



The Holy See

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

Saturday, 15 February 2003

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

1. The *ad limina* visit you are making these days to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul is for me a source of joy. It is an opportunity to confirm once again the bonds of communion that unite you to the Successor of Peter, and, with him, to the universal Church. I give thanks for the missionary zeal of your diocesan communities and for the fruit with which the Holy Spirit enriches your pastoral ministry. I cordially welcome you, and I especially greet Bishop Philippe Kourouma of N'Zérékoré, President of your Bishops' Conference. On your return to your dioceses, bring to your priests, religious, catechists and all your faithful the affectionate greeting of the Pope who is close to each one in his thoughts and prayers. Convey to all your fellow-citizens my cordial wishes for a future of peace and reconciliation, so that all may be able to live in security and brotherhood.

2. The Catholic Church in Guinea Conakry is very much alive. In the happy and sad periods of the history of your country, despite the small number of faithful and the lack of means, she has kept alive the strong consciousness of being the Gospel leaven, accounting for her faith, hope and charity by the proclamation of the Word that saves and the often heroic witness of her life. As you stress in your quinquennial reports, today there are many obstacles to the acceptance of the faith that include the plight of the desperate poverty of the populace, the difficulty of proclaiming the Gospel message in a situation that is defined by the predominance of other religious traditions and the problems you face as you reach geographically isolated communities. The new challenges of evangelization that confront the Church today must not frighten her; on the contrary, they must revive her missionary conscience by rooting her in an ever-stronger union with Christ and by reinforcing the bonds of communion that make truly fruitful the witness of Christians. By being established on the human and spiritual values that constitute the riches of the culture of the Guinean people, the Church is called to sow the Good News through the inculturation of the Gospel message, that offers all human beings an opportunity to receive Jesus Christ and to let

him meet them in the entirety of their personal, cultural, economic and political being so that in view of their total union with God the Father, they lead a holy life under the action of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 62). Through a basic change of mentality and conversion of heart that are always necessary, may your communities, called to become ever more fraternal, welcoming and open to others, make visible the signs of the love that God has for every human being!

3. As you mention in your quinquennial reports, this task of evangelization cannot be separated from an authentic human advancement which gives every person the chance to live to the full according to his dignity of child of God. From the beginning of evangelization in Guinea, the patient work of the missionaries, whom I want to thank with you today, has inseparably linked the prophetic mission of the Church, revealing the mystery of God who is the last end of man, and the mission of charity, revealing to the human person, by means of her actions, the integral truth about himself (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 41). By her work in the fields of education, relief work, health care and social advancement, the Church in Guinea makes the Word of God present, accompanying the material and spiritual growth of persons and communities. I invite you to continue in this direction, calling Christians especially to participate more fully in the political life of the country, and helping them, by an adequate doctrinal formation, to consistently combine their Christian faith with their civic responsibilities (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some Questions regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, n. 3). Thus they will be able "to bring to bear upon the social fabric an influence aimed at changing not only ways of thinking but also the very structures of society, so that they will better reflect God's plan for the human family" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 54), working for the common good, brotherhood and the building of peace in justice.

4. As I could see, in your pastoral programmes, you make plenty of room for the various agents of evangelization, so that they may carry out their indispensable role in the Church and in society. This has become even more necessary on account of the aggressive activity of the sects that exploit the poverty and credulity of the faithful to turn them away from the Church and the liberating word of the Gospel. In this perspective, I hope you will pay renewed attention to the formation of catechists, whom I greet with affection and whose tireless devotion I greatly appreciate. I warmly encourage you to give these valuable collaborators of the mission material, moral and spiritual support, and ensure that they benefit from an initial and ongoing doctrinal formation. They should be models of charity and defenders of life, since their daily example of Christian life is a valuable witness of holiness for those whom they are mandated to lead to Christ!

5. Today in Guinea all kinds of threats further the break-up of the family and its foundations, and harming social cohesion. "From the pastoral point of view, this is a real challenge, given the political, economic, social and cultural difficulties which African families must face as a result of the great changes which characterize contemporary society" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 80). It is essential to encourage Catholics to preserve and promote the fundamental values of the family. The faithful must hold in high esteem the dignity of Christian marriage, the sign of Christ's love for his Church.

Fully conscious of the dangers that the practice of polygamy represent for the institution of Christian marriage, the Church must teach clearly and tirelessly the truth about marriage and the family as God has established them, recalling especially that the love that the spouses bear each other is unique and indissoluble, and that, due to its stability, marriage contributes to the full realization of their human and Christian vocation and opens them to true happiness. Thus the family continues to be the indispensable place for the human and spiritual growth of children.

I also hope that the young people of your dioceses, who are close to my heart, may discover in their closeness to Christ the joy of welcoming his word of life and of being ready to serve him. In the difficulties they experience, may they never lose their confidence in the future; through prayer and a strong sacramental life, may they remain close to Christ in order to bring the values of the Gospel into the places they live and generously play their part in the transformation of society!

6. I cordially greet the priests of your dioceses, irreplaceable collaborators whom you should consider as your brothers and friends, being ever more concerned with their material and spiritual situation, and urging them to collaborate in an increasingly brotherly way with you and with one another. I also urge the *presbyterium* of your dioceses to show its unity and its deep communion around the Bishop, with the conviction that all are at the service of the one mission that the Church has entrusted to them in the name of Christ. In fact, this witness of unity is essential so that the local Church may fruitfully continue to be built up and grow. The witness of the irreproachable life of priests is also a strong incentive for young people and it can help them respond generously to the Lord's call, showing them the joy to be found in following Christ. In the promotion of vocations, and in their discernment and direction, the primary responsibility belongs to the Bishop, who must personally assume his responsibility, while also guaranteeing the indispensable collaboration of his *presbyterium*, notably, of priests who have been well-formed for this ministry, and by reminding Christian families, catechists and all the faithful of their personal responsibility in this area.

7. Meeting with the believers of other religions, especially with Muslims, is the daily experience of Christians in Guinea, a country where Islam is the religion of the large majority. At the time when suspicions, temptations to withdraw into self or the refusal of dialogue can be serious obstacles to social stability and personal religious freedom, it is important that the dialogue of life between Christians and Muslims continue, so that they may be ever more daring witnesses of the good and merciful Lord, in mutual respect. The future of a country largely rests on respect for the people, and for their freedom of conscience which includes the free choice of religion. However, as I wrote in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*: "Dialogue, however, cannot be based on religious indifferentism, and we Christians are in duty bound, while engaging in dialogue, to bear clear witness to the hope that is within us" (n. 56).

8. I know of the active presence of the Church, especially through her national and international charitable institutions, with people who are affected by such serious illnesses as AIDS, with the many refugees who come from neighbouring countries, and, in a general way, with all who are

suffering the consequences of poverty. I encourage you to persevere in your efforts to offer them the material and pastoral help they request. I warmly thank those who generously put themselves at the service of their brothers and sisters. In this way, in the name of the whole Church, they are witnesses of Christ's love to the weakest and most underprivileged of society.

9. At the end of our meeting, dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, I thank God with you for the work you have accomplished. I entrust each one of your dioceses to the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Rosary. I implore her Son Jesus to pour out upon the Church in Guinea an abundance of divine blessings, so that she may be the living sign of the love that God has for all people, and, especially for the deprived, the sick and the suffering. I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, which I gladly extend to the priests, men and women religious, catechists and all the laity of your dioceses.