



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY  
TO CAMEROON, SOUTH AFRICA AND KENYA

**EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION  
AT UHURU PARK**

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II***

*Nairobi (Kenya)  
Tuesday, 19 September 1995*

*"Let us praise the Lord, the source of life".*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. Last year, the *Special Session for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* held its working session in Rome, close to the tomb of the Apostle Peter. Now, a year later, the results of the Synod have been gathered in the Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Ecclesia in Africa*", and *the Successor of Peter comes to the Church in Africa* to encourage everyone *to heed the Synod's message and to put it into practice*. I gladly greet my dear Brother, Cardinal Otunga, and the members of the Kenya Episcopal Conference, as well as the Bishops of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa. I greet the priests, deacons, seminarians, the Religious Sisters and Brothers, the lay men and women, young and old alike. I extend a cordial welcome to the members of the other Christian denominations and the followers of other religious traditions. I extend a special greeting to His Excellency the President as well as to the others authorities of city and state for their welcome presence.

With heartfelt gratitude to God I am making this journey through Africa. Each stage of this journey of celebration emphasizes one or other of the guiding themes of the Synod: at Yaoundé in Cameroon, the vital question of the evangelization of culture and inculturation; at Johannesburg in

the Republic of South Africa, the question of peace and justice in society and in the Church; and now here in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, we direct our attention to *the agents of evangelization, and especially the family*.

2. "Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1: 3).

With these words from the Letter to the Ephesians this whole Eucharistic Assembly turns to the Father, to whom the Church prays each day with the words of the *Lord's Prayer*. We turn to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, the Eternal Word, *Africa – the continent of families, races and peoples – like the whole of human history, is brought into God's eternal plan realized in Christ, the only-begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit*. Our hearts turn to the Father who, in Christ, has bestowed on us every spiritual blessing, choosing us in him before the world began, and predestining us in love, through Christ, to be his own adopted children (Cf. *ibid.* 1: 4-5). Because of the Son's unflinching love for us, we have been redeemed and our sins have been forgiven through his blood. Therefore we say: "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us".

The Crucified and Risen Lord has become the Head of the Church, his Mystical Body, which makes its pilgrim way to the fullness of time, the final coming, when the whole of creation will be filled with the glory of the living God. This is the faith we profess each day in the Eucharist, when we say after the consecration: *Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again*.

3. *I ardently wish to associate with this Eucharistic Celebration here in Nairobi, the whole great family of the peoples of Africa, beginning with the people of Kenya.*

Kristu ndiye Amani Yetu. Watu wa Kenya msichoke kuomba Amani na kufanya kazi inayoleta amani.

(Christ is our peace! *People of Kenya, never tire of praying for peace and of working for peace*).

Je voudrais réunir autour de cet autel les peuples du Cameroun et de la République sud-africaine que je viens de quitter; les peuples du Zaïre, qui peinent encore pour rassembler de manière démocratique leurs différentes composantes, et ceux du Congo; ceux du Malawi et du Mozambique, de Zambie et du Zimbabwe, du Lesotho et du Swaziland, du Botswana et de Namibie. J'invite à venir près de cet autel les peuples de l'Angola, meurtris par de longues années de guerre civile. J'appelle les peuples du Sénégal, du Cap-Vert, de São Tomé et Príncipe; les peuples de la région du Sahel, du Burkina-Faso, du Niger, du Mali et de Mauritanie.

J'appelle la Tunisie, le Maroc et l'Algérie-pays à majorité musulmane mais qui ont connu une présence du christianisme dès ses premiers siècles. J'appelle la Côte-d'Ivoire, le Ghana, le Togo et le Bénin; la Gambie, la Guinée-Bissau, la République de Guinée, la Guinée équatoriale, le Gabon, la Sierra Leone et le Libéria. Me tournant vers le centre de l'Afrique, j'invite les peuples

nombreux du Nigéria, avec près de cent millions d'habitants; la République centrafricaine, et l'Ouganda des Martyrs.

J'appelle l'Égypte, la Libye, et le Soudan où, il y a quelques années, j'ai honoré les reliques de la bienheureuse Joséphine Bakhita: enfant, elle avait été vendue comme esclave; après avoir été rachetée, elle fut baptisée et devint religieuse; elle mena une vie exemplaire et fut élevée à l'honneur des autels pour devenir la patronne céleste de son pays d'origine si troublé, Patronne céleste du Soudan.

J'appelle les peuples du Burundi et du Rwanda. J'ai de vifs souvenirs de mes visites dans ces pays magnifiques en des temps de paix, alors qu'aujourd'hui, nous pensons tous avec tristesse, avec préoccupation, au terrible conflit ethnique encore latent après avoir englouti tant de victimes innocentes. Pendant le Synode africain, nous, les Pasteurs de l'Église, *nous avons ressenti le devoir d'exprimer notre consternation, notre préoccupation et de lancer un appel au pardon et à la réconciliation: c'est la seule manière de dissiper les menaces qui planent sur l'Afrique de l'ethnocentrisme qui, ces derniers temps, a si brutalement touché le Rwanda et le Burundi.*

A cette grande assemblée eucharistique, j'appelle les peuples du Tchad, et des terres antiques de l'Éthiopie, qui sont venus, en cette deuxième partie de la liturgie, aujourd'hui avec nous, de la Somalie, de l'Érythrée et de Djibouti. Nos pensées vont aussi à la Tanzanie, au pied du Mont Kilimandjaro. Je salue Madagascar et les Iles de l'Océan indien, avec leurs peuples d'origine africaine et indienne, Maurice, la Réunion, les Seychelles et les Comores.

