



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday, 4 October 1993

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brother Bishops,*

1. My heart is filled with profound joy as I welcome you, the Pastors of *the Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea* on the occasion of your visit "*ad Limina Apostolorum*". When you were last here for this purpose in 1987 you spoke to me movingly of your deep anxiety for the safety and Well-being of your beloved people beset by war, and I gave you my assurance that not only I, but the whole Church, would be praying for the Lord to send you peace. Now, violence has ended. It is a great comfort today that together we can thank God, the Father of all gifts, for the deliverance of the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea from that terrible scourge. As once you came "in tears" to the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul in order to intercede for deliverance, now you have "come back rejoicing" (Cf. Ps. 126(125): 5-6).

The "*ad Limina*" visit provides an opportunity for the Pastors of the particular Churches to give an account of how God's grace is bearing fruit in the lives of their people. Your Eminence's remarks vividly call to mind the harsh realities of the situation in which the faithful of Ethiopia and Eritrea have had to live out their baptismal promises. You have testified to their fidelity in the practice of the faith and their generosity in deeds of love.

I ask each one of you to express to your clergy, Religious and laity my deep affection in the Lord, my esteem for their courage and constancy, and my confident hope that just as God strengthened them to bear the distress of the past, so *he will now sustain them in responding to the challenges which lie ahead.*

2. In the new era which is opening up for Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Churches you shepherd are ready to shoulder a twofold responsibility: to help in the pressing work of recovery from the damage caused by the war, and to contribute to the long-term development of your peoples.

In regard to the immediate task of repairing the harm caused by war, no one can doubt the extent of what needs to be done: the care of those left wounded in body or spirit, the support of widows and orphans, the resettlement of displaced persons and demobilized soldiers, the reunion of families, the rebuilding of homes, the restoration of normal social and economic life. These are monumental tasks which require the dedicated cooperation of everyone. The Catholic faithful, following the example of Christ, who was moved to compassion by the sufferings of the people he met (Cf. Mt. 14: 14), will share fully in seeking to alleviate these burdens. In this regard the *Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat*, which has been so meritorious in assisting the victims of famine caused by war and drought, is a clear sign and an effective instrument of the will of Catholics to render practical service to those in material or spiritual need.

3. No healing of the wounds of war and violence can come without *a spirit of reconciliation* on the part of individuals and of the peoples involved. As you emphasized in your 1991 pastoral Letter "Peace Comes from Reconciliation", the hopes of the Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples for peace depend upon achieving national reconciliation, especially through a commitment to ethnic and religious tolerance. I share your satisfaction at the signs which indicate that at many levels there is indeed a firm commitment to reconciliation and cooperation. To heal divisions, pardon injustice, turn enemies into friends, and restore the bonds of solidarity are the signs that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom. 5: 5). His power is at work in all those who are dedicated to these aims. May the Almighty sustain the Eritrean and Ethiopian peoples and their leaders in making ever greater progress along this path, and may the spirit of reconciliation spread beyond the borders of your nations to all parts of the Horn of Africa.

4. The citizens of Ethiopia and Eritrea have high expectations of establishing a society dedicated to the true good of its members a society committed to safeguarding human rights, to rooting out corruption and lawlessness, and to fostering ethnic and civil harmony. Ethiopian and Eritrean Catholics, although they are a small minority, love their country and have a strong sense of their duty to secure for it a brighter future. They seek to be *a leaven of justice and solidarity*, and they are eager to work with the members of the other Christian Churches, and with men and women of other religions and all people of good will, in building up the communities to which they belong.

The Church offers to your countries, as to every nation or society in which she dwells, the truth which she has received from her divine Founder about the meaning of human life. She proclaims that *the root cause of violence is the corruption of man's heart* (Cf. Mt. 15: 18-19) and that a society built on the denial of God's existence and on the encouragement of class conflict cannot succeed, as the events of your recent history bear witness. Man is God's creature, made by him to

live as a social being, working with others for the common good, in such a way that all may pursue their transcendent destiny. Your proclamation of these truths lights up the path towards that integral development which is needed in order for your peoples to move beyond the difficulties bequeathed by the past.

