



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF ETHIOPIA
ON OCCASION OF THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT** Friday, 15 May 1987

My dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. I AM PLEASED to welcome you, the members of the Episcopal Conference of Ethiopia, on this joyous occasion of your *ad limina* visit. We are gathered today in unity, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and in the love of Christ who forever remains the chief cornerstone (Cfr. *Eph.* 2, 25) and the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls (Cfr. 1 *Petr.* 2,25).

The devoted sentiments which Cardinal Paulos has expressed to me on your behalf and in the name of all your priests, religious and faithful are deeply appreciated. I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge *the strong ecclesial communion* that exists between the Catholics of Ethiopia and the See of Peter. To the entire Church in Ethiopia I repeat the words of Saint Paul: "We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Cfr. 1 *Thess.* 1, 2). 2. Each of you is called in communion with Peter's Successor and in the grace of the Holy Spirit to fulfil your ministry so that the Body of Christ may be built up and increase. Through your faithful preaching of the Gospel, through your administration of the sacraments and through your loving exercise of authority, you serve the People of God entrusted to your care. Your *collegial communion* with the Successor of Peter is the work of the Holy Spirit. Together we confess "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Cfr. *Eph.* 4,5) in the common celebration of the divine liturgy which finds expression in two different rites. We share in the fraternal charity of the children of God and together we make our pilgrim way towards our heavenly homeland. We are always mindful that the unity which is ours in the Church finds its source in the unity of the Holy Trinity. For as the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church states, "the Church shines forth as a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (*Lumen Gentium*, 4). 3. *The long history of Christianity* in your country has known moments of great splendour and extraordinary vitality, as well as times of trial and suffering for the sake of your faith. You have a wonderful history of saintly men and women

who stood as steadfast witnesses of the faith in every age. The monasteries of Ethiopia in particular have been centres of learning and culture for generations of Christians. At present one Metropolitan See, two Eparchies, five Vicariates Apostolic and one Prefecture Apostolic make up your ecclesiastical jurisdictions. Although the Catholic Church forms a small part of the total population, you are particularly active in the areas of social services, education and health. We have witnessed a clear example of this in the generous assistance that has been given through agencies of the Catholic Church to the many victims of the recent famine which beset your country. Likewise, the local Church, and the missionaries in particular, are deeply committed to rehabilitation following on that famine. They work for social progress in schools, hospitals, dispensaries and a multiplicity of development projects. It is my prayer and my earnest expectation that the Government of Ethiopia will afford the missionaries all the facilities necessary to continue that service to the country, while you spare no effort to train Ethiopian personnel who may take over their apostolate in the future.

4. My dear Brothers: I wish to praise the many courageous initiatives that you have undertaken for proclaiming the Gospel. As pastors of the Church in Ethiopia you have directed your activity in two directions: *ad intra and ad extra*. On the one hand, with great pastoral solicitude you have given yourselves to the Catholic faithful, nourishing them by word and sacrament, exercising in their midst the role of the Good Shepherd. On the other hand, together with the cooperation of your clergy, religious and laity, you have not neglected the Church's great task of evangelization, proclaiming the Good News of salvation to the many who have not yet heard or accepted Christ. I take this opportunity to encourage all your *efforts in evangelization*, which, in the words of Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World, is "the fundamental programme which the Church has taken on as received from her Founder" (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 61). It is your particular responsibility, my Brothers, to adopt those means most appropriate for proclaiming the Gospel message in a multi-religious society. The Church has a *deep respect for non-Christian religions* because "they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people" (Cfr. *Ibid.* 53). Since the plan of salvation encompasses all those who acknowledge the Creator, there exists between Christian and non-Christians a profound basis for understanding and peaceful coexistence. In relation to non-Christian religions, the Church affirms her commitment not only to dialogue but also to the proclamation of the Gospel. "Neither respect and esteem for these religions nor the complexity of the questions raised is an invitation to the Church to withhold from these non-Christians the proclamation of Jesus Christ" (Cfr. Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 61). The Lord clearly exhorts his followers to make disciples of all nations, to baptize and to teach the observance of the commandments (Cfr. *Matth.* 28, 19-20).

