



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF KENYA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday 20 February, 1988

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. The spiritual significance of your *ad limina* visit, which is a return to the tombs of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, offers us a magnificent opportunity to confess once more together the faith we share and which has been handed down to us from the Apostles, the privileged witnesses of all that Jesus said and did "beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up" (Act. 1, 22). It affords us an occasion to experience in ourselves the intense joy of the special fraternal and apostolic communion which unites us in the College of the successor of those first witnesses, in whose place we have been appointed.

My dear Brothers, in this joy and union of hearts and minds I gladly welcome you and greet you. In your presence here I perceive the *entire Church in Kenya*, its priests, Religious and laity. I give thanks to God for the grace and holiness of life that he continually bestows on those who seek him with a sincere heart, for the vitality of your local Churches, for the love that unites and builds up the entire community of faith in your land.

2. In the course of my apostolic ministry in the See of Peter I have already had a number of occasions of addressing you, the pastors of the Church in Kenya. I remember with great pleasure my two visits to your country: the first in 1980 and the second on the occasion of the Forty-third International Eucharistic Congress held in Nairobi in 1985. We likewise met when you came on your previous *ad limina* visit in December 1982. On these occasions I have sought to fulfil the task entrusted to me in the Church: to encourage and confirm you in the faith and to strengthen you in unity, in love and in communion with the whole Body of Christ.

I am fully aware of your *generous dedication to your Episcopal ministry*, to the demands of your

prophetic, priestly and pastoral role in the Dioceses committed to your care. Know that I implore God to sustain you in this ecclesial service, for the spiritual and integral wellbeing of those whom you shepherd in Christ's name, for the benefit of those who have not yet believed in the Gospel message and for the good of the future generations of Kenyans who will also have a right to receive from you the gift of faith, genuine and complete. As your brother in the apostolic ministry I rejoice "to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ" (*Col. 2, 5*).

3. Today I wish to refer briefly to some of the principal themes of your ministry, especially in view of the *hundredth anniversary of the current evangelization of your country* which began with the arrival of the Spiritan missionaries in 1889, soon to be followed by other generous disciples of Christ, both men and women. Such an anniversary serves as a vantage point from which to consider what has been done so far and what is being done to build up and consolidate "the house of God" (*1 Tim. 3, 15*) in your midst.

Your seminaries and religious houses of formation are full. Kenya today can count on many candidates for the priesthood and religious life. This is indeed a blessed gift to the whole Church. It is a situation that calls for gratitude to the "Lord of the harvest" who wishes to send workers into his vineyard (Cfr. *Luc. 10, 2*). And it calls for attention and adequate policies on your part and on the part of Religious Congregations regarding *the selection and formation of candidates*. The recent introduction of a "spiritual year" prior to the beginning of studies in philosophy is an indication of your desire to take all necessary steps to ensure that your future priests have the necessary time and opportunity to mature their sense of vocation and their response in love to Christ.

The future of the Church in Kenya will depend especially on the life and ministry of her priests. They in turn will be properly equipped for their ministry if your seminaries offer them an intense and complete spiritual, intellectual and human formation, especially in relation to the rising general level of education in the country. Seminary directors and teachers should be keenly aware of the importance of their work, and they ought to be given the local Church's full encouragement and support. It goes without saying that they should be chosen from among the best and be appropriately prepared for their tasks (Cfr. *Luc. 10, 2*). Bishops have to resist the temptation to keep their best priests for "duties which, though in appearance of greater import, can in no way be compared with that of seminaries which is foremost and indispensable" (PII XI *Ad Catholicis Sacerdotii*, die 20 dec. 1935: AAS 28 (1936) 37).

4. Seminarians need the personal attention of expert staff, especially with regard to their *deeper spiritual formation*. They need teachers and directors who know how to create a climate of mutual trust, friendship and openness within the seminary community, essential for the development of proper attitudes of respect and obedience to authority in the way required by the Gospel and strongly reaffirmed by the Decrees of the Council. A supportive seminary environment helps in the development of the Christian virtues and a priestly life-style. In particular it contributes to

establishing a well-grounded appreciation and practice of chastity. It would be an injustice to the individuals involved and to the ecclesial community itself to present for ordination candidates who are not sufficiently qualified spiritually and intellectually. However urgent the needs of a diocese, the conciliar principle must be upheld that in all selection and testing of seminarians, necessary standards must always be firmly maintained. I wish to encourage you, dear brother Bishops, to make this one of the highest priorities of your common endeavours.

Through you I send cordial greetings to your Kenyan priest and to the many missionary priest and Religious engaged in formation work. My own involvement in teaching gives me an understanding of their hopes and deep commitment, as well as of the difficulties they willingly accept for the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church. May all of you be convinced of the centrality of this task.

5. Bishops are called to establish a special relationship of friendship and trust with all their priests, their closest and most effective collaborators in the pastoral ministry. The peace and well-being of a diocese, as well as its drive and zeal, depend to a great extent on the existence of a healthy relationship between the Bishop and priests and Religious (Cfr. *Christus Dominus*, 16).

