



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ZIMBABWE, BOTSWANA, LESOTHO, SWAZILAND AND MOZAMBIQUE

HOLY MASS AT "BORROWDALE PARK RACE COURSE"

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Harare (Zimbabwe)

Sunday, 11 September 1988

"The Lord is my shepherd" (Ps. 23 (22), 1).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. Today I stand in your midst as the Bishop of Rome and I make this joyful proclamation: "*The Lord is my shepherd*". I make it together with you, with the whole Church and with all the People of God who dwell in your country, Zimbabwe.

I come to you as a pastor. I come in the name of the Lord who is our Shepherd. I come in the name of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, the Eternal Pastor of our souls. And in his name I extend most cordial greetings to all those who constitute the Church in Zimbabwe: the bishops from your six dioceses, and in particular Archbishop Patrick Chakaipa of Harare. Together with them, I greet the priests, the men and women religious, and the seminarians of your Regional Seminary.

Christ is present in the daily life of this country through the dedicated members of your laity. I therefore wish to embrace you who bear witness to our Redeemer in the ordinary events of life: the families of Zimbabwe, fathers and mothers, small children and young people, the elders and the leaders of your local communities.

I greet those who build up the social and cultural life of Zimbabwe: all those who work on the land, in offices and in schools, in business and industry, in government and in social services. In a special way I embrace in the love of Jesus the lonely and the sick, as well as those who care for them.

At the same time, it is a joy to greet *the bishops who are members of IMBISA*, the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa. I am very grateful to the Lord for the grace of meeting with you last evening, and for the opportunity to concelebrate this Mass which brings your meeting to a close. I assure you of my fraternal concern for each of you as you seek to give a shepherd's care to the flock entrusted to you. Through you, dear brothers, I greet your local Churches. In particular, I am thinking of the Church in the countries which I have not been able to include in this pastoral journey: my brothers and sisters in Christ in Angola, Namibia, São Tomé e Príncipe and South Africa. Upon returning to your homes, please assure your people of my closeness to them in prayer and of my love for them in Christ Jesus.

Aos amados fiéis da Igreja em Angola, Moçambique e São Tomé e Príncipe, através dos seus Bispos, que participaram na Assembleia da IMBISA, envio as minhas cordiais saudações. Sinto-me muito unido convosco, irmãos e irmãs, na caridade divina, e desejo-vos felicidades, graça e paz, em Jesus Cristo, nosso Senhor e Salvador

2. At your invitation I have willingly come to Zimbabwe. I have come as the Successor of Peter and Bishop of Rome, who has inherited a particular *mission and responsibility, linked with the witness of the Apostles Peter and Paul*. For Peter and Paul strengthened the very foundation of the Church by their apostolic service, and above all by their death as martyrs, *giving their lives for Christ, for the truth which is Christ himself*. This truth they have faithfully handed on to all generations of the Church. This same truth I come to proclaim to you, as the Successor of Peter in the last part of the twentieth century.

Ever since the time of the Apostles, *the Church has built on this truth*, not only in Rome but throughout the entire world. In your country too the Church of Christ builds on this truth, in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome.

She builds *on the strength of the bond of truth and love*, a bond which the Holy Spirit has sustained in every age since the day of Pentecost and continues to do so today among the different peoples and nations that make up the one great People of God.

It was God's truth and love which inspired Father Gonçalves da Silveira to come to the Zambezi Valley in 1560, and in the following year to lay down his life in order to plant in this land the first seeds of the Christian faith. Other missionaries followed in his footsteps, beginning with the Jesuit and Dominican religious families.

The most intense efforts at evangelization and the most widespread fruits of those efforts have been seen in the past hundred years. The Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Truth and Love – has been at work in your midst in a remarkable way, moving hearts to accept the saving message of the Gospel, planting many native vocations to the priesthood and religious life, building up the family of believers into a holy dwelling place for God. You have thus become a new people, reborn in the Sacrament of Baptism, nourished by the Holy Eucharist, living in loving communion with God and with one another, with the Successor of Peter and the Catholic Church throughout the world.

Undoubtedly the most eloquent expression of God's grace and of the power of truth and love has been the heroic witness of those who have given their lives in service of the Gospel. I am thinking in particular of those who have been killed in the past fifteen years, including Bishop Adolph Schmitt, a number of your priests and religious, and many of your laity. To all of them I wish to pay tribute today. Their courageous testimony will never be forgotten. They have shown to all of us the power of truth and love. In them we see incarnate the victory of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.

3. The Gospel of today's Liturgy directs our thoughts towards the Apostle Peter who, later in his life, in Rome, was to become the foundation of the faith of the whole Church.

See how Jesus – in the region of Caesarea Philippi – puts a question to his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" (*Marc. 8, 27*). And then he puts a second: "But you, who do you say I am?" (*Ibid. 8, 29*). And at that moment Peter answers, speaking in the name of all the Apostles: "You are the Christ" (*Ibid.*). Or as Saint Matthew records it. the answer was: "You are the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the living God" (*Matth. 16, 16*).

"Messiah" means the one whom God had anointed with the Holy Spirit and sent to accomplish the work of salvation.

