



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF MALAWI
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Friday, 29 September 2006*

Dear Brother Bishops,

I am pleased to welcome you here today, the Bishops of Malawi, on your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*, and I thank you for the gracious words addressed to me on your behalf by Archbishop Tarcisius Ziyaye, President of your Episcopal Conference. Your visit expresses the deep bonds of communion and affection that link your local Churches in East Africa with the See of Rome. Simon Peter was called to strengthen his brethren (cf. *Lk 22:32*) and to feed the Lord's sheep (cf. *Jn 21:17*), and you too have been placed as leaders and shepherds of your people, to teach, sanctify and govern them in the Lord's name. As you venerate the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, I pray that, through their intercession, you will be strengthened and nourished for your ministry among the people of Malawi, and will continue to proclaim fearlessly the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who came "that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (*Jn 10:10*).

The exuberance with which the peoples of Africa give praise to God in their liturgical worship is known all over the world, and the Church in Malawi is no exception. Their joyful celebration expresses the great vitality of your Christian communities, and it reflects the predominance of young people in your population. Continue to guide them with true fatherly care towards a deeper knowledge of their Crucified and Risen Lord, always providing them with sound catechesis in the faith. To this end, it is important that teachers and catechists receive good preparation for their noble task since, as you know, they play a vital part in helping the Bishop to carry out his responsibility as the one who teaches with Christ's authority. Hence they should be well formed in the faith and able to communicate both the joy and the challenge of following Christ. I am hopeful that the newly-opened Catholic University of Malawi will be able to make a significant contribution

in this area, and I encourage you to do all you can to provide it with sufficient resources and to maintain high-quality teaching in fidelity to the Church's Magisterium.

In a world dominated by secular and materialist values, it can be hard to maintain the counter-cultural manner of life that is so necessary in the priesthood and the religious life. The clergy in your country, like those to whom they minister, sometimes find themselves in situations of want, lacking the means necessary for their "decent support ... and the exercise of works of the apostolate and of charity" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 17). I am sure that you will do your utmost to provide for the legitimate needs of your co-workers, while at the same time warning them against excessive concern with material possessions. Help your clergy not to fall into the trap of seeing the priesthood as a means of social advancement by reminding them that "the only legitimate ascent towards the shepherd's ministry is the Cross" (*Ordination Homily*, 7 May 2006). The formation staff in the seminaries need to teach the students that a priest is called to live for others and not for himself, in imitation of Christ, who came "not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Mk* 10:45). Above all, the Bishop's example of a truly Christ-centred ministry can serve as an inspiration to his priests. My dear Brother Bishops, live as authentic followers of Christ, and let your discipleship be the basis of the authority that you exercise. I pray that in this way you will be able to strengthen the bonds of fraternal charity within the *presbyterium* of each of your local Churches.

I am pleased to note that you continue to exercise your teaching office by commenting on matters of social concern. In fact, your Pentecost Pastoral Letter *Renewing Our Lives and Society with the Power of the Holy Spirit*, which you published earlier this year, drew attention to some of the social and moral evils afflicting the nation. Food security is threatened not only by drought but also by inefficient and unjust management of agriculture; the spread of AIDS is increased by failure to remain faithful to one partner in marriage or to practise abstinence; the rights of women, children and the unborn are cynically violated by human trafficking, by domestic violence and by those who advocate abortion. Never cease to proclaim the truth, and insist on it, "in season and out of season" (*2 Tim* 4:2) because "the truth will set you free" (*Jn* 8:32). The Good Shepherd, who never leaves his flock untended, watches over his sheep and protects them always. Following his example, continue to guide your people away from the dangers that threaten them, and lead them into safe pastures. I pray that they will pay heed to your counsel, so that the face of the earth may be renewed (cf. *Ps.* 104:30) and the Spirit of God may truly maintain the unity of your nation in the bond of peace (cf. *Eph* 4:3).

As I conclude my remarks to you today, I want to remind you of the image of the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room with Mary, Mother of the Lord, praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the same scene that you describe so beautifully in the closing paragraph of your recent Pastoral Letter. In that document, you encouraged your people to come together to pray, in their families and in small Christian Communities. I know that you too will continue to pray together, and in communion with the clergy and lay faithful, for the gifts of the Spirit on the Church in your

country. The Spirit is the energy “which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 19). I too pray that the Spirit may be poured out abundantly upon all of you, and as I entrust you and your clergy, religious and lay faithful to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and strength in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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