In order to accomplish this important service, the Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea must ever more clearly shine out as that sign of the unity which God wills for all mankind (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1). It is of the greatest importance that within the Christian community there should be no rivalry or discord. Whatever their language, race, ethnic background or cultural heritage, the faithful of Ethiopia and Eritrea are part of the one Body of Christ, one in communion of life with the Most Holy Trinity, and "members one of another" (Rom. 12: 5).

5. Changes in the political and social conditions of your peoples not only present the Church with many challenges in her service of society, but also offer new opportunities for the growth of the Christian community itself. In particular I share your satisfaction at *the prospects for evangelization being opened up through the guarantee of religious liberty*. I join you in ardent prayer that the clergy, Religious and lay faithful will fully meet the demands of this moment and give shining witness to the Gospel through ever more generous acts of love for God and neighbour.

As Pastors, whose task it is "to moderate everything pertaining to the ordering of worship and the apostolate" in your local Churches (*Lumen Gentium*, 27), you are obliged at this time, in response to the new situation, to devote special attention to reorganizing many elements of ecclesial life. I am confident that everything will be done to ensure effective preaching of the Gospel and increased efforts to extend God's kingdom – the purpose of all Church structures and activities. Indeed, one of the most fortunate results of peace is that more resources can be devoted to evangelizing those to whom the light of the Gospel has not yet come. Even in your own lands, where the faith took root so many centuries ago, there is still a first evangelization to be carried out. The restoration of civil peace makes it all the more possible for the word of God to resound more freely, more widely and more clearly. Much needs to be done. Your clergy and Religious, together with the generous men and women missionaries who serve among you, are all called to renew and strengthen *their commitment to the task of evangelization and catechesis*. I express my heartfelt affection for all these heralds of the Gospel, and I remember them in my prayers.

6. In this new atmosphere it is likewise to be hoped that the schools and all the other educational programmes of the Church especially religious education – will develop into ever more effective instruments of the apostolate. In the recently promulgated *"Catechism of the Catholic Church"*, the faithful in Ethiopia and Eritrea have a most apt instrument for the task of handing on the faith in its fullness.

The Bishop's mission to be the chief teacher in his local Church requires him to provide sound teachers of authentic Christian doctrine for his flock (Cf. *Christus Dominus*, 14). I encourage you to

continue to provide well-formed priests and Religious, teachers and catechists for this service to your people.

Priests are sacramentally consecrated for a special share in the apostolic ministry handed on to Bishops, and therefore one of your chief concerns is their formation both before and after ordination.

Every effort made to strengthen the spiritual, intellectual, human and pastoral development of priests will be rewarded abundantly by the increased effectiveness of their service of God's people.

7. In the months and years ahead, the *advancement of ecumenical relations*, especially with the clergy and faithful of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church will naturally be a matter of particular urgency.

As I recalled during my meeting earlier this year with Abuna Paulos, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: "We share the faith handed down from the Apostles, as also the same sacraments and the same ministry, rooted in the apostolic succession" (John Paul II, [*Address to the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church*](#), 11 June 1993). The success of the dialogue of charity which has been restored between the Catholic Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church requires "an improvement in fraternal relationships on all levels" (Ibid. 3). I am confident that the Lord who so ardently desires the unity of his followers will sustain you in all your efforts to promote mutual esteem and love, so that everyone who bears the name of Christian will rediscover the fulness of communion.

8. Even in the darkest days of violent conflict, the faithful of Ethiopia and Eritrea never lost their confidence in the power of *the intercession of Mary Mother of Mercy*, for she embraces all who call upon her in their distress and never ceases to ask for their deliverance from evil. Your filial trust was not disappointed, and so with all the greater confidence and hope, I join you in commending the faithful of your Churches to her loving protection.

She will obtain for you the strength you need to do all that her Divine Son is asking of you in this decisive hour of your nations' histories. With heartfelt affection I impart to you and your peoples my Apostolic Blessing.

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