



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF ANGOLA AND SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT

Friday, 22 October 2004

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, 1. I welcome and greet you all with great joy and affection in Christ the Lord, Pastors of God's pilgrim Church in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe who are making your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, motivated by the desire to strengthen your faith and your pastoral ministry - "I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain" (cf. Gal 2: 2) - and to witness to the dedication of your faithfulness to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church founded by Christ on the rock of Peter. I thank Archbishop Damião Franklin, Archbishop of Luanda and President of your Bishops' Conference, for the words he has just addressed to me on behalf of all, expressing your sentiments as well as the signs of hope and the pastoral concerns of your local Church. I address a special greeting to the new Diocese of Dundo with its Bishop and all those of you who have recently joined the Episcopal College. On your return, tell the priests, consecrated persons, catechists and the other lay faithful that the Pope is praying for them and encourages them to face the challenges posed by the *Gospel, a seed of new life for your nations*. And please convey to all your fellow citizens my cordial good wishes for peace and brotherhood in God, the Father of all. 2. Since your last *ad limina* visit, humanity has crossed the threshold of a new millennium, the third to be bathed in the light of the Son of God; "for us men and for our salvation, he came down from Heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary". The Christian communities of São Tomé and Príncipe and of Angola lived in tune with the whole Church the rich experience of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 that culminated in the Divine Teacher's call: "Put out into the deep!" (Lk 5: 4), in order to proclaim the Good News to the many people who do not yet know it. Yes, beloved Brothers, "these multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ - riches in which we believe that the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fullness, everything that it is gropingly searching for concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and truth" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 53). For this reason, *continue to proclaim ardently the Good News* of the one, longed for, Saviour of humanity! Knowing the collegial responsibility and communion that unite you in the service of the "household of God" (Eph 2: 19), I implore our common Father to strengthen within all of you the spirit of solidarity and ecclesial concern, so that the *Bishops' Conference* may fulfil ever better its role as a *place for the brotherly exchange of ideas and collaboration*, making the most of a *sharing of resources*, both material and spiritual, with your neediest Dioceses. You know well that "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work" (II Cor 9: 8). In this way, you will be able to

rebuild the communities destroyed by war, to alleviate wounded hearts and to help the people entrusted to your care to progress on the path of the Gospel.³ More than ever today, Angola needs peace with justice; it needs reconciliation and must reject every temptation of violence. I remind everyone that violence cannot solve humanity's problems, nor does it contribute to overcoming disputes. The courage for dialogue is essential. I am convinced that the effort and good will of the parties concerned in the unresolved issues can help build a culture of respect and dignity. This is the moment for a deep national reconciliation; it is necessary to work without respite to offer the future generations a Country in which all members of society can live side by side and cooperate. The Church, which suffered enormously during the hostilities, must maintain her vigorous position in order to protect the people who have no voice. My dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I urge you to *work constantly for reconciliation and to bear an authentic witness to unity* through supportive gestures of solidarity for the victims of the decades of violence.⁴ Do not lose sight of the long way you still have to go before the Gospel can transform the spirit and heart of the Christian faithful from within so that they may recognize one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. To this end, *an adequate Christian initiation* is essential. It must lead the baptized on the one hand to renounce the concepts of their ancestors such as sorcery or concubinage, and on the other hand, to oppose the secularized or even agnostic mindset that predominates. Actually, ancient practices that have not yet been purified by the Spirit of Christ, difficulty in feeling a member of the one family redeemed by the Blood of Christ and the dangers inherent in a materialistic and atheistic society, weaken family ties and those among groups. Spare no effort, therefore, to ensure that the baptized assimilate the Gospel message properly and model their lives on it, without forcing them to give up any authentic African values. It is a question of leading them to be won over by Christ and so come to depend radically upon him and desire to live his life and follow him on the path of true holiness (cf. I Thes 4: 3). To this end, ask the faithful of your Dioceses to turn their gaze to Christ and help them to contemplate his face. The liturgical and sacramental apostolate, catechetical, biblical and theological formation, the different forms of art and music and the various means of social communication, traditional or modern, must all serve to ensure that believers absorb and live the riches of their faith, so that they can share fully in the life of their own Ecclesial Community. This participation must become visible and concrete through participation in the Christian assembly that meets on Sundays - please God, or as often as possible - to celebrate the *Eucharist*; it is not without reason that the Eucharist is the *crowning point of Christian initiation*. In this year dedicated to it, may the Church "discover new enthusiasm for her mission and come to acknowledge ever more fully that the Eucharist is the source and summit of her entire life" (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n. 31). I am thinking at this time above all of those baptized persons in your communities whose irregular situation with regard to marriage prevents them from being admitted to Eucharistic Communion (cf. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 37). May the full power of God's grace be revealed in their lives, impelling them to conversion with the comforting prospect of taking part at last in God's banquet!⁵ Next to this shadow, your quinquennial reports also recall the witness offered by countless families who live faithfulness to Christian marriage heroically, in a context of civil legislation or traditional customs that are not exactly conducive to monogamous marriage. This is evident in various phenomena such as concubinage (mentioned above) and polygamy, divorce and prostitution; some of this *immoral behaviour leads to the spread of AIDS*. The very heavy toll of victims that this epidemic has taken and its serious threat to the social and economic stability make it impossible to ignore. While doing everything in your power, dear Bishops, to *defend the holiness of the family and the priority place it occupies in society*, do not cease to proclaim, loud and clear, the liberating message of authentic Christian love. The many educational programmes, both religious and secular, must stress the fact that *true love is chaste love* and, at the same time, that chastity offers a well-founded hope of getting the better of the forces that threaten the institution of the family and of freeing humanity from the devastating scourge of AIDS. Here I repeat the recommendation that I addressed to you in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*: "The companionship,

