



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF MOZAMBIQUE
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 26 May 2007

*Your Eminence,
Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate,*

You have come to Rome, accompanied in spirit by your Christian people, to venerate the tombs of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, in line with an ancient tradition. By your presence here today you wish to witness as a College to the unity of faith in conformity with the cooperation existing between your particular Churches and the Church in Rome which "presides in charity" (St Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistula ad Romanos*, I, 1), as well as to the unity between you and the Successor of Peter, sharing his solicitude for the whole Church (cf. II Cor 11: 28).

I know that you always exercise your ministry in union with the Pope, as you have often told me and now repeat through the cordial words of Archbishop Tomé Makhweliha of Nampula, President of the Bishops' Conference, who has expressed during your *ad Limina* visit your current sentiments and concerns. Therefore, I embrace and welcome you with great joy and esteem in this House, taking this opportunity to send, with you and through you, a cordial greeting to all the People of God in Mozambique: the priests, men and women religious, seminarians, catechists and animators, Christian families and all the lay faithful, since all are called, in the diversity of their charisms, to witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Beloved Pastors, I hope that those among you who received the fullness of the priesthood long ago can tirelessly continue in the pastoral care of the people entrusted to you.

To those of you more recently consecrated as Bishops I express my warm affection and hope before God that your youthful energy will give a new impulse to the ongoing work of evangelization and Christian formation. At the same time, I assure each one of you of my prayers that the Spirit of

the Lord, through your example and ministry, may bring about a new Pentecost and "renew the face of the earth" in your beloved Nation.

Yes, I ask the Holy Spirit, with his abundant light and strength, to accompany you in the exercise of your pastoral duty. As you were told on the day of your episcopal ordination, you are responsible for proclaiming the Word of God in the entire region entrusted to you: for liturgical celebrations, formation in prayer and preparation for the sacraments so that they may be administered with dignity to the Christian people. You are also responsible for the organic unity of the Diocese, its charitable institutions, formation and apostolate.

You have therefore been invested with authority as Pastors; this authority, however, takes the form of the servant who offers his own life, time, strength and heart for his sheep and it is strengthened by the example you give them in order to bring them to holiness of life by becoming "examples to the flock" (I Pt 5: 3).

Obviously, this pastoral service passes through your presence which must be as constant as possible in all the communities scattered throughout the Diocese and in your fatherly attention to their human and religious condition.

Your priests, in particular, need to be visited and received, listened to, guided and encouraged. Together with them you have an enormous duty: the first evangelization of more than half the population of Mozambique, to carry out of course, in communion with the Holy Spirit who moves hearts.

We know that the obstacles are many and complex, that reception and growth depend not on us but on the freedom of each person and on grace. However, at least try to make the missionary proclamation your top priority and make known to those who have the grace to be Christians that they must contribute to its fulfilment.

The Ecclesial Movements and new Communities are a providential instrument for a renewed missionary outreach; welcome and promote them in your Dioceses, since the Holy Spirit uses them to awaken and deepen faith in hearts and to proclaim the joy of believing in Jesus Christ. In fact, it is important to deepen the faith through all the means you have at your disposal: catechesis of youth and young adults, meetings, liturgy, with the necessary inculturation.

Without this profound formation, faith and religious practice would remain superficial and fragile, ancestral customs could not be imbued with a Christian spirit, souls would be upset by every sort of doctrine, sects would attract the faithful and distance them from the Church, respectful dialogue with other religions would be blocked by snares and risks. And above all, the baptized would not be able to withstand religious indifference, materialism and neopaganism, widespread phenomena in today's consumer society.

On the contrary, deep and committed faith will renew peoples' behaviour in their social and professional life, hence also in the fabric of society.

In this way Christians help to combat injustices; raise the standard of living of the neediest persons and groups; teaching people upright morals, tolerance, pardon and reconciliation.

It is a very important ethical task that serves the good of the Country; as Pastors it is up to you to inspire and support it, always maintaining your freedom, which belongs to the Church in her prophetic mission, making a clear distinction between pastoral mission and the policies set out in political programmes.

All the work of which I have spoken depends on the number and quality of the apostolic workers who collaborate with you: priests, men and women religious, catechists and animators of movements and communities.