Thus Peter professes his faith. And Christ accepts his profession but then goes on to foretell his own Passion and Resurrection. He declares: "The Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected... and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again" (*Marc. 8, 31*).

Peter, who has professed that Jesus is the Messiah, is astonished by these words. He takes his Master aside and rebukes him. What does this "rebuke" mean? It means that he tries to convince Jesus that what he has said cannot happen, that such a mission and death cannot happen to him, precisely because he is the Messiah, because he has been sent by God and anointed with the Holy Spirit.

And how does Christ react? He in turn rebukes Peter, in words that are very severe. He says "Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God's way but man's" (*Ibid. 8, 33*).

Yes, Peter already *believed in Christ*, but he was not yet ready to accept *the whole truth* about Christ. Like so many of his contemporaries, Peter was thinking of the Messiah in human terms: he saw Jesus as the one who could restore freedom to Israel.

4. But in fact *the full truth* about Christ, about the Messiah, did soon become known. It became known exactly as Jesus had foretold. And only then did Peter believe: he believed that *the Messiah* sent by God was *the Crucified and Risen Christ*.

Peter professed and proclaimed this truth about Christ, beginning on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem right up to the day when for the sake of this truth he gave his life on the Vatican Hill in Rome. And by believing and teaching this, Peter *thought and spoke in God's way and not in man's*.

5. In the light of Peter's profession of faith, what does it mean that *Christ is the Good Shepherd*? It means that he *"offers his life for the sheep"* (Cfr. *Io.* 10, 11). When the Psalmist of the Old Testament boldly proclaimed: "The Lord is my shepherd", his inspired words foretold a Shepherd who would offer his life for the flock, for all people; a Shepherd who would redeem them all with the Sacrifice of his own death on the Cross.

Today, *we have gathered* here in Harare to celebrate the Eucharist, which is the *"memorial"* of that *redemptive Sacrifice of Christ*. It is its unbloody renewal under the forms of bread and wine.

When he instituted the Eucharist on the day before his Passion, Jesus gave the disciples the Passover bread and said: "*This is my body* which will be given up for you". Then he gave them the Passover wine in a cup, saying: "*This the cup of my blood*, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven".

6. In the Eucharist, then, we celebrate the Sacrifice of the Covenant, the new and everlasting Covenant. This is God's Covenant with his people which had been foretold by the Prophet Ezekiel: "I will make a covenant of peace with them: it shall be an everlasting covenant with them... I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (*Ez.* 37, 26-27).

God made this Covenant with all humanity in the blood of his Son on Calvary. He made it with all people, with every person on earth. He made it also with you: with the people of Africa who live in the nation of Zimbabwe. And so we can sing with the Psalmist:

"The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want...
Near restful wafers he leads me...
He guides me along the right path" (*Ps.* 23 (22), 1-3).

7. What, then, must we do, dear brothers and sisters, to keep this Covenant with our God?

The response is given to us by the Apostle James in his Letter, which we heard in today's Second Reading: "If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, 'I wish you well: keep yourself warm and eat plenty', without giving them these bare necessities of life, then *what good is that?*" (*Jac. 2, 15-16*).

We must believe in the word of God. And we must also confirm our faith with works which are born of faith: "Faith is like that: if good works do not go with it, it is quite dead" (*Ibid. 2, 17*).

And one of the first good works which flow from faith, one that is so desperately needed in this place and everywhere, is the work of reconciliation: reconciliation with God, reconciliation with one another.

Your own country has known only too well the pain and suffering caused by sins such as racial discrimination and segregation, which deny the human dignity and full equality of other people simply because of the colour of their skin or because of the tribe to which they belong. The sins of greed and lust for power, as well as the sins of dishonesty and selfishness, likewise destroy bonds of trust and weaken the very fabric of society. These are sins which work against the harmonious and full development of your nation.

Yet all these sins can be overcome with the help of the God of the Covenant and through your faith in him. In the Sacrament of Baptism *God reconciled you with himself and entrusted to you the work of reconciliation*. In the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance, you are strengthened in faith and in the love of God: you experience the joy of *coming together in Christ*, and you are sent forth to overcome disunity wherever it exists – within your families and villages or in any sector of the country of Zimbabwe.

8. If we want to keep the Covenant with God which Christ accomplished through his blood, in his Cross and Resurrection, *we must follow Christ himself*. He has called us to be his disciples, and he continues to say to us:

"If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and *take up his Cross and follow me*. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it: but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it" (*Marc. 8, 34-35*). Think carefully about these words of Christ! Go back to them often in your mind, in your heart, in your prayer. The Good Shepherd offers his life for the sheep. He has given his life in sacrifice to the Father.

"If I should walk in the valley of darkness no evil would I fear. *You are there*" (*Ps. 23 (22), 4*). You, Jesus Christ! You are with me! You, Jesus Christ, the Eternal Shepherd of every individual and of all peoples! You are with me!

“Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life.
In the Lord’s own house shall I dwell for ever and ever” (*Ibid.* 6).

Amen.

© Copyright 1988 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana