



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO SENEGAL, THE GAMBIA AND GUINEA

MEETING WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE  
OF "ST. AUGUSTINE'S HIGH SCHOOL"

*ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

*Banjul, The Gambia  
Sunday, 23 February 1992*

Yen ndow u Gambia—munu ma nyaka dage ak yen. (*Young people of The Gambia, I could not miss having this meeting with you*).<sup>1</sup> I am delighted that this gathering could take place here at *Saint Augustine's High School*, as a token of appreciation and gratitude for the Church's long involvement in education in The Gambia. Mangi len di nuyu ku neka chi yen. Te mangay neyu ndaw yi ma deglu chi radio bi. (*I greet each one of you. And I greet all the young people who are listening to me over the Radio*). I come to you as the messenger of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Successor of the Apostle Peter, charged with confirming the Church in faith, unity and love. In the Lord's name I wish to encourage you, the *Christian youth* of The Gambia, in your fidelity to the Gospel and in your love of the Church. And I wish to encourage all of you, *Christians and Muslims*, to pursue the great ideals which will enable you to work together to build a better world. I am grateful to your representatives for their kind words of welcome, and for the bouquet and the gift which they have presented to me on your behalf.<sup>2</sup> Before coming here I tried to learn as much as I could about you. I wanted to understand your hopes, your fears, your aspirations, and the difficulties you face as you grow up and take your place in society. I was especially interested to know how you live your Christian faith, how closely you follow the teachings of Jesus, how the Christian and Muslim young people of The Gambia share the same concerns and are open to each other in the search for the good of your country and its people. Legi mange gis sen ni muun te di daaga sen bat u neh. Yen na di dega yakar gu mag cha kanan (uelaak). (*Now I see your smiling faces and hear your joyful voices. You really are a great hope for the future!*). You have prepared for this meeting by reflecting on the theme of the Papal Visit: "Be the salt of the earth; be

the light of the world!" Let us think together about some of the implications of this Gospel invitation. Salt is useful if it gives taste to food; light is useful if it banishes darkness. Jesus was very forceful when he said: "if the salt has lost its taste... it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out" (Mt. 5:13). Then he said that people do not light a lamp and hide it under a tub. That would defeat its purpose. Rather, they put it on a stand, "and it gives light to all in the house" (*Ibid.* 5:15). *Both the salt and the light must contribute to improving things.* That is what is expected of the young people of The Gambia. Am na lu bare lo len mona defal sen bopa jangu bi ak rew mi mep. (*There is much that you must do for yourselves, for the Church, for your country*).<sup>3</sup> But where will you find the strength and the incentive to work for the well-being and the true happiness of others, without ever giving in to difficulties and discouragement? The Gospel of Saint John tells us the wonderful story of what Jesus did for a person he met in the streets of Jerusalem: a man "blind from his birth" (Cf. Jn. 9:1-41). Jesus anointed the man's eyes and sent him to wash in the nearby pool of Siloam. The whole story of the *miracle is meant to teach us about Jesus himself.* He says: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (*Ibid.* 9:5). Jesus gives the man his sight so that we might understand that he alone can give us the light we need to see things as they really are, to *understand the full truth about ourselves and others*, about our life and its destiny. Jesus is indeed our light. In Saint John's Gospel he says: "*I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" (*Ibid.* 8:12). The name of the pool, "Siloam", means "sent": and Jesus himself is the one sent by the Father for the life of the world (Cf. *ibid.* 6:51). The pool where the man has to wash his eyes is a *symbol of Jesus' own role as the Messiah, the One sent to wash away the sins of the world, to redeem us through his Death and Resurrection, to purify us through the waters of Baptism.*<sup>4</sup> *Let us think about the experience of the blind man.* He has not yet seen Jesus, he can only hear his voice and feel the Lord's fingers anointing his eyes. But he "went and washed and came back seeing" (*Ibid.* 9:7). Imagine his joy and his surprise as he looks at the world for the first time! The people standing round want to know how he has been cured. He tells them that it was done by "the man called Jesus" (*Ibid.* 9:11). But when they ask where Jesus is, the man has no answer. He has to admit: "I do not know" (*Ibid.* 9:12). The man born blind has already received a great gift from the Lord, but a lot must happen before he will *actually see Jesus and fully believe in him.* First, he must resist the *opposition* of the Pharisees. Then, even his parents were afraid, and defended him only halfheartedly. The cured man does not yet have a full answer to the accusations made against Christ. He has only one argument, the fact that Jesus has cured him. "One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see" (Jn. 9:25). He has one certainty, that Jesus is a good man, a prophet: "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (*Ibid.* 9:33). Seeing that he publicly defended Jesus, the Pharisees "cast him out" (*Ibid.* 9:34). The blind man was now free to follow Christ, but he was also beginning to pay the *price of discipleship.* Then the Gospel tells us something very beautiful: "Jesus heard that they had cast him out" (*Ibid.* 9:35). *The Lord never loses contact with his followers.* He never abandons them. When they are alone and lost, he searches for them. *That is the work of the Good Shepherd and of all those who take the place of the Chief Shepherd in the life of the Church.* Jesus looked for the man whom he had cured, "and having found him he said: 'Do you believe in the Son of man?' " (*Ibid.*). Here we come to the heart of the Gospel message. Nda ngom ngen: li di large gi

