



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO BENIN

18-20 NOVEMBER 2011

**HOLY MASS AND CONSIGNMENT
OF THE POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
TO THE BISHOPS OF AFRICA**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Amitié Stadium, Cotonou
Sunday, 20 November 2011*

[Video]

*Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Following in the footsteps of my blessed predecessor [Pope John Paul II](#), it is a great joy for me to visit for the second time this dear continent of Africa, coming among you, in Benin, to address to you a message of hope and of peace. I would like first of all to express my cordial gratitude to Archbishop Antoine Ganyé Cotonou, for his words of welcome and to greet the Bishops of Benin, as well as the Cardinals and Bishops from various African countries and from other continents. To all of you, dear brothers and sisters, who have come to this Mass celebrated by the Successor of Peter, I offer my warm greetings. I am thinking certainly of the faithful of Benin, but also of those from other French-speaking countries, such as Togo, Burkina Faso, Niger and others. Our Eucharistic celebration on the Solemnity of Christ the King is an occasion to give thank to God for the one hundred and fifty years that have passed since the beginnings of the evangelization of Benin; it is also an occasion to express our gratitude to him for the [Second Special Assembly of the Synod of African Bishops](#) which was held in Rome a few months ago.

The Gospel which we have just heard tells us that Jesus, the Son of Man, the ultimate judge of our lives, wished to appear as one who hungers and thirsts, as a stranger, as one of those who are naked, sick or imprisoned, ultimately, of those who suffer or are outcast; how we treat them will be taken as the way we treat Jesus himself. We do not see here a simple literary device, or a simple metaphor. Jesus's entire existence is an example of it. He, the Son of God, became man, he shared our existence, even down to the smallest details, he became the servant of the least of his brothers and sisters. He who had nowhere to lay his head, was condemned to death on a cross. This is the King we celebrate!

Without a doubt this can appear a little disconcerting to us. Today, like two thousand years ago, accustomed to seeing the signs of royalty in success, power, money and ability, we find it hard to accept such a king, a king who makes himself the servant of the little ones, of the most humble, a king whose throne is a cross. And yet, the Scriptures tell us, in this is the glory of Christ revealed; it is in the humility of his earthly existence that he finds his power to judge the world. For him, to reign is to serve! And what he asks of us is to follow him along the way, to serve, to be attentive to the cry of the poor, the weak, the outcast. The baptized know that the decision to follow Christ can entail great sacrifices, at times even the sacrifice of one's life. However, as Saint Paul reminds us, Christ has overcome death and he brings us with him in his resurrection. He introduces us to a new world, a world of freedom and joy. Today, so much still binds us to the world of the past, so many fears hold us prisoners and prevent us from living in freedom and happiness. Let us allow Christ to free us from the world of the past! Our faith in him, which frees us from all our fears and miseries, gives us access to a new world, a world where justice and truth are not a byword, a world of interior freedom and of peace with ourselves, with our neighbours and with God. This is the gift God gave us at our baptism!

"Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (*Mt 25:34*). Let us receive this word of blessing which the Son of Man will, on the Day of Judgement, address to those who have recognized his presence in the lowliest of their brethren, with a heart free and full of the love of the Lord! Brothers and sisters, the words of the Gospel are truly words of hope, because the King of the universe has drawn near to us, the servant of the least and lowliest. Here I would like to greet with affection all those persons who are suffering, those who are sick, those affected by AIDS or by other illnesses, to all those forgotten by society. Have courage! The Pope is close to you in his thoughts and prayers. Have courage! Jesus wanted to identify himself with the poor, with the sick; he wanted to share your suffering and to see you as his brothers and sisters, to free you from every affliction, from all suffering. Every sick person, every poor person deserves our respect and our love because, through them, God shows us the way to heaven.

This morning, I invite you once again to rejoice with me. One hundred and fifty years ago the cross of Christ was raised in your country, and the Gospel was proclaimed for the first time. Today, we give thanks to God for the work accomplished by the missionaries, by the "apostolic workers" who

first came from among you or from distant lands, bishops, priests, men and women religious, catechists, all those who, both yesterday and today, enabled the growth of the faith in Jesus Christ on the African continent. I honour here the memory of the venerable Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, an example of faith and of wisdom for Benin and for the entire African continent.

