



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF ANGOLA AND SÃO TOMÉ E PRÍNCIPE (C.E.A.S.T.)
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Consistory Hall
Saturday, 29 October 2011*

*Your Eminence,
Beloved Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,*

In the joy of the faith, whose proclamation is our common service as Pastors, I welcome you to this meeting on the occasion of your *ad limina Apostolorum* visit. It is taking place after my [Visit to Luanda in March 2009](#), during which I was able to be with you and celebrate Jesus Christ in the midst of a people, who do not tire of searching for him, loving him and serving him with generosity and joy. I cherish these peoples in my heart and in a certain sense I have been waiting for your visit in order to hear their news. I thank Archbishop Gabriel Mbilingi of Lubango, President of the Bishops' Conference, for the presentation of your communities with their challenges and hopes at the present time with the strength and grace that Heaven has given to them. Your reciprocal and brotherly help, concern for the people of God in Angola and São Tomé e Príncipe, your union with the Pope and your desire to remain faithful to the Lord are for me the source of deep joy and a heartfelt cause for thanksgiving.

Beloved Brothers, by virtue of the apostolic mission you have received, you can introduce your people to the heart of the mystery of the faith, encountering the living Person of Jesus Christ. In the hope of shedding "ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ" (*Motu Proprio Porta Fidei*, n. 2), I decided to proclaim the Year of Faith so that the whole Church may offer to all a more beautiful and credible face, which more clearly reflects the face of the Lord.

As was rightly stressed by the [Second Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops](#), whose results,

in the customary form of the Apostolic Exhortation, I hope to be able to entrust to all the People of God in my upcoming [Visit to Benin](#), “the first and most specific contribution of the Church to the people of Africa is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. We are therefore committed to pursuing vigorously the proclamation of the Gospel to the people of Africa, for ‘life in Christ is the first and principal factor of development’... For a commitment to development comes from a change of heart, and a change of heart comes from conversion to the Gospel” (*Concluding Message*, n. 15). It is not a matter of “preaching a word of consolation, but rather a word which disrupts, which calls to conversion and which opens the way to an encounter with the one through whom a new humanity flowers” ([Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*](#), n. 93).

Christians truly breathe the spirit of their time and suffer from the pressure of the customs of the society in which they live. But, through the grace of Baptism, they are called to reject the prevalent damaging tendencies and to swim against the tide, guided by the spirit of the Beatitudes. With this in mind, I would like to talk about three reefs on which has run aground the will of many people of Angola and São Tomé e Príncipe, who have clung to Christ. The first is the so-called “amigamento” or concubinage which contradicts God’s plan for procreation and the human family. The reduced number of Catholic marriages in your communities points to the difficulties that weigh on the family, whose stability in the social fabric we know is of irreplaceable value. Aware of this problem, your Bishops’ Conference has chosen marriage and the family as pastoral priorities for the current three years. May God reward the initiatives for the positive outcome of this cause! Help married couples to acquire the human and spiritual maturity necessary to assume responsibly their mission as spouses and Christian parents, reminding them that married love should be one and indissoluble, as the covenant between Christ and his Church. This precious treasure should be safeguarded at all costs.

The second reef in your work of evangelization is the hearts of the baptized are still divided between Christianity and traditional African religions. Afflicted by problems in life, they do not hesitate to resort to practices that are incompatible with following Christ (cf. [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), n. 2117). An abominable effect of this is the marginalization and even the killing of children and the elderly who are falsely condemned of witchcraft. Remembering that human life is sacred in all its phases and situations, continue, dear Bishops, to raise your voice on behalf of all its victims. But, since it is a regional problem, a joint effort of the ecclesial communities tried by these disasters is appropriate, in the attempt to determine the deep reason for such practices, to identify the pastoral and social risks conveyed by them and to arrive at the method which leads to their definitive eradication, with the cooperation of the Government and of civil society.

Finally I would like to speak about the residual effects of ethnic tribalism evident in the attitudes of the community which tends to close in on itself, not accepting people from other parts of the nation. I express my appreciation of those of you who have accepted a pastoral mission outside the bounds of your region or linguistic group and I thank the priests and people who have welcomed and helped you. In the Church, as a new family of those that believe in Christ (cf. Mk

3:31-35), there is no room for any kind of division. “To make the Church *the home and the school of communion*: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings” (John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 43). Men and women of different tribes, languages and nations meet around the altar; they share the same Body and the same Blood of Jesus the Eucharist, they become brethren related by blood (cf. Rom 8:29). This bond of brotherhood is stronger than those of our earthly families and of your tribes.

I would like to conclude these reflections with a few words which I said on arriving in Luanda, on the above-mentioned Visit: “God has enabled human beings to fly, over and above their natural tendencies, on the wings of reason and faith. If you let these wings bear you aloft, you will easily recognize your neighbour as a brother or sister, born with the same fundamental human rights”. Yes, beloved Pastors of Angola and of São Tomé e Príncipe, a people made up of brothers, whom I embrace and greet from here.

Take my affectionate greeting to all members of your particular Churches: bishops emeritus, priests, seminarians, men and women religious, catechists, movement leaders and all the faithful lay people. While I entrust you to the protection of the Virgin Mary, so loved in your nations and especially at the Shrine of Mamã Muxima, I impart to all a cordial Apostolic Blessing

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