



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION
FOR THE FAITHFUL OF THE DIOCESE OF NORTHERN UGANDA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Kaunda Grounds, Gulu
Saturday, 6 February 1993*

Rwot waco ni "An Lakwat Maber"

("I am the good shepherd" (Jn. 10: 11), says the Lord)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. In the Gospel, Jesus Christ declares: "the Father loves me, because I lay down my life [for my sheep].. No one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own free will" (Ibid. 10: 17-18).

In the Old Testament, God had already proclaimed through the Prophets that he is like a shepherd who looks after his sheep and cares for them (Cf. Ez. 34: 11). These words were fulfilled in Jesus, the Good Shepherd "who lays down his life for his sheep" (Jn. 10: 11). *Jesus laid down his life out of love.* He loves the Father and all whom the Father has given him. He gave his own life so that all people might have eternal life.

Christ, the Good Shepherd, *brings salvation.* Because of his love for the Father, the Son goes out in search of every human being. He wants to save all men and women, to lead them back to the Father's house.

The parable of the Good Shepherd helps us to understand the mystery of our Redemption. *Each*

of us has been redeemed by the love of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. The Son's love for us is so great that he offered his life in sacrifice. He freely embraced the Cross. "No one takes my life from me", says Christ, "I lay it down of my own free will" (Jn. 10: 18). Jesus' death on the Cross is the perfect sacrifice of love and the price of our salvation.

2. In every age and in all lands the mystery of Christ's saving love is proclaimed by the Church built upon the Apostles. Today we rejoice that the faith of the Apostles *has taken root in Africa, in Uganda*, and borne fruit in the lives of all who believe in Christ. From the day when the Holy Spirit first descended upon the Apostles in the Upper Room, Christ's Church has never ceased to preach the Gospel to people of every nation under heaven (Cf. Acts. 2: 5). At this Eucharist we recall with gratitude those who first brought you the Catholic and Apostolic faith. We give thanks for all who have strengthened you by their words and deeds, and planted the seeds which, by God's grace, will yield an ever more abundant harvest.

Today the Pope, the Successor of the Apostle Peter, rejoices that *the Good Shepherd has called the beloved people of Uganda to become members of his flock.* With affection in the Lord, I embrace all of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ. I greet my Brother Bishops, especially Bishop Martin Luluga of Gulu, Bishop Frederick Drandua of Arua, Bishop Joseph Oyanga of Lira, and the other Bishops present, especially the Bishops of Sudan. My greetings go to the *priests, the men and women Religious, seminarians, the catechists and all the lay faithful* who make up your young and vibrant Churches.

We are also honoured and grateful for the presence of His Excellency the President of the Republic, who joins us for this celebration in Northern Uganda.

3. In fulfilling the words of the Prophet, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, shows his concern for all those belonging to his flock: "I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded and make the weak strong" (Ez. 34: 16).

The Good Shepherd is *our defender*: he protects the whole community, the whole flock, and all belonging to it. He defends it even at the risk of his own life. He is not like the hired man. The hired man is more concerned to save himself (Cf. Jn. 1: 12-13). As soon as he sees a wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away.

The Good Shepherd also *knows* his sheep (Cf. *ibid.* 10: 14). He *knows every one of us*. He knows the true dignity of *each person, because each person is made in the image and likeness of God himself* (Cf. Gen. 1: 26). This is why he knows and loves each human being. And this is why the Good Shepherd is ready to give his own life for each person.

Christ loves each one of us in a unique and special way *because he has ransomed each one of us by his death on the Cross*. He paid for us with the greatest love. There can be no greater love than

this (Cf. Jn. 15: 13).

4. Christians of Uganda! *The Good Shepherd is always in your midst!* He loves you and he will never abandon you!

Christ is in your midst in a special way *through the ministry of the Bishops and the priests* who nourish you with the word of God and the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In his love, he sought you out through the work of the *missionary priests*, especially the Comboni Fathers, who came from afar in order to share the gift of faith with the people of Northern Uganda and to help your young communities to grow to maturity. Your priests' faithful witness to the love of the Good Shepherd led some of them to lay down their own lives for the flock, sealing their love for their flock by following Christ to the full. They likewise help us to realize that missionary activity is an essential and never-ending task for the Church, and that the true vitality of each particular Church is measured by the missionary vocations it produces.

Jesus says: "I lay down my life [for my sheep]" (Jn. 10: 17). To my dear brothers in the priesthood, I say: take these words to heart and let them become the inspiration of your whole priestly existence! *Trust in the power of Christ's love!* By making a free gift of yourselves to the Church you will be strengthened in that pastoral charity which enables you to remain faithful to your charge, fruitful in your ministry and ready to render an account of your service on the last day. Only thus will you become what you are called to be: *servants of communion, ready to stand by your flock at all times*, ready to face difficulties and dangers for their sakes, completely devoted to the building up of the Body of Christ in love and unity.