Dear brothers and sisters, everyone who has received this marvellous gift of faith, this gift of an encounter with the risen Lord, feels in turn the need to proclaim it to others. The Church exists to proclaim this Good News! And this duty is always urgent! After 150 years, many are those who have not heard the message of salvation in Christ! Many, too, are those who are hesitant to open their hearts to the word of God! Many are those whose faith is weak, whose way of thinking, habits and lifestyle do not know the reality of the Gospel, and who think that seeking selfish satisfaction, easy gain or power is the ultimate goal of human life. With enthusiasm, be ardent witnesses of the faith which you have received! Make the loving face of the Saviour shine in every place, in particular before the young, who search for reasons to live and hope in a difficult world!

The Church in Benin has received much from her missionaries: she must in turn carry this message of hope to people who do not know or who no longer know the Lord Jesus. Dear brothers and sisters, I ask you to be concerned for evangelization in your country, and among the peoples of your continent and the whole world. The recent Synod of Bishops for Africa stated this in no uncertain terms: the man of hope, the Christian, cannot be uninterested in his brothers and sisters. This would be completely opposed to the example of Jesus. The Christian is a tireless builder of communion, peace and solidarity - gifts which Jesus himself has given us. By being faithful to him, we will cooperate in the realization of God's plan of salvation for humanity.

Dear brothers and sisters, I urge you, therefore, to strengthen your faith in Jesus Christ, to be authentically converted to him. He alone gives us the true life and can liberate us from all our fears and sluggishness, from all our anguish. Rediscover the roots of your existence in the baptism which you received and which makes you children of God! May Jesus Christ give you strength to live as Christians and to find ways to transmit generously to new generations what you have received from your fathers in faith! AKLUNO NI KON FENU TON LE DO MI JI [*Fon: May the Lord fill you with his graces!*]

On this feast day, we rejoice together in the reign of Christ the King over the whole world. He is the one who removes all that hinders reconciliation, justice and peace. We are reminded that true royalty does not consist in a show of power, but in the humility of service; not in the oppression of the weak, but in the ability to protect them and to lead them to life in abundance (cf. *Jn 10:10*). Christ reigns from the Cross and, with his arms open wide, he embraces all the peoples of the world and draws them into unity. Through the Cross, he breaks down the walls of division, he reconciles us with each other and with the Father. We pray today for the people of Africa, that all may be able to live in justice, peace and the joy of the Kingdom of God (cf. *Rom 14:17*). With these sentiments I affectionately greet all the English-speaking faithful who have come from

Ghana and Nigeria and neighbouring countries. May God bless all of you!

Queridos irmãos e irmãs da África lusófona que me ouvis, a todos dirijo a minha saudação e convido a renovar a vossa decisão de pertencer a Cristo e de servir o seu Reino de reconciliação, de justiça e de paz. O seu Reino pode ser posto em perigo no nosso coração. Aqui Deus cruza-se com a nossa liberdade. Nós – e só nós – podemos impedi-Lo de reinar sobre nós mesmos e, em consequência, tornar difícil a sua realeza sobre a família, a sociedade e a história. Por causa de Cristo, tantos homens e mulheres se opuseram, vitoriosamente, às tentações do mundo para viver fielmente a sua fé, às vezes mesmo até ao martírio. A seu exemplo, amados pastores e fiéis, sede sal e luz de Cristo na terra africana! Amen.

[Dear brothers and sisters of the Portuguese-speaking nations of Africa who are listening to me! I greet all of you and I invite you to renew your decision to belong to Christ and to serve his Kingdom of reconciliation, justice and peace. His Kingdom can be threatened in our hearts. There God comes face to face with our freedom. We – and we alone – can prevent him from reigning over us and consequently obstructing his Lordship over our families, society and history. Because of Christ, many men and women successfully opposed the temptations of the world in order to live their faith truly, even to martyrdom. Dear pastors and faithful, following their example, be the salt and light of Christ, in the land of Africa! Amen.]

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