joy, happiness and peace which Christian marriage and fidelity provide, and the safeguard which chastity gives, must be continuously presented to the faithful, particularly the young" (n. 116).⁶ *Young people* require you to pay special attention to the battle they must wage for a decent future in a widespread situation of poverty, all too often complicated by the fact that they have no family, since it has either been dispersed or broken up, and by the consequences of the war that have traumatized them. Help them to reject "the temptation of unlawful short-cuts towards false mirages of success and wealth" (*Message for 1998 World Day of Peace*, n. 7). These are often the product of deceptive publicity that can exercise a great attraction, especially on the young: to neutralize it, they must realize that they truly are a new generation of builders who are called to build the civilization of love in freedom and solidarity. In the difficulties they encounter, may young people never lose hope in the future! As the World Youth Days have shown, they *have a special ability to dedicate the best of their energies to solidarity* for the needy and to *the search for Christian holiness*. May they stay united with Christ, through a life of prayer and an intense sacramental life, in order to pass on the values of the Gospel in their own walk of life and generously to assume their role in the transformation of society. The entire Ecclesial Community must do all it can to see that the young generations are appropriately educated and prepared for the responsibilities that await them and, in a certain way, are already theirs. *Catholic schools* are a particularly effective means of guaranteeing this education. The overall curriculum and every area of school life must reflect their specific identity, making them communities in which their students can find nourishment for their faith and prepare for their role in the Church and in society. In addition, you must also continue to *promote the teaching of morals and religion* in State schools, seeking to generate a consensus in public opinion on the importance of this type of education. This service, which can derive from a *closer collaboration with the Government*, is a significant form of active Catholic participation in your Countries' social life. To carry out your task, whose aim is to guarantee well-qualified teachers who can offer a Catholic education in the school world, you are pinning great hopes on the *Catholic University of Angola*. It has ensured that the contribution offered by the Church in the area of elementary education has also borne fruit in the area of advanced education.⁷ Never neglect *the formation of the pastoral workers of evangelization*, so that they are able to guarantee their indispensable role in the Church and in society, which is especially necessary today, given the campaigns of the sects that exploit the poverty and credulity of the faithful to distance them from the Church and from the liberating words of the Gospel. Continue, therefore, to pay special attention to the formation of the *catechists*, whom I greet with affection and whose tireless dedication I appreciate; I encourage you to give material, moral and spiritual support to these precious collaborators in your mission and to ensure that they benefit from both initial and continuing doctrinal formation. May they be models of charity and champions of life, for their daily example of Christian life serves as a valuable witness to all those who they must guide toward and in the name of Christ. As the most important leaders responsible for the Church you should ensure that all the *candidates to the priesthood* are chosen carefully and trained, so that they subsequently devote themselves without reserve to the Church's mission. Relying on formation staff and teachers of proven human and priestly maturity, may seminarians acquire a serious spiritual, intellectual and pastoral instruction, together with a sound human formation that will cultivate in them the emotional maturity and responsibility that are indispensable to people who are called to celibacy, that is, "to offer, with the grace of the Spirit and the free response of one's own will, the whole of one's love and care to Jesus Christ and to his Church" (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 44). Priests, who are especially consecrated to Christ, the Head of the Church, are required to detach themselves from material goods and to devote themselves to serving their brethren through the total gift of themselves in celibacy. Scandalous behaviour must always be analyzed, investigated and corrected. The flourishing of *vocations to the consecrated life*, especially to women's religious life, is a magnificent gift of Heaven to the Church of São Tomé and Príncipe and of Angola. It is a gift for which you must give thanks. You could not do without it, for consecrated persons enrich your particular Churches not only with the effectiveness of their service,

but also and above all with their personal and community witness to the Gospel; "without this concrete sign, there would be a danger that the charity which animates the entire Church would grow cold, that the salvific paradox of the Gospel would be blunted and that the "salt" of faith would lose its savour in a world undergoing secularization" (*Vita Consecrata*, n. 105).⁸ At the beginning of a new millennium, our work as Bishops, dear Brothers, "has a new urgency... which calls for cooperation and commitment on the part of the whole People of God" (*Pastores Gregis*, n. 74). On this earth there is nothing more effective than the Eucharist in bringing Christians together and making them feel as one. In no other circumstance do people meet one another or become as closely bonded as when they communicate with Christ in the Eucharist, who embraces all things and unites them with him; thus, what already happens in Heaven is brought about on earth. Christ unites all who live in him with himself and with each other. To feel truly united, it suffices to communicate with him in the right way. I chose to dedicate a year to the Eucharist, such a centre of attraction for all human hearts, to make this sacrament more widely known and venerated among the faithful. God granted me the grace to set the Church on her long Jubilee journey for the second millennium of Christ, which with this Year of the Eucharist reaches, as it were, its culmination. I entrust to your pastoral care, dear Bishops of Angola and of São Tomé and Príncipe, the decision on the most suitable initiatives for reviving a similar awareness in your Ecclesial Communities, "so that Christ may be formed in each and every one of his members" (cf. Gal 4: 19), as he was incarnated in the womb of the Virgin Mother, Your Lady and Your Patroness. May my Apostolic Blessing be poured out upon all of you and on the priests, consecrated men and women, catechists and all the lay faithful of your Dioceses, as a pledge of the gifts from the Most High.