



The Holy See

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

Monday, 11 May 2015

[Multimedia]

Dear Brother Bishops,

I welcome you on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit. I greet Bishop Benoît Alowonou, President of your Conference, whom I thank for the words he addressed to me on your behalf. Through you, I also greet the priests, men and women religious, and all the faithful of your dioceses, as well as all the people of Togo.

On the occasion of this spiritual renewal at the tombs of the Apostles, I hope that you will find all the graces necessary to fulfil your pastoral ministry. Our meeting today manifests my closeness and the concerns I have for your dioceses, assuring you of the fraternal support of the universal Church, in the unity of faith and love. However, this meeting also manifests the interests that each one of you has in the other particular Churches, those of your Episcopal Conference of course, which experience comparable situations and face common challenges, but also those of the whole world, and particularly the Church of Rome which presides over the communion. And, in this regard, I am grateful that you pray for me and for my ministry as Successor of Peter.

I know that you practice this solicitude by asking your dioceses to participate in the preparatory reflections for the Synod of Bishops on the Family, which will meet next October in Rome. It is important that the positive aspects of the family in Africa are expressed and understood. In particular, the African family is receptive to life, it respects and takes into account the elderly. Therefore, this heritage must be preserved and serve as an example and as encouragement for others. The Sacrament of Marriage is a pastoral reality that is well received in your country, even if obstacles of a cultural and legal order still subsist, impeding certain spouses from fulfilling their desire to found their married life on faith in Christ. I encourage you to persevere in your efforts to support families in their difficulties, especially through education and social works, and to prepare

couples for the demanding but magnificent commitments of Christian marriage. Togo is not exempt from today's widespread ideological and media attacks, which propose models of union and families incompatible with the Christian faith. I am aware of your vigilance in the matter, as well as the efforts you make, especially in the field of mass media.

However, one of the keys that must enable you to face the challenges that present themselves to your communities and your societies is certainly educating the youth. The *Church — Family of God* in Togo has chosen to be close to children and young people, who benefit from a good human and religious formation through numerous projects and initiatives. I am well aware of the considerable efforts, both human and material, which are represented at all levels. I warmly thank all those who work in this educational endeavour, which is so important for the future — I am thinking in particular of the catechists whose involvement is considerable. May they always find in you the necessary encouragement and incentive. It is of the utmost importance that young people learn to live their faith in a coherent way, in order to be able to witness with authenticity, and contribute to a more just and supportive society.

Men and women religious have an irreplaceable role in proclaiming and transmitting the faith in Togo. "They are a necessary and precious aid to the Church's pastoral activity but also a manifestation of the deepest nature of our Christian vocation" (*Africae Munus*, n. 118). The Institutes, both the native as well as missionary, are numerous; their apostolate of closeness to the populations is appreciated by all and is exercised in harmony among you. In this *Year of Consecrated Life*, I wish to thank them for their selfless and generous commitment at the service of Christ and of the Church, as well as of the whole population that benefits from their dedication. I hope that consecrated people will be able to benefit from this Year of renewal and reflection, to be ever more united to the Risen Christ and to serve Him with perseverance and courage. I invite you to manifest always your paternal solicitude to the different Institutes. Their numbers are growing rapidly, and it is appropriate that their development be well supported and that they take care of the formation of young people, so as to avoid amalgamations at the level of faith and of inculturation.

I also wish to express my warmest gratitude and encouragement to all your diocesan priests. Their task is immense and they respond with enthusiastic and generous engagement. I invite you to be close to them always, to create a veritable family spirit in the *presbyterium* that fosters priestly solidarity and fraternity, at the service of a common mission. Vocations are numerous in Togo, and the seminarians receive a good formation in your seminaries. It is necessary that future priests "be rooted in the evangelical values to strengthen their engagement, in fidelity and loyalty to Christ" (*Africae Munus*, n. 121). This should help them, in turn, to fight against ambition, careerism, jealousy, worldliness, the seduction of money and the goods of this world, in a sincere celibacy lived joyfully. I recommend that you be particularly attentive to the spiritual and pastoral support of young priests, and that you listen carefully to their experiences.

Dear Brothers, Togo's society has made notable progress in political and social fields in recent years. The Catholic Church has largely contributed to this, not only through works of evangelization and human promotion, but also through her involvement in justice and reconciliation. I thank you very warmly for the efforts you have deployed in this area, in particular for the works of the *National Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission*. I encourage you to continue, so that the Church may take her rightful place in the process of the institutional reforms underway. In fact, "the Church in Africa must help to build up society in cooperation with government authorities and public and private institutions that are engaged in building up the common good" (*Africae Munus*, n. 81). However, it is necessary to take care not to enter directly into political debates and quarrels, while having at heart the need to form, encourage and support the laity — whose role it is — capable of committing at the highest level to the service of the Nation and taking on responsibilities.

I am pleased that this service rendered to Togo's society is also the occasion for common actions with other Christian communities, as witnessed by certain joint appeals that you have launched to the Nation. Likewise, in the matter of interreligious dialogue, it is appropriate to foster always, and perhaps develop even more, a culture of dialogue and encounter, while you live in peaceful coexistence, especially with Islam, a coexistence that is appropriate to preserve, keeping in mind the present context in West Africa. "Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 250). It is particularly necessary that young priests receive a solid formation in this regard.

Dear Brothers, may the efforts of evangelization that you implement in your pastoral ministry bear numerous fruits. I invite you to render thanks and to renew the gift of yourselves to Christ and to the people whose charge you have. I entrust you all, as well as your dioceses, to the intercession of the Patron Saints of the Church in Togo, *John Paul II* and *John XXIII*, and to the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary. I wholeheartedly impart my Apostolic Blessing.