5. I am pleased to learn that the *ecumenical dialogue between the various Christian denominations* in Ethiopia is evidenced by common prayer as well as by collaboration in forms of social activity. Similarly, I am glad to know that as an Episcopal Conference you are preparing a document on ecumenical relations in your country. I wish to emphasize that, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, "the Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized are honoured with the name of Christian" (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 15). This is particularly true of the way in which Catholic and Orthodox Christians find themselves at one in the *love and praise of Mary*, Mother of Christ and of

the Church. In my recent Encyclical on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the pilgrim Church, I referred precisely to the long tradition of Coptic and Ethiopian devotion to Mary when I observed that "the Coptic and Ethiopian traditions were introduced to this contemplation of the mystery of Mary by Saint Cyril of Alexandria, and in their turn they have celebrated it with a profuse poetic blossoming" (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP II. *Redemptoris Mater*, 31). 6. As regards the internal life of the Church in your country, I wish to assure you my full support and understanding in the face of the difficulties being experienced by your communities. I cannot fail to praise the *humble and dedicated service rendered by your brother priests*, both diocesan and religious, together with the numerous missionaries, all of whom are making an important contribution to the evangelization and social development of your local communities. I give thanks to Almighty God for their work. I am aware that at the present time there is an urgent need for a *more equal distribution of the priests* in your country. I therefore express the hope that all priests will have at heart the pastoral care of the faithful wherever they may be, and that, with the permission or at the suggestion of their own Bishop, they will be willing to exercise their ministry in other regions, missions, or activities which are suffering from a shortage of clergy (Cfr. *Presbyterorum Ordini*, 10). Likewise, I would encourage all Religious Superiors to an ever closer cooperation with the Bishops for a better coordination of the activities of all priests and men and women Religious in the spiritual service of your people. Special recognition is due to the evangelization work being done by the lay catechists in the villages and small communities. The catechists educate children and adults in the faith, prepare catechumens and lead the community in prayer. May the Holy Spirit strengthen them, and may they find in you and in your priests the encouragement and support they deserve.

7. My dear Brothers in Christ: as I reflect together with you on the present life of the Church in Ethiopia, I note with gratitude to Almighty God how many of your faithful make frequent use of *the sacraments*. I am especially pleased that the Sacrament of the Lord's mercy and forgiveness, *the Sacrament of Penance*, is held in such high esteem. In a special way I wish to encourage your young people to receive this Sacrament the source of reconciliation and peace with God, with oneself and with one's neighbour. Through catechesis may the faithful come to appreciate ever more fully the importance of all the sacraments in their spiritual growth. Another aspect of the Church's inner life which I wish to consider with you is *the Sacrament of Marriage*. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World clearly states that "as a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union, as well as the good of the children, imposes total fidelity on the spouses and argues for an unbreakable oneness between them" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48). The communion of marriage is characterized always by its unity and also by its indissolubility. Furthermore, the Church strongly affirms that the communion of love constituted by marriage is radically contradicted by polygamy, which "directly negates the plan of God which was revealed from the beginning, because it is contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women, who in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive" (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. *Familiaris Consortio*, 19). We must always be solicitous to remind the faithful that the love of husband and wife is a sharing in the mystery of the life and love of God himself. This is why the Church stresses the dignity of marriage and the serious responsibility of the transmission of human life. She considers it her duty "to promote human life by every means

possible and to defend it against all attacks, in whatever condition or state of development it is found" (Cfr. *Ibid.* 30). 8. My dear Brother Bishops: I assure you of *my spiritual closeness to all the Ethiopian people* in their hopes for peace, national harmony and development. It is my fervent prayer that you will return to your pastoral responsibilities renewed in faith, strengthened in hope and confirmed in your pastoral love. I commend you to Mary, the exalted Daughter of Sion, who helps all her children. And in the love of Jesus her Son I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all those entrusted to your pastoral care.

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