Yesu di wah chi ndaw u katolic yi neka chi rew mi tei (chi Gambia tei)(*Do you believe? This is the same question that Jesus addresses to the Catholic young people of The Gambia today*). Is your faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, strong enough to give meaning and direction to your lives? To lead you out of fear and loneliness: To fill you with an ardent desire to serve his Kingdom and make it present in your own lives, in your families, in society? Remember, the man has not yet seen Jesus with open eyes. But his heart is full of the desire to know *the one who has done this great thing for him*. He asks: "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" (*Ibid.* 9:36). And then comes the great moment when Jesus reveals himself: "It is he who speaks to you" (*Ibid.* 9:37). When we are open, the light of Christ penetrates our hearts. When we discover him as *the Way and the Truth and the Life*, we are transformed (Cf. Jn. 14:6). God's truth teaches us wisdom; his love fills us with certainty, and with a great desire to do what he wants of us, and to share our discovery with others so that they too may have the marvellous *experience of meeting the Lord*. The cured man professes his faith: "*Lord, I believe*" (*Ibid.* 9:38). At this moment he worships Jesus and a whole new world opens up before him. He enters into a *new relationship with God*. He will never again doubt God's unique love for him. He will adapt his life in every way to the will of God, to the following of Christ, to working for the coming of God's Kingdom in the heart of everyone he meets. Yesu angi len di o' tei chi sen ngom. (*Jesus is calling you to just such an encounter of faith*).<sup>5</sup> Like young people everywhere, the youth of The Gambia have many problems. You are anxious about your future. You are sometimes tempted by the false promise of happiness in drug or alcohol abuse, or in the misuse of the wonderful divine gift of human sexuality. These deceitful sirens of a would-be liberation and progress have already betrayed millions of young people like you in other parts of the world. By robbing them of their *youthful ideals* and the sense of responsibility and challenge, these harmful models of happiness have led many young men and women into a terrible state of frustration and alienation. Above all, a false "gospel" of materialism is being loudly "preached" to young people. It says that happiness depends on having more and more material things, and that material wealth, however obtained, is the measure of a person's worth. Nothing could be farther from the truth! True happiness has to do with "being", not with "having".<sup>6</sup> What then is the Pope's message to you? To be what you are! Yen nyep dom u yalla nden, te ku neka chi yen am na legaye gu mu wara mutali chi jangom ak chi kurail gi mu boka. (*You are all God's children, and each one of you has a task to fulfil for the Church and society*). God has endowed you with many gifts and talents which you must develop for his glory and for the good of The Gambia. Here I must remind you to use every opportunity to study well and educate yourselves for the tasks that life will set before you. I know that some of you may have to leave your own country in search of employment and opportunities elsewhere, but it is also true that as far as possible your vitality and skills are needed here in your homeland, in the service of your own communities. To some of you the Lord may give *the very special gift of a vocation to the priesthood or to the religious life*. Listen to his voice! Such a calling requires great sacrifice and absolute generosity. But remember the promise Jesus made to Peter and the rest of the disciples: "Every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Mt. 19:29). May the Lord grant many of you the light to discover this unique grace in your lives! No one must think

that he or she has nothing to offer. All of you, *Christians and Muslims, are called to make your families and society itself places where God is truly present, where justice and peace really exist, and where people are motivated by a spirit of love and mutual respect.* My message to the young people of The Gambia is this: *Neka len horom u aduna si neka len ler u aduna si!* (*Be the salt of the earth! Be the light of the world!*). Be for The Gambia a sign that respect for God's law is the only true path of peace and prosperity for her people. This is what the Pope and the Church expect of you. This is what your country needs from you. *Na yalla barkel kena ku neka chi yen. Na yalla barkel sen wajour, sen njabot sen jangalekat yi ak nyepa nyi len di sama chi sen hol. Na yalla barkel Gambia bi.* (*God bless each one of you. God bless your parents, your families, your teachers, and all those who have your well-being at heart. God bless The Gambia.*)