



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO AFRICA

### *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Nairobi (Kenya), 7 May 1980*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

*Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,*

1. We gather here today to give praise and glory to our heavenly Father. We come together in this place, men and women of many different backgrounds, and yet all united in him "who holds all things in unity", all united at the table of God's word and at the altar of Sacrifice.

My heart is filled with gratitude to God for this day and for this opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist with you, to sing praise to the Lord for having reconciled everything to himself, "making peace by his death on the cross".

On the day Jesus was crucified, he told Pilate: "I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth". Jesus came not to do his own will but the will of his heavenly Father. By his words, by his deeds, by his very existence he bore witness to the truth. In Jesus the tyranny of deceit and falsehood, the tyranny of lies and error, the tyranny of sin was defeated. For Christ is the living Word of divine truth who promised: "If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free".

2. The Church has received this same mission from Christ: to cultivate a deep love and veneration for the truth and to combine with faith the insights of learning and human wisdom - in all things to bear witness to the truth. In every age and in every land the Church proceeds in this mission, confident that if God is the supreme source of all truth, there can be no opposition between natural wisdom and the truths of faith.

All of the faithful, dear brothers and sisters, have a role to play in the Church's mission on behalf of truth. That is why I stated in my Encyclical that the "Church's responsibility for divine truth must be increasingly shared in various ways by all, including the specialists in various disciplines, those who represent the natural sciences and letters, doctors, jurists, artists and technicians, teachers at various levels and with different specializations. As members of the; People of God, they all have their own part to play in Christ's prophetic mission and service of divine truth" . Within the communion of the faithful, and especially within the local Christian community, careful attention should be given to this responsibility to bear witness to the truth. In his Message to Africa my predecessor Paul VI addressed a special word to the intellectuals of this continent, precisely because he was convinced of the importance of their mission at the service of truth. And his words still ring out today: "Africa needs you, your study, your research, your art and your teaching.... You are the prism through which the new ideas and cultural changes can be interpreted and explained to all. Be sincere, faithful to truth and loyal" .

3. We must begin our witness to truth by cultivating a hunger for the word of God, a desire to receive and take to heart the life-giving message of the Gospel in all its fullness. When you listen attentively to the voice of the Saviour and then put in into practice, you are indeed sharing in the Church's mission at the service of truth. You are bearing witness to the world that you firmly believe the promise God made through Isaiah: "As the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do" . You can be messengers of the truth only if you are first of all true listeners to God's word.

4. When Pilate asked Jesus whether he was a king, his response was clear and unambiguous: "Mine is not a kingdom of this world" . Christ came to bring life and salvation to every human being: his mission was not in the social, economic or political order. Likewise Christ did not give the Church a mission which is social, economic or political; but rather a religious one . Yet it would be a mistake to think that the individual Christian should not be involved in these areas of life in society. On this point, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council were very clear: "One of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their daily lives... The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties towards his neighbour, neglects God himself, and endangers his eternal salvation" .

Christians therefore, and especially you who are laity, are called by God to be involved in the world in order to transform it according to the Gospel. In carrying out this task, your own personal commitment to truth and honesty plays an important role, because a sense of responsibility for the truth is one of the fundamental points of encounter between the Church and society, between the Church and each man and woman . The Christian faith does not provide you with ready made solutions to the complex problems affecting contemporary society. But it does give you deep insights into the nature of man and his needs, calling you to speak the truth in love, to take up your

responsibilities as good citizens and to work with your neighbours to build a society where true human values are nourished and deepened by a shared Christian vision of life.

5. One of these areas which holds a very important place in society and in the total vocation of every human person is culture. "It is a fact bearing on the very person of man that he can come to an authentic and full humanity only through culture, that is, through the cultivation of natural goods and values. Wherever human life therefore is involved, nature and culture are very intimately connected". A Christian will gladly collaborate in the promotion of true culture, for he knows that the Good News of Christ reinforces in man the spiritual values which are at the heart of the culture of every people and of every period of history. The Church, which feels at home in every culture, without exclusively making her own any culture, encourages her sons and daughters who are active in schools, universities and other institutions of learning to give their best to this activity. By harmonizing those values which are the unique heritage of each people or group with the content of the Gospel, the Christian will help his or her own people to achieve true freedom and the capacity to face the challenges of the times. Every Christian, united with Christ in the mystery of Baptism, will endeavour to conform to the Father's plan for his Son: "to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth".

6. Another important challenge for the Christian is that of the political life. In the State citizens have a right and duty to share in the political life. For a nation can ensure the common good of all, and the dreams and aspirations of its different members, only to the extent that all citizens in full liberty and with complete responsibility make their contributions willingly and selflessly for the good of all. The duties of the good Christian citizen involve more than shunning corruption, more than not exploiting others; these duties include positively contributing to the establishment of just laws and structures that foster human values. If the Christian finds injustice or anything that militates against love, peace and unity in society, he or she must ask: "Where have I fallen short? What have I done wrong? What did I fail to do that the truth of my vocation called me to do? Did I sin by omission?".

7. Here today in Kenya, as I have done many times before, I wish to address a particular message to married couples and to families. The family is the fundamental human community; it is the first and vital cell of any society. Thus the strength and vitality of any country will only be as great as the strength and vitality of the family within that country. No group has a greater impact on a country than the family. No group has a more influential role in the future of the world.

For this reason, Christian couples have an irreplaceable mission in today's world. The generous love and fidelity of husband and wife offer stability and hope to a world torn by hatred and division. By their lifelong perseverance in life-giving love they show the unbreakable and sacred character of the sacramental marriage bond. At the same time it is the Christian family that most simply and profoundly promotes the dignity and worth of human life from the moment of conception.

The Christian family is also the domestic sanctuary of the Church. In a Christian home various aspects of the whole Church are found, such as mutual love, attentiveness to God's word and

prayer together. The home is a place where the Gospel is received and lived, and the place from which the Gospel radiates. Thus the family offers daily witness, even without words, to the truth and grace of the word of God. For this reason, I stated in my Encyclical "Married people... must endeavour with all their strength to persevere in their matrimonial union, building up the family community through the witness of love and educating new generations of men and women capable in their turn of dedicating the whole of their lives to their vocation, that is to say, to the 'kingly service' of which Jesus Christ has offered us the example and the most beautiful model" .

8. Beloved brothers and sisters: all the families that make up the Church and all the individuals that make up the families - all of us together are called to walk with Christ, bearing witness to his truth in the circumstances of our daily lives. In doing this we can permeate society with the leaven of the Gospel, which alone can transform it into Christ's Kingdom - a Kingdom of truth and life, a Kingdom of holiness and grace, a Kingdom of justice, love and peace! Amen.

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