



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF GHANA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 23 September 2014

Dear Brother Bishops,

I offer you a fraternal welcome on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*. May your pilgrimage to the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul confirm you in the faith and in your commitment to your ministry, and build up the bonds of communion between the Church in Ghana and the See of Peter. I thank Bishop Osei-Bonsu for expressing the love and devotion of your priests, religious and laity, and indeed of the entire Ghanaian people. I would ask you kindly to assure them of a continual remembrance in my prayers.

Ghana is blessed with a population that naturally and easily expresses its belief in God and which seeks to honour him in the variety of religious traditions present in your country. As pastors of the Church established by the Lord to be the light to the nations, you offer to your country Jesus Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (cf. *Jn* 14:6). You do so by bearing witness to the transforming power of his grace by preaching the Good News, by celebrating the sacraments, and by shepherding God's people with humility and dedication. In this way, the Catholic community in Ghana, faithful to the Lord's command and under your guidance, enriches society by proclaiming the dignity of each human person and by promoting their full human development. For it is only in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, that the fullness of our dignity and destiny can be seen and thus appropriated.

The 2009 Synod on Africa noted as a principal concern the need for the Church's pastors to "inspire in Christ's disciples in Africa the will to become effectively committed to living out the Gospel in their daily lives... (and to obey Christ who) calls constantly for *metanoia*, conversion" (*Africae Munus*, 32). This requires in the first place, brothers, our own daily conversion, so that all

of our thoughts, words and actions may be inspired and directed by the word of God. We must be men who are thoroughly transformed by the grace of being ever more truly sons of the Father, brothers of the Son, and fathers of the community guided by the Holy Spirit. Only then can we offer credible witness to “the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe” (cf. *Eph* 1:19), living in holiness, unity and peace. From the grace of Christ experienced in our own converted hearts comes the spiritual strength which helps us promote virtue and holiness in our priests, men and women religious, and laity.

The work of conversion and evangelization is not easy, but it bears precious fruit for the Church and the world. Out of the spiritual vitality of all the faithful come the Church’s numerous charitable, medical and educational endeavours, and her works of justice and equality. The varied services, carried out in God’s name, especially for the poor and weak, are the responsibility of the entire local Church, under the prayerful oversight of the bishop. I think in a particular way about the importance of the Church’s health care apostolate, not only in Ghana, but throughout western Africa, which is suffering at this time from the outbreak of Ebola. I pray for the repose of the souls of all who have died in this epidemic, among whom are priests, men and women religious and healthcare workers who contracted this terrible disease while caring for those suffering. May God strengthen all healthcare workers there and bring an end to this tragedy!

I would ask you in a special way to be close to your priests, supporting them as fathers, easing their burdens and leading them with tenderness. Please convey my heartfelt gratitude to them and to all religious men and women in Ghana, upon whom so much of the necessary work of evangelization depends, for their daily sacrifices. I ask the Lord to bless them continually with dedication, zeal and fidelity.

Dear brothers, the Church in Ghana is justly respected for the contribution she makes to the integral development of individuals and the entire nation. At the same time, she often finds herself lacking in the material resources necessary to fulfil her mission in the world. In this regard, I would offer you two thoughts. First, it is imperative that whatever temporal means the Church has at her disposal continue to be administered with honesty and responsibility, in order to provide good witness, especially where corruption has hindered the just advancement of society. The Lord will surely not fail to bless and multiply the works of those who are faithful to him. Second, material poverty can be an occasion to draw greater attention to the spiritual needs of the human person (cf. *Mt* 5:3), thus leading to a deeper reliance on the Lord, from whom all good things come. While your communities rightly make many efforts to alleviate extremes of poverty, so too the Church is called, in imitation of Christ, to work with humility and honesty, using the goods at her disposal to open minds and hearts to the riches of mercy and grace flowing from the heart of Christ.

I pray as well for your lay catechists, without whom the works of evangelization would be much diminished in Ghana. I encourage you to improve and expand the education and preparation provided for them, so that their labours may lead to concrete and long-lasting results. Almost three

years have passed since Pope Benedict XVI urged the bishops and priests of the entire African continent “to be concerned for the human, intellectual, doctrinal, moral, spiritual and pastoral formation of catechists” (cf. *Africae Munus*, 126). It is timely, then, to ask whether and to what degree we have responded to this summons to encourage and form the next generation of men and women who will pass on the faith and build upon the legacy of our forebears. Concern for catechists also requires, as a matter of natural justice, attention to the material assistance and recompense required in order for them to carry out their tasks.

Finally, dear brothers, like Saint Paul, I wish you to go to the cities and the countryside, to the markets and the streets, witnessing to Christ and showing his love and mercy to all. Be close to other Christian leaders and the heads of other religious communities. Ecumenical and interreligious cooperation, when carried out with respect and an open heart, contributes to the social harmony of your country, and enables growth in an understanding of the dignity of each person and a greater experience of our common humanity. Thankfully, Ghana has been spared much of the tribal, ethnic and religious divisions that have afflicted too many other parts of Africa, a continent whose promise, in part due to these divisions, has yet to be fulfilled. I pray that you will be ever greater promoters of unity and leaders in the service of dialogue! May you be firm in upholding the Church’s teaching and discipline, and unyielding in your charity. And may your generosity in offering Christ be matched only by your humble and patient openness to others.

With these thoughts, dear brother Bishops, I commend all of you to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Word of God and Our Lady of Africa, and with great affection I impart my Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to all the beloved priests, religious and lay faithful of your country.