Regarding priests, I am pleased to recall their first Continuing Formation Meeting in July 2001, an initiative that gave you an opportunity to urge them to spiritual renewal and to conform their life to their apostolic activity.

I encourage you to promote this permanent formation with a view to the theological and pastoral updating of the clergy, as well as their regular spiritual life. It concerns their apostolic dynamism at the service of evangelization, their capacity for facing the problems and holiness in their ministry.

Equally important and decisive is the sound preparation of future priests. I know you have at heart the improvement of theological and spiritual formation in seminaries. This is a theme frequently treated in the work of your Bishops' Conference and of the Conference of Men and Women Religious Superiors, who are ready to offer their collaboration.

Given the importance of what is at stake, I exhort you to dedicate your best priests to this formation, to ensure that seminary spiritual directors are duly prepared.

The grave shortage of priests shows how necessary it is to invest in the pastoral care of priestly and religious vocations, giving them a new impulse and coordination at the diocesan and national level. This passes through a reflection on the role of priests with all the members of the Church, especially the so-called "Small Christian Communities".

It would be worth deepening and broadening the same awareness with regard to the consecrated life. How is it that its candidates and the Christian people admire Institutes of consecrated life for the help they give to the apostolate and human advancement rather than for the intrinsic value and incomparable beauty of total consecration to God, in following Christ to whom the consecrated person unites himself as to his Divine Spouse?

The latter perspective is so beneficial for the whole Church that she would find in it a very special call to holiness through the lived experience of the Beatitudes.

Here too, it is impossible to ignore the importance of a careful basic formation for aspirants to the consecrated life, according to the specific spirituality of each religious family. I am in no doubt that the bodies which coordinate men and women religious must cooperate with you in order to face this need.

In Mozambique, as in many African Countries, the role of catechists is crucial in the formation of catechumens and in encouraging many communities without a resident priest. Their generous and disinterested dedication is great and praiseworthy, but they need careful formation and special support to face their responsibility to witness to the faith before the cultural evolution of their own brothers and sisters, and to be able to guide them with the example of a holy life.

The future will depend largely on the way in which youth - who in your Country constitute the majority of the population - are able to acquire faith convictions, to live them in a context that no longer offers ethical orientations and supportive institutions as in the past, and to integrate themselves with confidence into the Ecclesial Community.

It is an immense field to which can be added the world of children, adolescents and above all students, exposed to every sort of trend and problematical issues.

I particularly encourage you in your efforts to give all young Christians the chance to receive sound religious instruction to prepare them for appropriate Christian action.

The evangelization of Christian life and the budding of vocations depends on the formation of authentically Christian families that accept the model, demands and grace of Christian marriage. I know that there are no lack of difficulties due to the limitations of some ancient customs and also to the instability of domestic life, sorely tried by a so-called "modern" society permeated with sensualism and individualism.

The crisis will not abate unless there is a dynamic and solidly founded pastoral care of the family, with the support of family associations coordinated at the diocesan and national level.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, there are other fields where your pastoral solicitude is required: assistance to the poor, the sick and the marginalized, the attitude to adopt to face the invasion of the sects, the development of the means of social communications, etc.

Although the points mentioned already represent a burden that demands a sustained effort, if we consider the limited apostolic forces at your disposal, even calling on priests and Religious from other countries whom I hope will be generous.

I am certain that all these challenges can be overcome thanks to the faith and determination that motivate you and thanks to the Holy Spirit who never refuses his help to those who ask and seek the will of God.

This is first of all affective and effective union at the heart of your Bishops' Conference. At the Last Supper, as you know well, the Lord Jesus prayed for the unity of the Apostles so that they would imitate his union with the Father (cf. Jn 17: 21). In the solid bond that unites you to the Successor of Peter, preserve and increase unity and collegial activity among yourselves.

Pool your experiences, interpret harmoniously the signs of the times regarding the needs of your own people, always moved by the spirit of fidelity to the Church.

This unity among you, Bishops, will be the centre and root of perfect ecclesial communion, which includes all in Christ: Bishops, priests, men and women religious and lay faithful.

Above all, may the Virgin Mary, to whom I entrust you, watch over you with motherly love, as I impart to you my Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to your collaborators and to all the Church in Mozambique, which God has made leaven and light in the heart of your beloved Nation.

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