



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO MADAGASCAR, LA RÉUNION,
ZAMBIA AND MALAWI

MEETING WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF MALAWI

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Kamuzu Stadium, Blantyre
Friday, 5 May 1989*

Dear young Friends,

1. Thank you for your warm welcome! I am grateful to Bishop Mkhori and the Youth Representative for their cordial and sincere words which point to the grace of God at work in this country and the goodness that continues to flow from young hearts.

I am very happy to be with you in Blantyre on the second day of my pastoral visit to Malawi. Already I feel the vigour of your youth. It is infectious! Your song and dance are a tribute of praise to God the Father and I thank you for the beauty of that living prayer.

Yes, we are happy to be together, *Gathered Together in Christ* - this is the theme of our meeting. It is a very suitable one, because we already know that it is only in Christ that we find unity. It is only in him that we can experience the *joy of our youth*. It is Christ who keeps the Church youthful and he does so by pouring out his love on each one of us. Today, young friends, I would like to speak to you about *the love of Christ* which keeps us young and which binds us *together in him*.

2. Saint Paul once called upon the Christians at Colossae to "put on love" (*Col. 3, 12*). And today I repeat these words for you, young people: put on love! I say this to all the young people of Malawi. It is the basic message of my entire pastoral visit. I say this because love is such a powerful force;

love can change the world. I say it also because love is such an important part of a young person's life. It dominates so much of your thoughts and actions. Love could be compared to a river flowing through life, a river which enriches everything it touches and which keeps us going in time of difficulty. What a pity if that river dries up or becomes polluted! Even if we see much hatred, evil and violence around us, we can still keep the river of love flowing through life in a healthy state. *It is possible today to live a life of loving service to Christ* and to our brothers and sisters. "The river of God is full of water" (Ps. 65, 10) – it flows into our lives and is itself life-giving.

3. What can keep the river of love flowing through life? What is it that can keep the spirit of youth and the love of God alive in us? To answer these questions we need to go back to our reading from the Letter of Saint Paul.

First of all, Saint Paul tells us: "You are God's chosen race, his saints; he loves you" (Col. 3, 12). Yes, my dear young friends of Malawi, *you are called to holiness*. This is a real vocation and not just a pious wish. God has specially chosen you out of love to be his saints. He is calling you now as students, young workers, or seminarians. Even if you are unemployed and have little prospect of getting work, you are still *chosen in love to be a saint*. Even if you have experienced the darkness of great sin and have wandered into the desert of hopelessness, God is still calling you. He, better than anyone else, knows that there is a vast reserve of goodness in each of you, for he created you in his own image and likeness. But only you can say "Yes" to God, "Yes" to his love, "Yes", to holiness.

4. Already I hear the questions you want to ask me: How can we become saints if there are so many obstacles in our way? How can we be honest if there is bribery and corruption around us? How can we become holy if the surest way to earn a living is to be mean and to exploit others? How can we become holy if we live in a world that cheapens true love or does not appreciate the beauty of chaste love? I hear these questions and many more besides. God the Father knows your difficulties, but he also knows that deep down you want to do the right thing; deep down you want to follow Christ because you know that he is "the way and the truth and the life" (Jo. 14, 6).

Of course, the path to holiness is not easy, but that should not prevent us from facing the difficulties with courage. The *path to holiness is a journey, sometimes a difficult journey involving an inner struggle* against selfishness and sin. We must be properly equipped to make this journey. Saint Paul gives us a list of the "clothing" – the attitudes – necessary; he says: "You should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3, 12).

5. My dear young friends of Malawi: I ask you to take to heart these words of Saint Paul and to think of them often. I know you want to be inspired by goodness, kindness and compassion. You want to see justice and tolerance extended to all. And so I say to you this evening: *cultivate these qualities yourselves!* Allow the seeds of goodness and mercy to grow *in your own lives first*. Allow your gentleness and patience to develop to the full. Take Christ as your model. To all young

people he says: “learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart” (*Matth.* 11, 29).

I know that you young people of Malawi love a challenge, and today *I place before you the challenge which life in Malawi offers you at this time*. Do not see present problems as the end of hope and the death of enthusiasm. Rather, see the whole of life as an opportunity for conversion, an opportunity through which God speaks to you and calls on you to contribute to the well-being of your country and its people in a way that is lasting.

You have a word, “Chitukuko”, meaning “self-help”. The Lord has blessed you with the strength, vitality and creativity of youth. He has blessed you with ways and means of achieving higher standards of living and education which were not available to your parents and grandparents. Use these talents to develop your own character and what is best in life. Malawi now needs people who are strong in character, who know the value of self-help and yet who have the humility to turn to Christ for the graces that they need.

Malawi is a developing country and you young people especially will have a decisive part to play in this process. At this stage in your lives your character is also developing and is exposed to various influences – social, political and religious. In “clothing” yourselves with the virtues necessary for holiness, you must learn to discern what is true from what is false; and in developing a strong character, you must be ready to put the things of God before the attractions of the world. *You can show your love for Malawi by respecting the many positive cultural and traditional values which have been handed on to you* – the values of hospitality, respect for the old, and care for the sick. Christ is the light of the nations; he is also the light of Malawi. You are chosen to be bearers of that light.

6. I am particularly happy to hear of your involvement in the life of the Church through parish youth groups and groups dedicated to helping the poor. I encourage you to continue being involved in the life of the Church. *The Church has a special place for each one of you!*

The vitality of the Church in Malawi depends to a great extent on the response you give to Christ now, on how committed you are to the gospel message. I know that your bishops, the chaplains, the Sisters and the catechists have given you every encouragement to offer yourselves freely and completely to Christ. Today I make that appeal my own. God’s Kingdom will be brought to fulfilment by your efforts, whether in university, schools, parishes, villages or outstations. It has to be brought to fulfilment first in your own lives, and then in the world around you. *The world is looking for the signs of God’s Kingdom in your lives*: it wants to see if you are clothed in his love. God alone is the ultimate basis of all values, of all that is good, noble and true. He is at the beginning and end of all your questions. He is the answer to life, its probings, its searching. Without reference to God, the world of created values remains in a vacuum. Without reference to him, the world itself remains an unanswered question (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Epistula apostolica ad iuvenes internationali vertente anno iuventiti dicoto, 4, die 31 mar. 1985: Insegnamenti di*

Giovanni Paolo II, 8, 1 [1985] 763 s.).

For this reason I invite all of you to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (*Matth. 6, 33*). God is love, true love; and his love is alive in you. Reflect that love and those values so that people will say: “I have seen his kingdom”, because they have come to know you.

7. My dear young people: *Christ is your friend* and he loves you very much. *He is your best friend*. To discover this, you must spend time talking to him in prayer. Your relationship with him will grow only through conversation with him. And from that prayerful conversation, you will hear him say: “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (*Jo. 15, 14*). Follow the path marked out by your friend, Jesus. He wants to help you answer the difficult problems that life presents and *he wants you to know* as well that, in spite of unanswered questions and unsolved problems, he always loves you. Young people of Malawi: live in the knowledge of this truth. Let Christ lead you to the truth. Live in the peace and the love of Christ, and make that love known to others. “May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts... always be thankful” (*Col. 3, 15*).

God bless the youth of Malawi!