



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO MADAGASCAR, LA RÉUNION,
ZAMBIA AND MALAWI

MEETING WITH THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF ZAMBIA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Apostolic Nunciature of Lusaka
Tuesday, 2 May 1989*

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. On this occasion of my pastoral visit to your country I greet all of you in a spirit of fraternal love: "To all God's beloved" in Zambia, "*who are called to be saints*: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Cfr. *Rom.* 1, 7). It is a great joy for me to be here, thanks to your kind invitation. I am happy to have this opportunity to strengthen *the bonds of ecclesial communion* which we celebrated together during your *ad limina* visit to Rome last year.

My visit coincides with the preparations being made for the *Church's centenary in Zambia in 1991*. From humble beginnings the Church has grown and flourished in your country. Today there are nine dioceses, many parishes and outstations, a growing number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, increasing lay involvement, and many educational, medical and social service institutions.

I rejoice with you at the gift of salvation in Christ that the Father has willed to grant to Zambia through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the dedicated efforts of missionaries, both men and women, the Gospel *was brought here in obedience to Christ's command* to teach all the nations (Cfr. *Matth.* 28, 19). But the challenge to carry forward the work of evangelization never ceases. With Saint Paul we can say: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (*1Cor.* 9, 16). The whole

Church in Africa is continually being called to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For this reason I was pleased to announce earlier this year a *Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*. This came about as a result of frequent requests from various groups and individuals over the years, as well as my own experience of the Church's vitality in Africa during the course of previous pastoral visits. I am confident that the Special Assembly will be a *particular moment of grace* for the Church in Africa. I know that you will join me in prayer for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon this event and the preparations that are being made for it.

2. On the eve of the Church's centenary in Zambia, your thoughts must inevitably turn to the spiritual needs and aspirations of all those within your own country. During your *ad limina* visit last year I raised some of these concerns. I spoke about marriage and the family, young people, seminarians and priests, men and women religious, lay involvement in Small Christian Communities, ecumenism, social communications and the needs of refugees. Today I wish to continue my reflections. In particular, I wish to discuss the Church's teaching office, and the *role of the diocesan bishop as an authentic teacher of the faith* for his people.

Christ himself told his apostles to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that he had commanded (Cfr. *Matth.* 28, 19-20). Before he returned to the Father, *Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit upon his Church, to guide her into all truth* (Cfr. *Io.* 16, 15). Through the anointing of the Spirit of truth, the entire People of God has been enabled to cling to the faith it has received, to gain deeper insight into its mysteries, and to apply it more fully in daily life (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 12).

As successor of the apostles, the Pope and the bishops have been entrusted with *the mission of preaching the Word of God*. The Second Vatican Council teaches that bishops are both heralds of the faith, who draw new disciples to Christ, and "authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ", who preach to the people entrusted to their care. It falls to bishops to teach the faith, to make it bear fruit, and to be vigilant against errors that threaten their flock (*Ibid.* 25).

In fulfilling this great task, dear brothers, we can be certain that God who entrusted it to us will also give us the grace to fulfil it. For our part, *we must never fail to persevere in our task of teaching*: we must search for the most suitable and effective means of accomplishing it; and we must never lose confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit whose grace we received at our ordination.

3. Within the local Church, the diocesan bishop is the "*moderator of the entire ministry of the Word*" (*Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 756). As such, he is called to collaborate actively with many people in the service of the Gospel. On every level of the Church's life, it is your duty to ensure that the Word bears fruit and grows in the lives of those who believe (Cfr. *Col.* 1, 6). For all members of the Church, this will require a *lifelong formation in Christian doctrine and discipline*

and in the riches of the spiritual life. Priests, religious and laity must be continually formed in Christian living, so as to hold fast to the faith, in accordance with their particular vocation. Their knowledge of the faith must be deepened; their practice of it must determine their choices and actions; and their love for it must create the desire to share it with others.

