



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS FROM TANZANIA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT

Friday, 9 October 1981

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. After a long period of recovery, it is a joy for me to be back once again in the midst of my Brothers in the Episcopate. It was especially pleasing to me to resume the *ad Limina* audiences by beginning last week with the first group of Bishops from Tanzania, and in particular with Cardinal Rugambwa. During my visit to Africa I had the occasion to express publicly my deep esteem for him, recalling his long and faithful service as a Bishop and his two decades as a Cardinal. And with deep affection in Christ Jesus I welcome you today, and direct my words of fraternal support to you and to the whole hierarchy of your country.

I likewise take this occasion to send my respectful and cordial greetings to His Excellency the President of the Republic.

2. As zealous pastors of the flock you have come to Rome *to offer your local Churches to Jesus Christ* – to offer them to him in Catholic unity. You have come to entrust the destiny of your people “to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood”^[1]. You bear the joys and burdens, the hopes and aspirations of thousands of individuals and numerous ecclesial communities. Be assured, dear Brothers, that your offering is pleasing to the Lord, who is for ever with his bride, the Church.

3. At the same time you have come to renew your own dedication as Bishops. As you do so, I want you to know that I am close to you in prayer. As Bishop of Rome, your brother and fellow servant in the Gospel, I wish to proclaim the great pastoral role that is yours, *your lofty dignity as servant leaders of God's people*. I wish to offer words of praise for all the united efforts you have made, for everything you do in imitation of Jesus the Good Shepherd. I wish likewise to encourage you to continue steadfast in facing the pastoral problems of each day, seeking together realistic solutions in accordance with the reality of the word of God and its almighty power, knowing full well that “what is impossible with men is possible with God”^[2]. Jesus himself has laid down the standards for our people; he gives the grace. It is up to us to

offer his teaching in its fullness, waiting patiently for him to touch human hearts and to bring forth a good harvest. Indeed, we must be convinced that he who is “at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think”[3]. For us, failure consists in doubting the infinite power of Christ’s grace.

4. It is clear that we must maintain our evangelical priorities: those essential values that affect the very life of the Christian communities. In particular, I would ask you to continue to make every effort in promoting *catechetical instruction, religious education and the proper training of your seminarians*. As Bishops, show your pastoral interest in your priests and give to all of them the expression of your fraternal love, so that they in turn may be effective instruments in the ministry of salvation.

5. In everything you do, maintain a vision of the Church as a community gathered together in Christ, *a communion built up by his holy word*, nourished by his Body and Blood, and loved by his Father in heaven. The local Churches for which you give your lives are the communities of your own beloved people God’s pilgrim people – making up his Mystical Body and striving to live his very life amidst the customs of their own cultures – purified and uplifted by the salvific Gospel of Jesus – and amidst the events of daily life. This was my thought last year when [I addressed the Bishops assembled in Nairobi](#) and said: “By respecting, preserving and fostering the particular values and riches of your people’s cultural heritage, you will be in a position to lead them to a better understanding of the mystery of Christ, which is to be lived in the noble, concrete and daily experience of African life. There is no question of adulterating the word of God, or of emptying the Cross of its power[4], but rather of bringing Christ into the very centre of African life and of lifting up all African life to Christ. Thus, not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but Christ, in the members of his Body, is himself African”[5].

To minister to Christ’s Body, to lead your people to full maturity in Christ – this is your vocation as Bishops. Yes, this is your ministry: to lift up all African life to Christ, who in his members has himself become African, and who continues in his Church to proclaim a Gospel that purifies and uplifts, that liberates and saves.

6. The criterion of your effective ministry – your effective episcopal ministry – is *absolute fidelity to Jesus Christ and to his word*. It is up to us to plant and to water; God himself will give the increase and make the seed of his word grow in his own good time. He demands our trust, our obedience in preaching his message, our patience in awaiting the full harvest of salvation. You have indeed come to Rome carrying in your hearts the hopes of your ecclesial communities and the aspirations of all your people. Today, as pastors, you and I offer all of this to Jesus Christ, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

7. May you always be close to your priests, sustaining them in generosity and fervour, and assuring them that the Pope loves them and urges them to give themselves fully for the flock. To the religious sisters and brothers I send the expression of my gratitude for their consecration to the Kingdom and for the service that they lovingly give in the name of Jesus. Tell the seminarians that Christ needs them and is counting on their collaboration and perseverance. Assure the Christian families that their vocation is blessed by God and that their fidelity renders immense glory to the grace of Jesus Christ. And before all the People of God uphold the command of Christ in all its fullness: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”[6]. This is truly *your ministry as Bishops*, servants of Christ’s Gospel, chosen to shepherd the Church “which he has acquired at the price of his own blood”[7].

Dear brother Bishops, together let us praise Jesus Christ, who has called us to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters, so “that they may have life, and have it abundantly”^[8]. To him we renew the oblation of our lives; to him we make the offering and consecration of the holy Church of God. Praised be Jesus Christ!

[1] *Apoc.* 1, 4.

[2] *Luc.* 18, 27.

[3] *Eph.* 3, 20.

[4] Cfr. *1 Cor.* 1, 17.

[5] Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Episcopos Kenianos in urbe «Nairobi» congregatos habita, 6. die 7 maii 1980*: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, III, 1 (1980) 1223.

[6] *Matth.* 5, 48.

[7] *Act.* 20, 28.

[8] *Io.* 10, 10.

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