



The Holy See

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

Thursday, 14 January 1982

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. With the help of God, it will be my privilege in a few weeks' time to journey to your country and to express personally my love and esteem for all the Nigerian people. My visit there will be above all a pastoral visit. I shall go in order to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and to celebrate with you – in faith, hope and charity – the communion of the Catholic Church. In a real sense I shall be making a pilgrimage to the living shrine of the People of God, which is the Church in your land.

2. The visit will give all of us an opportunity to experience our unity in Christ and in the Church.

Together we shall be able to realize ever more deeply what it means to be united in the acceptance of the word of God and to express this unity through prayer, sacramental action and charitable concern. In this way we hope to manifest ecclesial communion with the same fervour as the early Christians who "Devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers". Indeed, I pray that my visit will not only reflect this communion but also intensify it. Meanwhile, today's ad limina visit anticipates our great celebration of unity and leads up to it. It is a prelude and preparation for a pastoral visit in which the Pope will belong in a special way to Nigeria.

3. By its very nature every celebration of ecclesial communion is linked to the proclamation of the word of God. It is in the truth of Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word of God that all our assemblies take place; it is to this truth that our unity must give witness. As Saint John explains, our fellowship is linked to the message of truth which we have heard and proclaim: "our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ". Indeed, in his prayer, Christ implores perfect unity for his followers only after he has addressed his Father, saying: "Sanctify them in truth... And for their sake I consecrate myself that they also may be consecrated in truth". All ecclesial communion is built on the truth of Christ's word.

4. The great desire of my heart is therefore to proclaim to your people the life-giving message of truth, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this sense my whole pastoral visit is to be seen in the context of evangelization. It thus becomes a further proclamation of the message of salvation which has already been preached and accepted by your people. It becomes a fresh invitation for them to put on Jesus Christ and “to lead a life worthy of the calling” to which they are called. In a word, the visit is placed under the sign of evangelization, at the centre of which is “a clear proclamation that in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy”.

Understood in this way, evangelization means preaching a message of hope, bringing the Good News to all parts of society, and inviting individuals and communities to interior change.

Evangelization is the vocation proper to the Church; it expresses her deepest identity, for it sums up the whole mission of Jesus himself, who said: “I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God... because this is what I was sent to do”.

5. In union with the Bishops of Nigeria and the whole Church, I too shall strive to fulfil my own mission of evangelization at the service of the Gospel, inviting the Church in your midst to become an ever more effective sign and instrument of God’s kingdom on earth. It is through evangelization, through the communication of the power of Christ’s Gospel, that the local Churches are purified and enabled to become ever more authentic communities of faith, in which the poor and the suffering, the sick and the handicapped, the unemployed and the disinherited, the orphans, widows and refugees find fraternal love, solidarity and support; and in which everyone is “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”.

Yes, dear Brothers, I look forward to being with you and your people, in order to render homage to those who first brought you the Gospel message and implanted the Church among you. I earnestly desire to celebrate together with you our unity under the sign of evangelization. All this is directed to the glory of the Triune God, to whom each of us, on that occasion, will be able to address our prayer of exultation and joy: “I will give you praise in the vast assembly; in the mighty throng I will praise you”. With God’s help we shall praise him together – in Nigeria! And may the Mother of Jesus help it to be so.

© Copyright 1982 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana