



The Holy See

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

Consistory Hall

Monday, 19 November 2007

My dear Brother Bishops,

It is with great joy that I welcome you, the Bishops of Kenya, on your quinquennial visit to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, a visit which serves to strengthen the bonds of fraternal love and communion between us. I thank Archbishop Njue for his kind words addressed to me on your behalf. Your solicitude for one another and for the people entrusted to your care, your love of the Lord and your devotion to the Successor of Peter are for me a source of profound joy and thanksgiving.

Every Bishop has a particular responsibility to build up the unity of his flock, mindful of our Lord's prayer "that they may be one, even as you, Father, are in me and I in you" (*Jn 17:21*). United in one faith, sharing one Baptism and believing in the one Lord, (cf. *Eph 4:5*), the Church is one throughout the world, yet at the same time she is marked by a rich diversity of traditions and cultural expressions. In Africa, the colour and vibrancy with which the faithful manifest their religious sentiments has added a new dimension to the rich tapestry of Christian culture worldwide, while at the same time your people's strong attachment to the traditional values associated with family life can help to express the shared faith which is at the heart of the mystery of the Church's unity (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 63). Christ himself is the source and guarantee of our unity since he has overcome all forms of division through his death on the Cross and has reconciled us to God in the one body (cf. *Eph 2:14*). I thank you, dear Brothers, for preaching the love of Christ and exhorting your people to tolerance, respect and love of their brothers and sisters and of all persons. In this way you exercise the prophetic ministry that the Lord has entrusted to the Church, and in particular to the Successors of the Apostles (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 26).

Indeed it is the Bishops who, as ministers and signs of communion in Christ, are pre-eminently

called to make manifest the unity of his Church. The collegial nature of the episcopal ministry traces its origins to the Twelve Apostles, called together by Christ and given the task of proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples of all nations. Their pastoral mission is continued by the members of the episcopal College in such a way that “whoever listens to them is listening to Christ” (*Lumen Gentium*, 20). I urge you to continue your fraternal cooperation with one another in the spirit of the community of Christ’s disciples, united in your love for him and in the Gospel that you proclaim. While each of you has an individual contribution to make to the common collegial voice of the Church in your country, it is important to ensure that this variety of perspectives always serves to enrich the unity of the Body of Christ, just as the unity of the Twelve was deepened and strengthened by the different gifts of the Apostles themselves. Your dedication to working together on issues of ecclesial and social concern will bring great fruit for the life of the Church in Kenya and for the effectiveness of your episcopal ministry.

Within each diocese, the vibrancy and harmony of the presbyterate offers a clear sign of the vitality of the local Church. Structures of consultation and participation are necessary, but can be ineffective if the proper spirit is missing. As Bishops, we must constantly strive to build up the sense of community among our priests, united in the love of Christ and in their sacramental ministry. Life can be difficult for priests today. They can feel isolated or alone and overwhelmed by their pastoral responsibilities. We must be close to them and encourage them, in the first place, to remain firmly rooted in prayer, because only those who are themselves nourished are able to nourish others in turn. Let them drink deeply from the wells of Sacred Scripture and from the daily and reverent celebration of the most holy Eucharist. Let them give themselves generously to praying the Liturgy of the Hours, a prayer that is made “in communion with all who pray throughout history, a prayer in communion with Jesus Christ” (*Address to the priests and permanent deacons of Bavaria*, 14 September 2006). By praying in this way they include and represent others who may lack the time or energy or capacity to pray, and thus the power of prayer, the presence of Jesus Christ, renews their priesthood and flows out into the world (cf. *ibid.*). Help your priests in this way to grow in solidarity with one another, with their people, and with you, as your consecrated co-workers. Respectful dialogue and closeness between Bishop and priests not only builds up the local Church but also edifies the entire community. Indeed, visible unity among the spiritual leaders can be a powerful antidote against division within the wider family of God’s people.

A key focus of unity in a community is the institution of marriage and family life, which the people of Africa hold in particular esteem. The devoted love of Christian married couples is a blessing for your country, expressing sacramentally the indissoluble covenant between Christ and his Church. This precious treasure must be guarded at all costs. All too often, the ills besetting some parts of African society, such as promiscuity, polygamy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, can be directly related to disordered notions of marriage and family life. For this reason it is important to assist parents in teaching their children how to live out a Christian vision of marriage, conceived as an indissoluble union between one man and one woman, essentially equal in their

humanity (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 82) and open to the generation of new life.

While this understanding of Christian family life finds a deep resonance in Africa, it is a matter of great concern that the globalized secular culture is exerting an increasing influence on local communities as a result of campaigns by agencies promoting abortion. This direct destruction of an innocent human life can never be justified, however difficult the circumstances that may lead some to consider taking such a grave step. When you preach the Gospel of Life, remind your people that the right to life of every innocent human being, born or unborn, is absolute and applies equally to all people with no exception whatsoever. This equality “is the basis of all authentic social relationships which, to be truly such, can only be founded on truth and justice” (*Evangelium Vitae*, 57). The Catholic community must offer support to those women who may find it difficult to accept a child, above all when they are isolated from their family and friends. Likewise, the community should be open to welcome back all who repent of having participated in the grave sin of abortion, and should guide them with pastoral charity to accept the grace of forgiveness, the need for penance, and the joy of entering once more into the new life of Christ.

The Church in Kenya is well known for the fine contribution made by its educational institutions in forming generations of young people in sound ethical principles and in opening their minds to engage in peaceful and respectful dialogue with members of other social or religious groups. At a time when a secularist and relativist mentality is increasingly asserting itself through global means of social communication, it is all the more essential that you continue to promote the quality and the Catholic identity of your schools, universities and seminaries. Take the steps necessary in order to affirm and clarify their proper institutional status. Society greatly benefits from educated Catholics who know and practise the Church’s social doctrine. Today there is a particular need for highly trained professionals and persons of integrity in the area of medicine, where advances in technology continue to raise serious moral questions. Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue likewise present major challenges that can only be addressed adequately on the basis of sound catechesis in the principles of Catholic doctrine, as expounded in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. I know that you will continue to be vigilant over the quality and content of teaching that is offered to young people through the Church’s educational institutions, so that the light of Christ’s truth may shine ever more brightly over the land and the people of Kenya.

My dear Brother Bishops, as you guide your people into the unity for which Christ prayed, do so with ardent charity and firm authority, unfailing in patience and in teaching (cf. *2 Tim* 4:2). Please convey my affectionate greetings and my prayerful encouragement to your beloved people, and to all those who are active in the service of the Church, through prayer or in parishes and mission stations, in education, humanitarian activity and health care. To each of you and to those entrusted to your pastoral care, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

