



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION
FOR THE FAITHFUL OF THE WEST-CENTRAL PART OF UGANDA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Kasese (Uganda)
Monday, 8 February 1993*

*Abagonzebwa omu Kristo,
Muroho Muta?
(Dearly beloved in Christ,
How are you?)*

1. *Mukama waitu Yesu Kristo natugambira ati, Itwena tube baum.* (Our Lord Jesus Christ has told us that we should all be one). On the night before he died, Christ prayed to the Father for the unity of his disciples: "Father may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (Jn. 17: 21).

God himself is one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the roots of the unity of all Christ's followers reach into the very depths of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, where the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father, through the Spirit of Love who proceeds from the Father and the Son. That same Love the Father poured out upon the world in Jesus Christ: "*God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son*" (Jn. 3: 16).

Today, here in Kasese, the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, has been given the grace of celebrating the Eucharist with you, the faithful of the West-Central part of Uganda. Gathered in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, *we acknowledge and rejoice in the unity which binds us together in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.*

The night before his sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of the world, the Son prayed to the Father for the unity of his disciples: for the Apostles and for those who would come afterwards, from generation to generation. He prayed for the unity of all those who through the Apostles' words would believe in him (Cf. *ibid.* 17: 20). Thus he prayed for the unity of the particular Churches among themselves, and for the unity of the particular Churches with the Bishop of Rome.

2. The Eucharist is the most complete sign of our unity. And so with great affection in our Lord Jesus Christ I greet all of you, especially those who have travelled great distances in order to take part in this solemn event. In the shadow of Rwenzori Mountain, whose mighty peaks silently bless the Lord (Cf. Dan. 3: 75), I greet your Bishops: *Bishop Egidio Nkaijanabwo of Kasese*, whom I thank for his cordial words of welcome; *and Bishop Paul Bakyenga of Mbarara, Bishop Paul Kalanda of Fort Portal, Bishop Deogratias Byabazaire of Hoima, and Bishop Barnabas Halem'Imana of Kabale, as well as Bishop Serapio Bwemi Magambo, Bishop emeritus of Fort-Portal, and Bishop John Baptist Kakubi, Bishop emeritus of Mbarara.* I greet you, the priests, Religious and laity of the whole Western region of Uganda.

I extend a warm greeting to the representatives of other Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and to the followers of other religions. I gratefully acknowledge the presence of the civil authorities, involved in the noble task of serving the common good of their fellowcitizens. Bishop Nkaijanabwo has spoken of the great natural beauty of the Rwenzori Mountains and the numerous rivers which flow down from its peaks and water the land. Inspired by this image as we celebrate the Eucharist, let us open our hearts to the stream of living water which Christ gives to those who believe in him, until it becomes a spring of water welling up to eternal life (Cf. Jn. 4: 14).

3. In the priestly prayer of Jesus in the Upper Room on the night before he died, there is a distant but faithful echo of the words of the Prophet Ezekiel, which we have heard in today's liturgy: "I am going to take you from among the nations and gather you together from all the foreign countries, and bring you home to your own land" (Ez. 36: 24).

The Prophet uttered these words thinking of the sons and daughters of Israel living in exile in the *Diaspora*. How they desired to return home! How they wished to rebuild the ancient unity of the people of God around the Temple in Jerusalem! Jesus, on the other hand, speaks of a much deeper unity: a unity capable of overcoming every barrier and every division, a unity of mind and heart which has its source in God himself. For Jesus prayed: "Father may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you... with me in them and you in me" (Jn. 17: 21: 23).

"*With me in them*". This is the great objective that I wish to propose to the Christian faithful of Western Uganda: that Christ may so live in you, through your faith and holiness of life, *that no ethnic difference, no social or religious difference, will stand in the way of a real solidarity in building the common good.*

4. In this region, with its mountains and plains inhabited by many different peoples, there has been a great movement of population. In most places people from various ethnic backgrounds and languages live side by side. Should not everyone, especially the religious leaders and the civil authorities, work hard to create an awareness of membership in a wider regional and national community, a membership which calls for everyone to play a part in the common task of rebuilding Uganda's social fabric?

The tragic events of the recent past have left a painful inheritance. During those dark years the Bishops bravely nourished the hope that peace and unity would one day prevail. Let us together give thanks for their pastoral zeal and for the Christian witness of the countless faithful whose heroism, charity and sacrifice added yet another splendid chapter to the history of the Church in Africa.

Now is the "acceptable time, the day of salvation", the day for all Ugandans to cast aside the traces of destructive divisions based on inequality, ethnic enmity and rivalry. The Gospel reminds us: "No town, no household divided against itself can stand" (Matth. 12: 25). So, your Bishops have written: "the time has come for us all as a nation to forgive one another and be reconciled, and start *a new era of togetherness and solidarity*" (Epist. Pastoralis *Let Your Light Shine*, 36). I make these words my own and entreat you to be reconciled with God and with one another (Cf. 2Cor. 5: 20).

5. *A spiritual conversion, a moral renewal* is required if justice, peace and unity are to be firmly established. The Prophet teaches that God must put within us "a new heart" and "a new spirit" so that we shall live according to the divine will (Cf. Ez. 36: 26). If there is discord between you, between members of the same family, between different groups, between regions, let God's grace take away the "heart of stone" and replace it with the "heart of flesh" (Cf. *ibid.*). Let there be reconciliation and peace!

