



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF ANGOLA AND SÃO TOMÉ
ON THEIR AD "LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" VISIT**

Tuesday, 27 May 1997

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

1. How welcome your presence is here today in representing and presenting the Church which, amid the tribulations of the world and the consolations of the Holy Spirit, is a pilgrim in Angola and São Tomé and Príncipe! I have wished many times and, in all possible ways, I have never ceased to be close to you when a senseless war again flared up, bringing in its wake deprivation, ruin, bereavement, humiliations and sufferings of every kind which afflicted you and your communities and nations, pitilessly decimating the flock and forcing survivors into the diaspora and poverty. It seemed that hell had been furiously unleashed to extinguish that dawn of peace and hope which my Apostolic Visit, during those blessed and unforgettable days of Pentecost 1992, had intended to encourage and strengthen with renewed gifts from on high.

How can I forget, among other things, that immense multitude of people of all ages, gathered round the altar at Praia do Bispo, Luanda, with their festive, brightly-coloured clothes and their souls united in the same song of gratitude to God and brotherhood in Christ? I recall their heartfelt expressions of joy and happiness, when they learned of the Pastors that heaven was sending them as the Ordinary of Mbanza Congo and Auxiliary of Luanda, in the persons respectively of Serafim Shyngo-Ya-Hombo and Damião António Franklin, who are present here. You are the proof that that day has not ended and that hell will not prevail. In fact, despite great and persistent problems, in the following years we have seen the renewal of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Lubango, Kwito-Bié, Novo Redondo and Saurimo, and the appointment of a Coadjutor Bishop for Malanje. With warm ecclesial gratitude to the whole Episcopal Conference — and especially to

those who cared for and continue to care for Christ's flock in these Dioceses — I welcome you to this humble "house of Peter", which has always been yours. I congratulate your recently elected President, Archbishop Zacarias Kamwenho, and I thank Cardinal do Nascimento for his kind words in the name of all, which have shown me the beating of the troubled hearts of the communities entrusted to your care. I fraternally greet each one of you, and would again like to open my arms and clasp to my heart all my brothers and sisters in Angola and in São Tomé and Príncipe, together with their fellow citizens and the authorities, in a renewed supplication for peace: "The Lord bless you and keep you: the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Nm 6:24-26).

2. With the Eucharistic celebration in Luanda on 7 June 1992 the jubilee celebrations to mark the fifth centenary of the evangelization of Angola were concluded; they ended with a moving thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity, to the "fathers and mothers" of your faith. With their gaze already turned to the third millennium, that multitude of sons and brothers renewed their commitment to continue, proud of their adherence to Christ and open to the life-giving breath of the Holy Spirit, to sow the Good News of salvation to the borders of Angola and to make it fruitful in the many fields of Angolan culture and life, whose furrows were bathed in blood and whose advancement had been jeopardized by the events of the war.

"Laity for the Year 2000"! With this slogan one month later, to be precise on 7-12 July, the First National Congress of the Angolan Laity took place, calling lay Christians to be the soul of a nation that needed to devote all its energies to the ways of peace and reconciliation, to kindling hope in a future worthy of Angolan society. I learned, with great satisfaction, of the high degree of maturity shown by your lay faithful, both in the long preparation for the assembly at the parish, diocesan and national levels, and in the interventions made in that context with great harmony and knowledge of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent Apostolic Exhortations, especially *Christifideles laici*.

3. The tragic events that began in the last months of that same year 1992 sorely tried the enthusiasm and resolutions created in those days. Calvary was closer to "Mount Tabor" than it seemed! When at last you were hoping to gather the harvest of a long and painful sowing, seeing each of the faithful become "another Christ" on the paths of life, a Christ reviled, persecuted and killed in many of his members was left in your arms, resembling what happened in the past to the sorrowful and blessed Mother, and leaving you, the priests, the women religious and everyone who could help you, to ask God for peace for the dead, peace which the living had denied them, to lead the survivors to safety and to watch over them, to invite the transgressors to conversion and to keep the light of hope alive in everyone.

Putting together the thousand pieces that remained of the broken dish, mending it with a mother's patience and boundless trust in man for the love of God, is tangible and authentic proof that the Creator Spirit is with you and helping you, he who has done nothing else since his earthly

masterpiece, moulded from clay but enlivened by his divine breath, slipped from his hands and was broken in the Garden of Eden. For this reason, beloved brothers, do not be discouraged! Continue instead to raise your voices in unison, letting everyone know with absolute certainty that “the grain of wheat which falls into the earth and dies, bears much fruit” (cf. Jn 12:24). See that your Christian communities pray for their members who have fallen or are dispersed, the victims of hatred and injustice. As in the apostolic communities (cf. 1 Pt 3:8; 4:19), teach them to distinguish clearly between suffering for the cause of God's kingdom and for his justice, and suffering as “a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker” (1 Pt 4:15), for the latter needs correction; the former is glorified because he will bear “much fruit”!

4. May the memory of the many human lives sacrificed hasten the time of renewal and harmony in Angola! All those lives.... Those of yesterday, victims of the inclemency of travel and climate or of misunderstandings and human treachery: named perhaps on some unknown or broken cross or tombstone, or perhaps despised and forgotten, because they were summarily and indiscriminately presumed to have connived with the interests of explorers and merchants; perhaps they were accused of supporting slavery or of dealings with the colonial authorities! Church in Angola, if today you do not redeem the honour of your fathers and mothers in the faith, how can you hope to survive in your children? Whenever someone took your hand in his and made the Sign of the Cross over you and your land, did this not bring blessings? You have had 500 years of evangelization: of which of these do you want to be deprived?

