



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF ZIMBABWE
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

Friday, 18 June 1982

My brothers in Christ,

It is a great joy for me to welcome all of you here. As we gather in faith and in love, our meeting gives evidence of the deep bond of unity that joins the Holy See and the Churches in Harare, Bulawago, Gwelo, Umtali, Wankie and the Prefecture Apostolic of Sinoia. It is particularly significant that this is your first ad limina visit since Zimbabwe gained its independence as a nation two years ago. I know that you share in the happiness that this new status has evoked in the hearts of your countrymen, and I am pleased that you have dedicated yourselves to the continuing efforts aimed at bringing about a just and peaceful society, wherein the dignity of every person is guaranteed. Your defence of human rights provides a firm hope that all prejudice based on race, origin or culture will be eliminated.

I am confident that the Church in Zimbabwe will continue to demonstrate its wisdom by working for reconciliation and for building up a society that is truly Christian, one therefore in which all races will feel at home and in which a welcome is given to the specific contribution that each can make to the general welfare. Pursuit of the common good of the whole of society calls for continued collaboration between the hierarchy and the civil authorities, in an atmosphere of freedom and of respect for the different competences of Church and State. The Church willingly cooperates in efforts to advance the integral development of peoples. Her members are also part of the civil community, but she keeps her own identity, an identity based on the teaching of Christ, one that can never be confused with that of any political party. No political group can arrogate to itself the right to represent her. No political programme can claim to exhaust the riches of her message. She must therefore be careful to preserve her identity and freedom, while working wholeheartedly for the greater good of all.

These are challenging days for Zimbabwe - for the country and for the Church. Each member of the faithful and every local ecclesial community must be prepared to be renewed, in order to meet the demands of a changing situation. This requires a process of purification, a consistent conversion of mind and heart, so that the authentic values of the Gospel may penetrate and act as a leaven throughout society, transforming it into an ever more human reality. The Church finds the motivation for this in her obedience to the will of God. For it is God's plan that all men and women share in the gifts of unity and justice, integrity and peace. In his loving Providence, God has revealed this desire in the person of Jesus Christ and he continues to offer the Good News of salvation through the ministry of the Church. In every age, then, the Church labours to proclaim this divine message and thereby to further the coming of the Kingdom. In this context, we are able to say with Saint Paul, "We are ambassadors of Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5, 20). The message of reconciliation, then, has been entrusted to us and its proclamation is urgently incumbent upon us. Thus we know well the sentiments of Saint Paul when he exclaims: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor. 9, 16).

In the history of Zimbabwe, we find an excellent example of this spirit in the courageous determination of Father Gonçale Silveira, S. I., who first brought the Catholic faith to the kingdom of Monomotapa over four hundred years ago. This same apostolic zeal has inspired the work of so many missionaries in your country during the last century, among whose number there have been exemplary witnesses. In our own day the work of evangelization is no less demanding, as God calls worthy human instruments from among the local clergy and religious to proclaim the saving truth of the Gospel.

From the earliest days, the intention of the missionaries was to impart a deep love of God and neighbour, a love fostered by the celebration of the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist. The reverence and devotion which Zimbabwean Catholics have always shown towards the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is one of the most noble aspects of their spiritual heritage.

But the missionaries were also aware that "evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the increasing interplay of the Gospel and men's concrete lives" (PAULI VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 29), and so they sought to serve the whole person, realizing that the response of faith demands a total commitment to one's entire life. For this reason they attended to the practical needs of education, medical care and job training, in order that the internal conversion of faith might manifest itself externally and, in this way, become the cause of deepening faith throughout the whole community.

It is evident, however, that in present times many obstacles have to be overcome for the full accomplishment of the work of evangelization. For example, the suffering caused by violence within your nation has placed a heavy burden on the personal and material lives of your people. In addition to this, the scarcity of financial resources has caused curtailment of plans for increased charitable works. The relatively small growth in the number of clergy, for the service of an ever

increasing population, has also placed a strain on programmes of catechetical instruction and other important aspects of the Church's mission.

Yet, in spite of these difficulties, the Church in Zimbabwe continues to grow in the strength of the word of God, while it reaches out in service of the common good. The past and present contribution of your primary and secondary schools, together with that of the homecraft schools and teacher-training colleges, have made an important contribution to the country's development. The Catholic hospitals, medical dispensaries and orphanages have shown in a concrete manner the concern of the Church for the suffering and the poor, the lonely and the abandoned. The work of evangelization involves not only the proclamation of the faith by word but also its demonstration by works of love and compassion.

Here I cannot fail to mention the remarkable role that women religious have assumed on behalf of the faith in Zimbabwe. As teachers, nurses and administrators, and in various other roles, they have served most generously and admirably. The witness of missionary Sisters in your land has been truly impressive; and now your local Churches can boast of four indigenous congregations who continue this esteemed tradition. Certainly this is a sign of divine favour and a cause of great rejoicing for the whole Church.

Finally, my dear brothers, you have expressed the wish that the Church in Zimbabwe be truly Catholic and truly African. It is my own fervent prayer that it may be so. I repeat here what I said during my pastoral visit in Nigeria: "The Church truly respects the culture of each people. In offering the Gospel message, the Church does not intend to destroy or to abolish what is good and beautiful. In fact she recognizes many cultural values and through the power of the Gospel purifies and takes into Christian worship certain elements of a people's customs. The Church comes to bring Christ; she does not come to bring the culture of another race. Evangelization aims at penetrating and elevating culture by the power of the Gospel".

I encourage you to make the divine message of the Gospel incarnate in the customs and culture of your people. At times this will require great powers of discernment, prudence and patience on your part. But we know that Christ is the centre of all human history and every human culture finds in him its completion and perfection. Be ready to accept all that is compatible with the Gospel and offer it to your people as an opportunity to grow in holiness.

Let us always appreciate, moreover, that the path to holiness involves the way of the Cross. There is no genuine growth in Christ, no interior transformation, that does not to some extent demand suffering and self-denial. Jesus himself made this point when he said, "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (*Jo. 15, 20*). If we desire therefore to share in his glory, we must be willing to join in his Passion.

With this thought in mind, we are moved to rely more fully on the power of prayer. I ask you to

encourage your people to find frequent opportunities for prayer and to seek through prayer strength for daily living. In doing this, let us, as bishops, be the first servants of prayer, constantly beseeching the Lord for the grace of fidelity, perseverance and wisdom. And let us not forget the powerful intercession of Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of all who are Christ. She has known a deep intimacy with her Son and she has experienced the joy of abandoning her life to the will of the Father. Let her be for you an example and a guide.

From the depths of my heart, I wish you peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. I invoke upon you his grace and favour in your sacred ministry and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, together with your clergy, religious and laity.

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