All of us have our origin from the same loving God, who "from one single stock... created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth" (Acts. 17: 26). The human family is one! It is called to form a community free from discrimination based on race, colour, class or religion (Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 5). The differences between us should strengthen, not diminish, the unity and respect of all for one another. A community spirit, a sense of generous sharing, a warm hospitality towards others are among the most worthy aspects of traditional African culture. Recently, these qualities have inspired your praiseworthy generosity towards the many *refugees from the civil strife in Rwanda*. Let us pray that efforts to end the conflict in that country will be successful and that the displaced will soon be enabled to return to their homes and families.

Having experienced at first hand the suffering caused when prejudice leads to hatred and violence, you know the importance of not permitting an exaggerated individualism and selfishness to threaten the virtues of solidarity, justice and peace which represent the only sure hope for the

future of Ugandan society.

6. In this respect I wish to encourage the Church in Western Uganda to continue its dedicated work in certain areas of pastoral concern. First, *in fostering a more and more effective family apostolate*. Right from the opening pages of the Book of Genesis, it is clear that God intended man and woman to find each other, to love each other in a stable and faithful way, and responsibly to accept, nurture and educate the fruits of their love, their children. "This at last", Adam says contemplating his wife, "is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. This is why a man leaves his father and his mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body" (Gn. 2: 23-24). This close, personal, monogamous union is not of Western origin, but rather *corresponds to God's plan for husband and wife*. The marriage covenant is so noble, so close to God's own way of being in the Trinity, that again and again the Scriptures compare God's love for sinful humanity to the love of an infinitely faithful husband for his wife. Saint Paul boldly presents the self-sacrificing love of Christ for his Church as the symbol and model of every indissoluble marriage covenant (Cf. Eph. 5: 25-33).

The positive sense of family bonds characteristic of African traditions, the seriousness of the matrimonial commitment as a basis of solidarity among related families – a solidarity which especially favours old people, widows and orphans, and produces a form of co-responsibility in caring for children – can contribute to strengthening Christian homes. It is the delicate task of priests, Religious and catechists *to teach young couples how to bring this family dynamism into conformity with God's plan for marriage and for the family*. Marriage preparation courses should guide couples to the discovery of all the grace and spiritual strength available to them through the Sacrament which consecrates their love. With trust in the Lord they can set out on life's journey together, conscious of the threats to which their fidelity will be exposed but ready to face together whatever challenges may come.

7. I wish to urge your hard-working Bishops and priests to continue to make family life a priority of pastoral action. Groups and movements which support couples should be encouraged. Catholic couples can be of enormous help to other couples. Courses and days of prayer and study can play an important part in consolidating families. Where there are special difficulties, as for example when husbands are forced to go elsewhere in search of work, or in cases of sickness, or where there are other failings, the Christian community should show particular concern and offer concrete assistance in keeping strong the bonds of family life. I realize that, for many of you, your family roots are far away and it is difficult to create a community spirit. *I am asking you, especially the young people, to take courage and to develop an intense concern for the common good*. The State too should be firmly convinced of the importance of the family as the basis of an ordered society, and it should therefore follow policies which defend family values against attacks of all kinds.

8. Brothers and sisters, your joyful participation in this Liturgy is a reflection of *the vitality of your*

parish life. I know that you are close to your priests and to the sisters and religious brothers who work in this part of Uganda. But they are not sufficient in numbers for all that has to be done. The Pope is asking you to pray for more priests and religious. He would like the young people to ask themselves whether Christ is calling them, and to be generous in responding if he does. There is so much to be done! In particular I wish to emphasize the role of women religious in evangelization and in nurturing the Catholic community. To all the sisters present I give a hearty thanks in the name of the Church.

And how could I forget to thank the catechists? And the Catholic teachers? Your admirable work, and the cooperation of the laity in lay councils and committees, is fundamental for the strengthening of the Church's life in your parishes and dioceses. In everything there must be a great sense of unity around your Bishops.

And so we return to the theme of this Eucharist, in which Christ's priestly prayer resounds with emphasis: "may they all be one". *The Saviour wants us to be one so that the world may believe that it was the Father who sent him* (Cf. Jn. 17: 21). Every work of evangelization depends on this witness. If others are to believe, they must see that Christians are united.

They must see that we are one in love. The sacrifice of the cross, in fact, is the highest point of the mission of our Redeemer, and by it the world knows the love with which God loved all mankind. Every time we celebrate Christ's paschal sacrifice in the Eucharist, Christ renews this love for each one of us.

Where does this love lead? It leads to eternal life in God: "I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (Jn. 17: 24). At the Last Supper Christ expressed his love for his disciples. Today in Kasese he expresses this same love for you. "Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever" (Hebr. 13: 8). Through union with him, through our union with one another in him, we too become sharers in divine life: eternal life in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The people of Western Uganda are yearning for a better life, a more honest, just and peaceful life. This will only be possible if society respects and defends the spiritual dimension of man's life and his call to transcendence. *The human heart is restless until it rests in God* (Cf. Saint Augustine *Confessions*, I, 1: CSEL 33, s.1.). But we have a certain hope, for the Lord himself prayed for his people: "I have made your name known to them and I will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them and so that I may be in them" (Jn. 17: 26).

Engonzi za Yeso Kristo zikale omu mitima yanyu ebiro byoona.

Engonzi za Ruhanga zibe maani ganyu, inywena Abanya 'Uganda.

Amina.

(May the love of Jesus reign in your hearts!
May God's love be the strength of all Ugandans!
Amen.)

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