



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF KENYA ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT Monday, 25 April 1994 Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops, 1. It is a great joy for me to welcome you, *the Bishops of Kenya* on your quinquennial *ad limina* visit. While every encounter with my brothers in the Episcopal College is an experience of faith and ecclesial communion, two circumstances coincide to give a special spiritual intensity to our meeting at this time. You are here in the Easter Season, a motive for increased confidence in our service to God's people since we are aware that the bonds which make us "of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32) are the work of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the Church by her Risen Lord. At the same time, how can we not see that your presence here during the *Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* is a further call to open your hearts fully to the dynamic action of the Holy Spirit who is leading the Church on your Continent into all truth, justice and love? I am confident that this providential coincidence will make your visit an occasion for a renewed awareness of the true measure of authentic apostolic witness, by leading you to concentrate in prayer and reflection on the "hour" that the Church in Africa is living. Your presence brings to mind the priests, Religious and lay faithful entrusted to your care and, recalling my visits to Kenya in 1980 and in 1985, my heart embraces them once again. Mindful of how I was received with ardent love and warm hospitality, I ask you to assure all the faithful that, as I promised, "neither distance nor time" has diminished the communion which the Bishop of Rome feels towards them (cf. John Paul II, [Address at the Departure from Kenya](#) (Nairobi), 1 [8 May 1980]). 2. During your pilgrimage *ad trophaea Apostolorum*, you, as Bishops, will renew your contact with realities which lie at the very foundation of the Church. As you stand at the sites which marked the final stages in the missionary journeys of Saints Peter and Paul, and as you pray on ground made holy by their heroic confession of the Gospel, you will understand more deeply the nature of your own vocation. By becoming more vividly aware of all that was involved in the Apostles' being sent forth from Jerusalem as the Lord's witnesses (cf. Acts 1:8), you will better appreciate what God requires of their Successors in terms of holiness of life and steadfastness of faith. Like the Apostles, Bishops are called to testify "in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2) to the word revealed for our salvation. This saving word is a sacred trust passed on, first by the Apostles and then by their Successors from one generation to the next, along with the gifts of the Spirit required for its integral proclamation. The Bishop is "sanctified in the truth" (Jn. 17:17), so that by his preaching and teaching the light of that truth might shine forth in his life and ministry. In our day, when so many voices call into question the truth about man, about his transcendent dignity, about his supernatural destiny and the means to achieve it, it is more important than ever that a Bishop bear unambiguous witness to the Creator's plan for the human person and his design for a society in which this plan can be brought to fulfilment (cf. John Paul II, [Veritatis Splendor](#), 114-117). 3. After reviewing the reports submitted in preparation for your quinquennial visit, it would not be possible to overlook the fact that in these last few years you have been called upon with ever increasing urgency *to enunciate the truth about the moral order in an uncertain political and social*

context. In your pastoral letters and related statements you have spoken of the challenge facing your people with a courage and forthrightness that express your genuine love for Kenya and your concern for all its citizens. You have pointed out the evil of fomenting ethnic divisions for selfish purposes. Your protests against violence, your defence of human rights, your reproof of those who seek personal advantage by exploiting their neighbours, your calls to the civil authorities to renew their honest dedication to ensuring the common good, and your summons to national reconciliation—all of these are signs of your fidelity to the demands of your apostolic ministry. They mark you out as authentic heirs of those who said: "We cannot do anything but speak" (Acts 4:20); "We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth" (2 Cor 13:8). Among your principal duties, *the great challenge of evangelization is the burden which the Lord daily lays on your shoulders* (cf. Mt. 11:30; 1 Cor. 9:16). In your earnest efforts to spread the faith you are being faithful to the heritage which has come to you from those who brought the Gospel to your nation over a century ago. This work, begun with such confidence in God, has already brought forth much good fruit. Evidence of this fruitfulness is the fact that since the hierarchy was established in Kenya in 1953 three new ecclesiastical provinces have been set up in order to accommodate the development of the local Churches, with the newest Diocese being erected only last year. This abundant return, in the overflowing measure promised by the Lord himself (cf. Lk. 8:8), should inspire all those who serve the Gospel to work ever more generously. In this regard I extend a special word of appreciation *to the men and women who have come from abroad* in order to help their Kenyan brothers and sisters to take the places appointed for them at the banquet of the Son of our Heavenly King (cf. Mt. 22:1-10). Tribute is likewise due to all those, especially the *catechists and teachers*, who give so generously of themselves in order to share the good news of our salvation in Christ. Your support of these heralds of the word of salvation, and especially your efforts to see that they receive adequate formation for the mission entrusted to them, remains indispensable for their success. Of particular importance in the current situation is your concern to see that all those who teach the faith are able to meet the challenge posed by the increasing spread of sects.⁴ Your quinquennial reports indicate that *Kenya has been particularly fertile ground for the growth of Religious life*. The exemplary witness given by so many men and women consecrated to chastity, poverty and obedience shows the wisdom of insisting on the careful selection of candidates and their thorough formation. Religious who have been properly prepared to respond to the gifts of the Holy Spirit will continue to earn the admiration of believers and non-believers alike for their service in parishes, schools, hospitals, among the poor, the elderly, the disabled and the abandoned. All the faithful of Kenya, especially the clergy, should be continually invited to support Religious in their consecration and mission. I am also certain that you will be close to them by involving the whole Catholic community in Kenya in a prayerful and fruitful reflection on Religious life in preparation for the General Assembly of the Synod in October.⁵ A further thought is inspired by the Church's celebration of the *International Year of the Family*. As Pastors you well know the importance of the example and testimony given by Christian spouses. In a sense, the strength of Christian marriages and of Christian family life is the measure of the penetration of the Gospel in a given culture. As the Pastoral Constitution "Gaudium et Spes" states: "By the joys and sacrifices of their vocation and through their faithful love, married people become witnesses of the mystery of that love which the Lord revealed to the world by his dying and his rising up to life again" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 52). And as the Fathers of the Council remind us in another place, this testimony to the Paschal Mystery, while "priceless... at all times and places", is particularly so "in areas where the seeds of the Gospel are being sown, or where the Church is still in her infancy" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11). This is surely the voice of the Spirit speaking to the Churches of Africa. Do we not sense here a promise from the Paraclete about the spiritual power to be unleashed on the Continent when strong family ties, which have been an outstanding characteristic of African society, are transformed and deepened by his action in the Sacrament of Matrimony? Like "cities set on mountains" (Mt. 5:14), the Christian homes of Africa will be so many beacons of light showing how the New Adam

