



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF LESOTHO
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Friday, 15 September 1989

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Phil.* 1, 2). In welcoming you to Rome on the occasion of your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*, my thoughts spontaneously turn to our last meeting, exactly one year ago, in the heart of *Lesotho*. I recall with special gratitude the warm hospitality which I encountered among the Catholics of your mountain Kingdom. Although my visit was not spared some of that drama which is a part of the life of the Church in Southern Africa, I was blessed with the opportunity of witnessing the firm faith which has taken root among your people, the challenges it faces, and the promise it holds out for the future of Lesotho.

As we gather here today we still feel the sadness caused by the sudden death of Archbishop Morapeli. His love of the Church and his wise counsel as brother Bishop and Metropolitan stand as an example and incentive for your own pastoral ministry. May God reward his faithful servant in his eternal love.

2. A strong faith in Jesus Christ demands that we "be renewed in the spirit of our minds" (Cfr. *Eph.* 4, 23), and learn to judge all things in the light of the Gospel. I am pleased to see that your recent Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Lesotho has called all the members of the Church to undertake an *examination of conscience concerning their contribution as Christian believers to the life of your society*. In pursuing this self-examination, the Church in Lesotho will look to you, the Bishops, for inspiration and guidance. This is entirely appropriate, for it is through the ministry of its Bishops that the people of the New Testament is guided and directed on its journey towards eternal happiness (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 21).

I wish to assure you of my fraternal support as you seek to build up the Body of Christ in the Kingdom of Lesotho. It was as a sign of my “concern for all the Churches” (Cfr. *2Cor.* 11, 28) that I recently convoked a Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. This Assembly will serve as an opportunity for all the Bishops of Africa to evaluate in the light of faith the reality of the Church in the life of your peoples on the threshold of the Third Millennium.

3. Dear Brothers: at the core of your ministry as Successors of the Apostles in the awesome task of preaching the Gospel and *helping the people entrusted to your care to apply the truths of the faith to their daily lives*. The Second Vatican Council reminds us that Bishops are heralds and authentic teachers of the faith - teachers, that is, who are endowed with the authority of Christ himself (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 25).

To respond to a world that longs to “see Jesus” (Cfr. *Io.* 12, 21), you must embody in your person the truth of God’s Word and the love of the Good Shepherd. This great task requires of you an ever deeper configuration of both mind and will to Christ our High Priest. The foundation for this deepening imitation of Christ has already been laid, thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit which you received at your episcopal ordination. Through God’s grace, you have been enabled to stand in the place of Christ and act in his person (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 21). As shepherds in the image of the Good Shepherd, you are called to become the *forma gregis*, the very pattern of that fervent faith and spiritual wisdom to which all Christians are called. Within the particular Church, you have been *called to discern and order the many gifts which the Spirit has given for the building up of Christ’s Body in faith, hope and love*.

4. As I reflect upon the life of the Church in Lesotho, I give thanks to God for the many ways in which your ministry has brought the light of Christ to your country and to its people. *Inspired by the example and prayers of Blessed Joseph Gerard*, you have sought to carry on the great work of implanting the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the minds and hearts of the people of your country. Amid political and social tensions, you have addressed the needs of your people with a praiseworthy concern for moral values and the demands of justice. I am particularly gratified by the patient and generous efforts which, in collaboration with the leaders of other Ecclesial Communities, you have made on behalf of the exiled Basotho, whose return to their native land is a sign of hope for the future of Lesotho, for where reconciliation prevails, love unity and solidarity strengthen a people’s resolve to live in peace.

I urge you as “ heralds and authentic teachers of the faith ” to make every effort to guarantee that the Catholic Faith continues to be carefully and fully taught to all of the Christian faithful. Few aspects of your ministry as Bishops are as important as this, for it is upon a clergy and laity well-instructed in the Faith that the future vitality of the Church in Lesotho will depend. The examination of conscience which you have enjoined upon Lesotho’s Catholic will only bear fruit if it is made in the light of an *adequate and practical knowledge of the word of God and the teaching of the Church*.