4. In the past I have been able to visit most of these countries, meeting the great African family of peoples. Where it has not yet been possible I hope some day to go. The question is often asked: *why does the Pope visit Africa so often?* One reason stands out: *Africa is the continent of the family*, and the future of the Church's evangelizing mission passes through the family.

At the highest point of his creative work, God called man into existence; "male and female he created them" (Gen. 1: 27). The Book of Genesis goes on to say: "A man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body" (Ibid. 2: 24). *Through the union of husband and wife, the miracle of creation is renewed over and over again*; the miracle by which the Creator calls into life a new being, made in his own image and likeness. The married couple, man and woman united before God, form a singular unity which must be permanent and indissoluble if the family is to become a true community of life and love, if it is to guarantee the future of its children, if it is to be the "domestic church" and *the principal place of evangelization*, as called for by the African Synod.

*The family is fundamental in Africa!* African society is deeply rooted in the family! This is a treasure which must be preserved and never underestimated, since every weakening of the family is the source of intractable problems. If a utilitarian and materialistic notion of the family prevails, its

members tend to have expectations and make individualistic demands which sunder its unity and its capacity to build harmony and educate in solidarity.

On the contrary, where the family is seen as a value in itself, the members realize that their personal good coincides with their duty to love, respect and help each other. Their affective bonding and mutual support help them to face all kinds of challenges together and to overcome many difficult moments.

5. *Cana in Galilee* tells us about the family and evangelization. Jesus went there with his Mother and the Apostles for a wedding feast. When his Mother pointed out that there was no more wine, he changed the water into wine. Mary played a special part in this first miracle of Jesus. Her maternal sensitivity wanted to save the couple from shame, for she knew that her Son would not let her down. So she says to the waiters: "*Do whatever he tells you*" (Jn. 2: 5). Jesus orders them to fill the jars with water, and to take some to the steward. When the steward had tasted it, he called the bridegroom and said: "People generally serve the best wine first, and keep the cheaper sort till the guests have had plenty to drink; but you have kept the best wine till now" (Ibid. 2: 10). What is indeed striking about this passage is the very fact that *the Lord started his messianic activity from the family*.

Cana in Galilee tells us that the family is the first place of evangelization. It tells us that while both parents are responsible in all things for the family, it is *the mother who is generally the first evangelizer*. It was Mary who declared: "Do whatever he tells you" (Ibid. 2: 5). Experience shows that it is often Christian mothers who are *the first to teach the truth about God, the first to join their children's hands in prayer* and to pray with them. Mothers teach their children to distinguish good from evil. *They teach them the commandments of God*, both the commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, and the commandments of love of God and love of neighbour which Jesus put at the heart of the Christian moral life. *The magnificent vocation and responsibility of parents*, and in the first place of mothers, consists not only in bringing children into the world, but also in leading them to spiritual maturity. The family is the natural environment in which this task can be fulfilled. The educational role of the family is never easy, but it is always a sublime and noble human enterprise.

Even before parishes and schools, mothers and fathers are the teachers of the *Beatitudes* enunciated in today's Gospel. The Beatitudes are the full programme of the Christian life: of life in spirit and in truth (Cf. Jn. 4: 23). They teach us to show mercy, to preserve purity of heart, to love one another and build peace. They teach poverty of spirit, which is a person's greatest wealth. They teach us to console the afflicted; to hunger and thirst for what is right. They teach us meekness, which is that inner silence which gives us control of ourselves and of our circumstances. Likewise, the Beatitudes teach us to suffer persecution for the sake of justice. *This is the law of those who journey towards the fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven*, where God will wipe away all tears from our eyes (Cf. Rev. 21: 4). For this reason, Jesus says: "Rejoice and be

glad, for your reward will be great in heaven" (Mt. 5: 12).

6. In transmitting the Gospel spirit, Christian families have *a perfect model in the Holy Family of Nazareth*. We should not imagine that the Holy Family was exempt from problems, trials and suffering. The Holy Family knew poverty, danger, persecution and flight. Hard work provided the repetitive context of its daily life. It is not the absence of hardships that is the measure of a happy family life, but the courage and fidelity and love – for one another and for God – with which the family members meet trials, and either overcome them or accept them as expressions of God's will, and as opportunities to share in the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

In our faith and in our devotion, the Holy Family stands out as the *living Gospel of Life, the Gospel of Work and the Gospel of Love*. At the opening and closing of the recent *Year of the Family*, an initiative of the United Nations which the Holy See adopted as a spiritual and moral challenge, a Pontifical Legate went to Nazareth to dedicate that Year in a special way to the Holy Family. It was during that Year that the working session of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was held. It was a providential incentive for the Synod Fathers to underline *the importance of the family in evangelization* and to see the Church herself as *the Family of God in Africa* and in the world.

7. May African families find in the Holy Family of Nazareth the path of their safe journey through the upheavals of social change which threatens to uproot them materially and spiritually from their healthy roots!

May the Christian families of this Continent experience an outpouring of the strength and joy of the Holy Spirit, for the great task of *being evangelized in order to be evangelizers*.

Njoo Roho Mtakatifu, Uzijaze Roho za Waumini wako, na uwashe moto wa mapendo yako ndani Mwao. Alleluia. Amina.

(*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Alleluia. Amen*).