Priests are your indispensable companions in teaching, sanctifying and shepherding God's people, and so they *should receive a spiritual and intellectual formation* equal to their responsibilities. For this reason, I urge you to give special attention to the formation of those preparing for the priesthood as well as to the continuing education of those already ordained so that your priests may be *of one mind and heart with you* in the ministry of proclaiming the Word (Cfr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7). *Love for Christ means zeal for all his flock*, especially for those who do not yet know him and those who have wandered away. I join you in asking for God's blessing on the work of the Emmaus Spirituality Centre which you have set up in order to provide priests with the sound training they need for the service of Christ's flock.

4. Your duty as bishops to make the faith "shine forth and bear fruit" (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 12) also requires you to provide for the *spiritual growth of the laity*. You can be justifiably proud of the many lay organizations in Zambia and the many *catechists and lay leaders* who do so much in the service of the Gospel. Catholics are called to occupy positions of responsibility in the civic and cultural life of this country. But vigilance is needed on your part so that *the good seed of the Gospel is not snatched away or choked or does not wither* amid the temptations and cares of modern life (Cfr. *Luc.* 8, 11-14). You must attend to the many profound questions being asked today about the human person and society – questions that Zambia must also face as it looks to the future. As pastors and teachers you will want to do everything possible to help your people understand their Catholic faith in the light of *their own questions about life and the challenges* that may be raised by others.

This teaching task likewise calls for a systematic approach to adult catechetics suited to different groups of people. Special attention should be given to those whose social, economic or cultural status could weaken their *sense of Catholic identity or their ties with the Church community*. *Nor can I fail to mention the solicitude required of pastors towards those who find it difficult to fulfil the Christian obligation of marriage and family life* in accordance with Church teaching. Teachers of the faith must constantly call people to conversion, to perseverance, to a deeper love rooted in the Cross. We have as our inspiration the words of Saint Paul: "Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ" (*Phil.* 1, 27).

Within the context of lay formation, your role as teachers also demands attention to the *religious education of the young*. I know and share your concern for the youth of Zambia, who make up such a large part of the population. Many of them are unable to continue their education or to find work. By reaching out to them, the Church manifests Christ's love for them. By teaching them the Gospel she helps to *answer their deepest questions about life and salvation*. In Catholic schools

particularly they should be able to find sound catechesis in Catholic doctrine and Christian living, especially through the instruction and good example of *teachers who are well prepared spiritually and intellectually* for this important task.

Finally, dear brothers, I urge you to take full advantage of the *communications media* in furthering the Church's teaching mission. Your use of the press, radio and television will not only serve Catholics: it will also *influence and inform public opinion* about the Church and her teachings. I know that the Church in Zambia enjoys freedom to make use of the media. Do not hesitate therefore to devote the resources and the talents necessary to carry out this important ministry as part of your work as teachers of the faith.

Next Sunday, 7 May, is the Twenty-Third World Communications Day. In my message for this occasion I point out that "the question confronting the Church today is not any longer whether 'the man in the street' can grasp a religious message, but how to employ the communications media so as to let him have the full impact of the Gospel message. The Lord encourages us very directly and simply to take the broader view in our witness and our communication: '*Do not be afraid... what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops*' (Matth. 10, 26-27)" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Nuntius scripto dotus ob diem ad communicationes sociales favendas dicatum*, 6, die 24 ian. 1989: vide *supra*, p. 163).

5. Dear brothers, I encourage you and wish to be close to you in your faithful service to Christ and your devoted efforts for the sake of the Gospel in Zambia. In the face of new challenges, you are striving to bring the *knowledge of Christ* to people so that they in turn may bring him to others. You are building up the Church by your example and by leading the faithful to an ever deeper understanding of her life and mission. With Saint Paul, I know that "he who began this good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Cfr. *Phil.* 1, 6).

With fraternal affection in the Lord, and with full confidence in the power of divine grace at work in our local Churches, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.