



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO AFRICA

(MAY 2-12, 1980)

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
DURING HIS VISIT TO THE CARMEL***

Nairobi (Kenya)

Wednesday, 7 May 1980

Dear Sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. Being your neighbour for two days, I could not fail to come and visit your Carmel. It gives me great joy to know that, near the house of the Pope's Representative, there is a house of prayer where God's praises are constantly sung and where the sacrifice of your cloistered life is offered in joyful generosity to the Father. The fact that other contemplative communities in Kenya have gathered here with you gives me added joy. My dear Sisters, I bring you the greetings and love of the whole Church, and I thank you for your contribution to evangelization and for the inspiration of your lives. Yes, it is a great tribute to the grace of God and to the power of the death and Resurrection of the Lord that many years ago the contemplative religious life took root in African soil, bringing forth abundant fruits of justice and holiness of life. You are indeed the recipients of a particular gift from God: the contemplative vocation in the Church. The introduction of the contemplative life in a local Church is an important indication of the dynamic implantation of the Gospel in the heart of a people. This is a sign which, together with missionary activity, shows the maturity of the local Church. To live the holiness of Christ and to share the ardent desire of his heart - "I must preach the Good News of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose"^[1] - these are hallmarks of Christ's Church.

2. Here in the heart of Kenya you are called to fulfil your exalted mission in the Body of Christ: to perpetuate Christ's life of prayer and loving immolation. The Church has learned from her Founder - and centuries of experience have confirmed her profound conviction - that union with God is

vitally necessary for fruitful activity. Jesus has told us: "I am the vine, you are the branches... apart from me you can do nothing"[2].

The Church is deeply aware, and without hesitation she forcefully proclaims, that there is an intimate connection between prayer and the spreading of the Kingdom of God, between prayer and the conversion of hearts, between prayer and the fruitful reception of the saving and uplifting Gospel message. This alone is enough to assure you and all contemplative religious throughout the world just how necessary your role is in the Church, just how important your service is to your people, just how great your contribution is to the evangelization of Kenya and all Africa.

3. In your lives of prayer, moreover, Christ's praise of his Eternal Father goes on. The totality of his love for his Father and of his obedience to the Father's will is reflected in your own radical consecration of love. His selfless immolation for his Body, the Church, finds expression in the offering of your lives in union with his sacrifice. The renunciation involved in your vocation shows the primacy of Christ's love in your lives. In you the Church gives witness to her fundamental function, which is, as I said in my Encyclical: "To point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of God..."[3].

4. Your lives and your activities are very much a part of the whole Church; they are in the Church and for the Church. You live in the very heart of the Church as did Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and so many other contemplative nuns throughout the Church's. And as you pursue your vocation in fidelity to the Christ who called you, you remain spiritually very close to your families and the communities from which you come.

As you live out your lives totally for Jesus Christ, your spouse, and for all who have been called to life in him - the entire Christian family - you can rightly feel near to all your brothers and sisters as they strive for salvation and the fullness of human dignity. In your lives of material detachment and in the earnest work that you perform each day, you show your solidarity with the whole working community to whose service you are called. And through your prayers and the fruitfulness of your spiritual activities you are in a position to contribute effectively to the great cause of justice and peace and to the human advancement of countless men and women. Through your cloistered lives children are brought to Christ, the sick are comforted, the needy assisted, human hearts reconciled and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.

In certain places in Africa, a monastery of contemplative religious has been established in the vicinity of the major seminary. Is it not especially meaningful that those who saw the necessity of promoting vocations to the priesthood, so as to enable the young churches to become fully implanted in the native soil, also professed their conviction that only the grace of God, humbly sought in constant prayer, could sustain the fervour of the priesthood? I ask you therefore, as a special request on this occasion, to make it one of the primary intentions of your prayers, to beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest[4], and to bless his Church

in Africa with many good, generous, and committed priests, whose example of a holy and truly pastoral life constitutes the best guarantee for the life of the Church and the propagation of the faith.

5. Yours is then a truly important life of faith in Jesus Christ. In the words of Saint Peter: without having seen him, you love him; though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy^[5]. And precisely because of this, your lives become lives of great service to the Church. With Mary you are called to meditate on the word of God, and to cooperate in bringing forth to spiritual life those who believe in Christ. For you therefore the future is clear. You are on the right path - the path of total joyful consecration to Jesus Christ and of loving service to all your brothers and sisters in Africa and throughout the Church.

Dear Sisters: in all your efforts to walk with Mary and to ascend the mountain that is Christ by loving more deeply and serving more generously, remember that "your life is hid with Christ in God"^[6] for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

[1] *Luc.* 4, 43.

[2] *Io.* 15, 5.

[3] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

[4] Cfr. *Matth.* 9, 38.

[5] *1 Petr.* 1, 8.

[6] *Col.* 3, 3.