5. The Good Shepherd, who knows and loves every member of his flock, is also in your midst in the person of all those Christians who devote themselves to *servicing the needs of their brothers and sisters*. Here, in the first place, let us give thanks for the great role which your *catechists* have had—and still have—in the growth of the Church in Uganda. Their fidelity to Christ often led them to follow in the footsteps of Saint Charles Lwanga and the other martyrs whose sacrifice consecrated the beginnings of the Church's life in your country.

Because Christ's love takes root and is expressed in a special way in the experience of families, I encourage *Christian parents* in their noble vocation to be channels of God's love for each other and for their children. The family is the cradle in which each new generation comes to know God's love through the faithful love of fathers and mothers, united before the Lord in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

I add a word of encouragement to the *young people* who are such an important part of your communities and who represent the future of your country. You too are called to be witnesses to the love of the Good Shepherd: not only in your families and among your friends, but also and especially in your desire to search for the lost sheep, to come to the help of the poor and the

outcast. Christ is calling you, with all the generosity and joy of your youth, to be messengers of his love and to reject the selfishness which spreads only unhappiness, hatred and violence.

Among those who have followed the Good Shepherd by laying down their lives for the sheep, I wish also to thank the many *men and women Religious* who have devoted themselves to serving the Ugandan people. Through their witness, Christ's special love is made known and made effective in giving people a deeper sense of their own dignity as God's children. So too the *doctors, nurses and health care assistants* who in a very real way help to "bandage the wounded and make the weak strong" (Cf. Ez. 34: 16). Here in Gulu I cannot fail to mention the dedicated work of the staff of Saint Mary's Hospital. What more impressive witness can be given to our Christian belief in the dignity of each human person, than in the concern for the poor, for the sick, and for those who are dying? I commend you also for your generosity in welcoming the great number of *refugees from the Sudan*.

Your sacrifices on behalf of these your brothers and sisters will be amply rewarded by the One who himself was once an exile, and who says to his faithful followers: "I was a stranger and you made me welcome" (Mt. 25: 35).

We know that Christ had a special love for the sick and often reached out to touch and heal them. And so I address a word to *all the sick, especially those suffering from AIDS*. The Good Shepherd loves each of you! You have a special place in the Church, and you can share actively in her mission by offering your sufferings and prayers in union with Christ, for the needs of the flock, and for the unity and peace of the Lord's flock.

6. *Christ has conquered death!* He is the Lord of life, who says: "Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid" (Jn. 14: 27). Even though we walk through the valley of darkness, we fear no evil, for he is there: with his crook and his staff he gives us comfort (Cf. Ps. 24(23): 4). Christ knows the sufferings which Uganda has had to endure! He knows the price you have paid for years of war and unrest! He knows the price you and your children have paid in living with fear and uncertainty! But he repeats: "Be brave: I have conquered the world" (Jn. 16: 33). *Jesus has paid the price in order to ransom you from the power of fear and violence: he has redeemed you by his Blood!*

See, he is calling you to be his messengers! He is calling you to build up where others have torn down, to be heralds of hope in the face of cynicism and despair, heralds of love in the face of violence of every kind. Today, in Uganda, in Gulu, I appeal to all of you: *be messengers of Christ, the Good Shepherd!* Let all people see how you love one another, how you cooperate with one another, overcoming divisions in charity and seeking to serve all people, seeing in them the children of God, your brothers, your sisters. For the sake of your children, for the sake of the future God holds in store for Africa, you must be messengers of the light which casts out the darkness (Cf. *ibid.* 1: 5). You must overcome the culture of death by building a civilization of love.

7. Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, says: "*there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well.* They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock and one shepherd" (Ibid. 10: 16). These are the words Jesus spoke to those who listened to him in the land of Palestine. Today he says the same thing to us—here in Gulu.

Jesus wishes to draw all people to himself. Out of love for the Father, Jesus gave his own life for the salvation of the world. He constantly *looks after the people* redeemed at the price of his Blood. He fills them with the love which gives salvation. And he looks forward to that final time, *when he will give every man and woman back to the Father*, so that God will be "all in all" (1Cor. 15: 28).

Lokristo me Uganda, Lakwat maber tye kwedwu. Uwek en kutel wun iyo metir. Amen.

(Christians of Uganda! Christ, the Good Shepherd, is with you! Let him guide you on the right path! Amen.)

**Greetings to the faithful
at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Celebration**

Fratelli e Sorelle,

è stata una celebrazione meravigliosa, come meravigliose sono state la vostra partecipazione e la preparazione di questa Santa Messa. Voi pregate non solo con il vostro cuore e con la vostra voce, ma con tutto il vostro essere, le vostre tradizioni, con tutta la vostra identità. Voi pregate con il movimento del corpo, con il canto, con la danza.

È una preghiera di ringraziamento, di offerta di ciò che voi siete e di tutto ciò che avete al Creatore, al Redentore, al Santo Dio. Che questo incontro, questo sacro incontro nell'Eucaristia, permanga sempre per voi come una fonte di benedizione, di divina benedizione. Grazie molte.