You, more than anyone, know *the goodness and commitment of your priests*. You also know the *difficulties* they face when certain cultural and social factors clash with Christian doctrine or the requirements of their Catholic priesthood. Sometimes they are without sufficient fraternal support because they may have to live alone and far from one another. Experience shows that there is only one really effective remedy: a deep personal faith nourished by constant prayer, and a life-style based on *self-giving and humility*, in an effort to identify ever more fully with Christ, the high priest who offered himself up unblemished to God (Cfr. *Hebr.* 9, 11-14). For this reason everything that you do in collaboration with each other and with the religious communities involved, in order to sustain and increase the spiritual growth and fraternal communion of the priests working in your Dioceses, is a magnificent service to them and to the Church.

6. As for the life and ministry of priests and Religious in your country, it is clear that they have a special role and responsibility in "*incarnating*" *the Gospel in the culture* of the people whom they serve. The word of God is directed to all cultures, and the task is to translate the treasure of the faith, in all its originality and without betrayal, into the legitimate variety of expressions found among the various peoples of the world. Inculturation is not the simple assimilation of local customs, expressions or outlooks into the life of the Church. It proceeds above all from the very power of the Gospel to transform, purify and elevate the genius and values of every culture. Once the elements of a particular culture are seen truly to conform to the revealed message as held and transmitted by the Church, then can they be incorporated into the worship, life and ministry of the ecclesial community. There is always a need for a genuine discernment that is subject to a corresponding pastoral charism entrusted to the magisterium of the Bishops.

7. To recall the important role of *catechists and Catholic teachers* in evangelization in your country is to mention something that is self-evident to you who work with them daily and depend on them in your pastoral ministry. I am aware of the many efforts you are making to give them the formation and support they need. To all of them I send a special greeting in the Lord, and I ask him to strengthen their faith and sustain them in *consolidating the Christian communities* in which they work.

Today there is a need too for improved adult catechesis, both for those who are coming to the faith for the first time and for the faithful in general who are called upon to live their Christian lives in an increasingly complex and sometimes secularized environment. The defence of the Christian family, the upholding of the dignity of the human person in the face of old and modern forms of violence against the image of God in every individual, including the unborn child, are serious challenges requiring unity and collaboration between clergy and laity. These are also areas in which a spirit of ecumenical collaboration with members of other Christian Communities, and dialogue with the followers of other religious traditions, can bring results beneficial to all concerned.

In the wake of the recent Synod of Bishops on the theme of the Laity, the Church is called to foster lay involvement at all levels, in parishes, through lay organizations and by enabling lay persons to assume their proper roles of responsibility in Church activities. Much has already been done in this field, and you have expressed your intention to pursue this path still further in your local Churches, by seeking to intensify the formation of the laity for their specific tasks, both ecclesial and social. Do not hesitate to promote the formation of Catholic leaders capable of taking a prominent place in the cultural and public life of your country. To achieve this purpose, you are blessed to have in Nairobi the *Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa*, which I had the joy of inaugurating at the time of International Eucharistic Congress in 1985. This Institute offers invaluable resources for the training of lay leaders, as well as for the entire spiritual and ecclesial life of your ever maturing local Churches. I can only encourage you to pursue the many ideas which you are already considering for the constant improvement of Catholic education.

In this respect too it is heartening to know that more attention is being given to the Catholic presence in the media, and that you are in the process of responding to the need for a Catholic newspaper. Leaders in these endeavours should be moved by a sincere desire to serve the genuine progress and well-being of their fellow-citizens.

8. My dear brother Bishops: whoever looks at the state of the Church in Kenya is immediately impressed by the sense of commitment, the hard work and self-giving which characterizes you, the Pastors, and your collaborators. So much has been achieved in the past hundred years! And new projects are constantly being initiated. The progress of the Church in your land is symbolized, in a sense, in the creation of four new Dioceses in the past four years. Nairobi itself is the seat both of various International and Regional Organizations and of the African offices of various

Catholic Organizations, all of which I greet and encourage in their respective activities.

But it is above all the inner life of the spirit, the *increase of grace and holiness*, that is your principal concern and task. And here too we must give humble thanks to God for his graciousness and mercy. May you ever more successfully fulfil the words which the Council addresses to Bishops: "Intent upon prayer and the ministry of the word" (*Act. 6, 4*) they should devote their labour to this end, that all those committed to their care may be of one mind in prayer and through the reception of the sacraments may grow in grace and be faithful witnesses to the Lord" (*Christus Dominus*).

In this Marian Year I entrust you to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her intercession and the example of her discipleship constitute one of the most fruitful sources of strength and inspiration for your and our brothers and sister in the faith.

I ask you to take back to your peoples my greetings and my love in the Lord Jesus Christ. With my Apostolic Blessing.

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