conquered sin and restored the innocence bestowed upon the human family at its creation (cf. Nuntius paschalis "Exsultet"). As has frequently been pointed out at the present Synod, the future of the Church in Africa depends greatly on the energies given to *catechesis and formation of the laity at every level*. In order that in their homes, as well as in all their social relationships, the laity "can make Christ known to others, especially by a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 31), adequate formation is indispensable (cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 59-60). It is so important that sound foundations be laid during childhood, and reinforced during adolescence and early adulthood. When they reach full maturity, the lay faithful will thus be equipped to play their proper role as a leaven in society. The high priority given to the *catechesis of the young and the care of families* in your pastoral planning is a clear recognition of this fact.⁶ In all these activities, *your priests are "your indispensable co-workers and advisers"*, for with you "they share... the one identical priesthood and ministry of Christ" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7). I join with you in giving thanks to God that your Dioceses are blessed with many devoted priests and that the prospects for the future appear bright, in no small part because of your zealous promotion of priestly vocations. As always, the need remains for careful screening of applicants to the seminary, in order to ensure that they possess sound motives, genuine piety and sufficient talent, and that they are of irreproachable moral character. Such candidates will respond generously to the demanding formation programme which the Church expects them to follow. Under the care and direction of well-qualified priests - men outstanding not only for their learning but above all for their likeness to the Good Shepherd - these candidates will grow to be "shepherds after the Lord's own heart" (cf. Jer. 3:15). Because the quality of the seminary staff determines the efficacy of any formation programme, the Bishop, in accordance with the apostolic injunction against ordaining those who are not considered worthy (cf. 1 Tim. 5:22), must act decisively to ensure that seminarians are placed under the authority of those whose influence nurtures their progress in priestly virtue. In all that concerns the training of priests, I draw your attention once more to the results of the 1990 Synod of Bishops, which I took up anew in the post-synodal Exhortation "*Pastores Dabo Vobis*". It is my hope that in this document you will hear the voice of Peter helping you, his Brothers (cf. Lk. 22:32), to meet your grave responsibility for the formation of priests who are capable of truly building up the Body of Christ in the face of today's challenges. The recently published *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* is a further fruit of the 1990 Synod, and it will, I am confident, be most useful to you in directing that permanent formation of the clergy which the Second Vatican Council described as an object of "greatest care" for a Bishop, upon whom, "above all, rests the heavy responsibility for the sanctity of his priests" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 7). I encourage you in your efforts to assist your sons and brothers in the presbyterate "to rekindle the gift of God" that is within them (2 Tim. 1:6).⁷ As I had occasion to say at the opening of the current Synod: "Our Church, which has spread all over the earth and which expresses herself today in a particular way through the presence of the African Bishops, *firmly believes that the power and mercy of the one God were manifest above all in the Incarnation of the Son of God*, the Son who is consubstantial with the Father, who acts with the Father through the Holy Spirit and who, in this trinitarian unity, receives full glory and honour" (John Paul II, *Homily for the Opening of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, 5 [10 April 1994]). The Father who loves you in Christ and who pours forth the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon all who believe is the source of your trust and courage. God is asking much of the Church in Kenya, and your response depends to an essential degree on *the reality of the interior life and personal and community prayer* which you and all the faithful foster. By God's grace at work within you and your flock, you will - in the words of Saint Paul - be "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. To him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21). Commending you and the priests, Religious and lay faithful to the loving intercession of Mary, Star of Evangelization, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing. © Copyright 1994 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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