5. In this regard, I would underline the importance of a sound catechesis, imparted by well-trained and generous personnel. In the Apostolic Exhortation "Catechesi Tradendae", I noted that "every baptized person, precisely by reason of being baptized, has the right to receive from the Church instruction and education enabling him or her to enter on a truly Christian life" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II Catechesi Tradendae, 14). The work of catechesis is an indispensable aspect of the wider work of evangelization. Once the believer has heard the Gospel and accepted Christ, he or she must grow in Christ, learning to follow him, "to think like him, to judge like him, to act in conformity with his commandments and to hope as he invites us to" (*Ibid.* 20).

The nurturing of a strong Catholic identity, rooted in conformity to Christ and in a sound knowledge of doctrine, is crucial to the success of the Church's mission in today's society. As young people face serious challenges to their faith and to their fidelity to Christ's law, they need the tools which will enable them to lead a life worthy of the calling they have received. An all-embracing catechesis will enable them to face those challenges in a way that is at once fully Christian and fully African. A particular area of your pastoral endeavour must always be the training of committed and well-prepared catechists who know and love Christ and who wish to share the faith of the Church with all whom they meet.

One privileged *locus* of catechesis in Lesotho has been and continues to be its fine system of *Catholic schools*. These schools, and the dedicated religious and laity who staff them, have had a profound impact upon society. They have produced generations of students in an atmosphere of learning which is inspired by faith and sees all knowledge within the setting of God's plan for the world and for mankind. You are rightly concerned for the quality of religious education imparted in the schools and in programmes of sacramental preparation in the parishes. In so many ways, Catholic schools play an important role in your society. I hope that any difficulties regarding these schools will be met in a true spirit of goodwill and that the public authorities will continue to give them the support they need.

6. Another area of prime importance for the future of the Church in Lesotho is the *formation of future priests*. Here too, your obligation as "teachers of the faith" must lead you to ensure an adequate formation in the truths of Catholic doctrine and in the apostolic life. It may be that here a particular sacrifice will be required of you. Seminarians need the presence and guidance of your finest priests – priests who are able to inspire in young men a deep love of the Lord and an unwavering commitment to a life of apostolic zeal. Indeed, there are few assignments where a priest will have so profound an effect on the future of the Church's mission *Spes messis in semine*: the hope for the harvest depends upon the generosity with which the seed is sown.

The ministerial priesthood to which your seminarians are called is a sharing in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, who for our sake "humbled himself and became obedient" (*Phil.* 2, 8). In an age which exalts social status, the priest is called to serve others, especially the poorest and those most in need. For this reason, the *spiritual formation* which is so important a part of seminary

training must *stress the figure of Jesus as the one who came among us as a servant* (Cfr. *Luc. 22, 27*). The purpose of this formation must be to foster a zeal for the service of others that is deeply rooted in gratitude for the gift received.

The *men and women religious* working in Lesotho contribute enormously to the life of your local Churches. Their educational, welfare and pastoral activities are indispensable. But above all they bring to your communities the testimony of their *religious consecration, a sign of the Kingdom of God* and an expression of a preferential love of Christ which can attract all the members of the Church to the fulfilment of their Christian duties (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 44). It is your task to support them in this deeper aspect of their consecrated life and call to holiness.

7. Dear Brothers: in sharing these reflections with you, I encourage you in your ministry for the People of God. As you face the challenges of the present and the future, may you never cease to draw new confidence and hope from the grace of God at work in the hearts of all who believe. In this, you have a powerful example in the life of Blessed Joseph Gerard, whose personal holiness and trust in God's will inspired a whole people to turn to Christ.

With gratitude to the Father for all his many gifts, I ask you to convey my affection and best wishes to my brothers and sisters in the Churches of Maseru, Leribe, Mohale's Hoek and Qacha's Nek. Please tell them once again that the Pope loves them and prays for them, so that they may grow in grace and in the joy which comes from serving the Lord in fidelity and thanksgiving. To them, and to you, their pastors, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing, invoking upon all of you the loving protection of Mary, Mother of the Church.

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