



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE REGIONAL EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF NORTH AFRICA
(C.E.R.N.A)
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday, 2 March 2015

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

It is with joy that I welcome you in these days of your *ad limina* visit. I hope that your pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Apostles reaffirms your faith and strengthens your hope in order to continue the ministry entrusted to you in each of your countries. I thank Archbishop Vincent Landel of Rabat, President of your Conference, who expressed on behalf of all of you, sentiments of communion with the Successor of Peter. Through you, I join the faithful of your dioceses of North Africa. Bring them the Pope's affection and the assurance that he remains close to them and encourages them in the generous witness they render to the Gospel of the peace and love of Jesus. My cordial greeting also goes to all inhabitants of your countries, especially to those who are suffering.

For several years, your region has been undergoing significant developments, which have provided hope in realizing certain aspirations for greater liberty and dignity and the for fostering of greater freedom of conscience. But some of these developments have led to outbursts of violence. I would like to particularly commend the courage, devotion and perseverance of the Bishops in Libya, as well as the priests, consecrated and laity who remain in the country despite the many dangers. They are the authentic witnesses of the Gospel. I deeply thank them, and I encourage you all to continue in your efforts to contribute to peace and reconciliation throughout your region.

Your Episcopal Conference, which regularly convenes the pastors of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, is a forum of important exchange and dialogue, but it must also be an instrument for

communion, allowing a deepening of brotherly and trusting relations among you. Your pilgrimage to Rome is a propitious occasion to renew your shared commitment to serving the mission of the Church in each of your countries. You realize this mission with your priests, your direct collaborators. Originating from numerous countries, they sometimes have difficulty adapting to situations which are so new for them. It is therefore particularly necessary that you be close to each one of them and attentive to their continuing formation so that they can live out their ministry fully and peacefully. To each of them I convey my warmest greetings and I assure my prayers to all.

Men and women religious also play a special role in the life and mission of your Churches. I am grateful to them for their witness of fraternal life and their most generous commitment to serving their brothers and sisters. In this *Year of Consecrated Life*, I invite them to renew their awareness of the importance of contemplation in their lives and thereby let the beauty and the holiness of their vocation shine.

At the heart of your mission and at the source of your hope are first and foremost the personal encounter with Jesus Christ and the certainty that He is at work in the world where you have been sent in his name. The evangelical vitality of your dioceses depends therefore on the quality of the spiritual and sacramental life in each one. The history of your region has been marked by many holy figures, from Cyprian and Augustine, the spiritual heritage of the whole Church, to Blessed Charles de Foucauld, the centenary of whose death we will celebrate next year; and closer to us, by those men and women religious who gave everything to God and to their brothers and sisters with the sacrifice of their lives. It is up to you to develop this spiritual heritage, first of all among your faithful, but also by opening it to all. I am also delighted to know that in recent years, it has been possible to restore several Christian shrines in Algeria. By welcoming everyone as they are, with benevolence and without proselytism, your communities manifest the desire to be a Church with open doors, one which ever “goes forth” (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* nn. 46-47).

In the midst of the difficult situations at times facing your region, your ministry as shepherds experiences a number of joys. Like this, the welcoming of new disciples who join you, having discovered God’s love manifested in Jesus, is a beautiful sign given by the Lord. By sharing with their compatriots the concern for building a more fraternal and open society, they show they are all children of the same Father. I greet them in a special way and I assure them of my affection, with the wish that they may take up their place in the lives of your dioceses.

Universality is also a characteristic of your Churches, whose faithful come from many nations to shape very lively communities. I invite them to show the joy of the Gospel on their faces, the joy of meeting Christ who gives them life. This is also an opportunity for you to marvel at the work of God, which is disseminated among all peoples and in all cultures. I would like to offer my encouragement to the many young students from Sub-Saharan Africa, who form an important part of your communities. By remaining firm in the faith, they will be able to establish bonds of

friendship, trust and respect with everyone, and thereby contribute to the building of a more fraternal world.

Interreligious dialogue is an important part of the life of your Churches. Here, too, the creativity of charity is able to find countless ways of bringing the newness of the Gospel into cultures and into the most diverse corners of society (cf. *Apostolic Letter to all consecrated people on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, 21 November 2014). You know how much mutual ignorance can be a source of so many misunderstandings and at times even clashes. Yet, as Benedict XVI wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, “If all of us who believe in God desire to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, we must work together to banish every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism” (n. 94). The most effective antidote to every form of violence is education in the discovery and acceptance of difference as a treasure and a fertile ground. Moreover, it is essential that the priests, religious and laity of your dioceses be trained in this field. And in that regard, I am pleased to note that the *Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies* (PISAI), which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, was born in your region, in Tunisia. Support and use this much-needed institution in order to be immersed in the language and culture which will allow a dialogue to expand in truth and in love between Christians and Muslims. Dialogue is something you even experience day by day with Christians of different confessions. May the Ecumenical Institute, *Al Mowafaqa*, founded in Morocco to promote ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in its own context, also contribute to greater mutual understanding!

As a Church of encounter and dialogue, you also want to be at the service of all without distinction. With often humble means, you demonstrate the charity of Christ and Church among the poor, the sick, the elderly, women in need and prisoners. I sincerely thank you for the part you play in coming to the aid of the countless immigrants originating from Africa who seek a place of passage or of welcome in your countries. By recognizing their human dignity and striving to reawaken consciences to so much human tragedy, you reveal the love that God bears for every one of them.

Dear Brother in the Episcopate, I would lastly like to assure you of the entire Church’s support in your mission. You are “at the peripheries”, with the particular service of manifesting Christ’s presence to his Church in this region. Your testimony of life in simplicity and poverty is a prominent sign for the whole Church. Be assured that the Successor of Peter accompanies you on your arduous journey and encourages you to always be men of hope.

I entrust you to the protection of Our Lady of Africa, who watches over the whole continent, and the intercession of St Augustine, Blessed Charles de Foucauld and to all the saints of Africa. With all my heart I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the faithful in your dioceses.

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