All those lives sacrificed ... even today! On the occasion of my Pastoral Visit, your Justice and Peace Commission had prepared a list of Christians who had been kidnapped, tortured or killed between 1960 and 1991. I reread those names with deep feeling: they were persons from various ecclesial states, coming from the most varied corners of Angola and many from abroad. How I would like the respective local communities to glory in these persons and imitate the courage of their faith and their witness of Christian life: if they could do it, why cannot I? May their glorious deeds be recounted, according to good African tradition. May their names and example live in hearts and shape the human and Christian ideals of all the People of God: children and the elderly, young people and adults, the ordained, consecrated or married, without forgetting all those who today feel called and are preparing shortly to take on ecclesial commitments themselves. Thus the pseudo-reasons invoked to keep African men and women on the fringes of Christian life will be dispelled once and for all.

5. The “*Church which is in Africa*” has spoken.... The Apostolic Exhortation that gathers “the results of their reflections and prayers, discussions and exchanges” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 1) is within the reach of all, aiming decisively at the goal of holiness, recognized and professed as the common vocation of all the baptized: “The Synod reaffirmed that all the sons and daughters of Africa are called to holiness” (n. 136), understood as “being configured to Christ” (n. 87).

In this regard, “Christian marriage” has been defined as “a state of life, a way of Christian

holiness”, if it is lived in “indissoluble love; thanks to this stability it can contribute effectively to the complete fulfilment of the spouses’ baptismal vocation” (n. 83). Passing to the “consecrated life”, the Encyclical then affirms that it has “the particular function” in the Family of God which is the Church “of indicating to all the call to holiness” (n. 94). It informs all who care for the Lord’s flock that “the Pastor is the light of his faithful above all through an exemplary moral conduct marked by holiness” (n. 98).

Then, turning its gaze to the immense, rich harvest of the world to be evangelized, which is waiting for the reapers, the Synod Assembly recommends: “A missionary is really such only if he commits himself to the way of holiness”. So that no doubts remain, it adds: “The renewed impulse to the mission ad gentes demands holy missionaries. It is not enough to update pastoral techniques, organize and co-ordinate ecclesial resources, or delve deeply into the biblical and theological foundations of faith. What is needed is the encouragement of a new ‘ardour for holiness’ among missionaries and throughout the Christian community” (n. 136).

This norm is not limited to the spiritual realm and to the Church’s religious mission, since the objective it proposes in a multicultural dialogue with society is precisely to “dispose people to receive Jesus Christ in an integral manner. It touches them on the personal, cultural, economic and political levels so that they can live a holy life in total union with God the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit” (n. 62). To limit myself to the political context, I remember how the Synod Assembly, seeing the need that exists for “a high degree of competence in the art of governing ... prayed fervently to the Lord that there would arise in Africa holy politicians —both men and women — and that there would be saintly heads of State, who profoundly love their own people and wish to serve rather than be served” (n. 111).

6. Significant steps have recently been taken in the Angolan nation: I am referring to the Government of National Unity and Reconciliation, set up on 11 April last, and the National Assembly, which can finally count on the presence of all its members. These are important, long-awaited political events, related to democratic normality in the national institutions. With the help of the international community, may they return the whole nation to normality as soon as possible, in its family, cultural, economic, sociopolitical and religious life. In fact, we are grieved to know that in various regions there are communities which have been deprived of religious assistance since 1975. Following the most recent hostilities, difficulties in communication and free transit were even more accentuated in certain districts, due to the utterly unjustifiable arbitrariness of the rival parties, thus denying the Church her most elementary rights: to provide religious assistance and humanitarian aid to her faithful. Joining my voice to yours, I ask those responsible to put an end to these irregularities so that no citizen may feel a foreigner in his own land.

7. My beloved Brothers, reading your quinquennial reports would also allow me to reflect on other topics concerning the life of your Dioceses. Nonetheless, having discussed them with each one of you at our individual meetings, I have preferred to keep for this more collegial occasion the

expression of the whole Church's gratitude to you who have loved your flock more than your lives, as I urge you to persevere with one accord in your ministry as "vicars and legates of Christ" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 27), who came so that men might have life and have it in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10).

The Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ leads us to that fullness of life which we invoke upon all humanity, which is invited to quench its thirst at the springs of salvation. In truth, the heavenly Father, by sending his own Son, has responded, in a total and definitive way as he alone can, to the many anxieties, doubts and expectations of the human heart. In our day we are witnessing a practical materialism, with its consumeristic view of things and of time, which is stifling the natural longing for God in humanity's heart and the search for the fullness of life, by clipping the wings of intelligence and faith. This secular mentality is arid ground for the seed of the Gospel, and a new and difficult challenge for us all: a challenge to the spiritual vigour of every local Church and every Christian. Only the Holy Spirit, who pours his dew upon our dryness and bends our stubbornness (cf. Sequence of Pentecost), can till such ground and make it fertile, so that the Word of God can put down roots in it.

Trusting in the Holy Spirit, who has guided the Church through many difficulties in the past 2,000 years, you will be able to cross the threshold of the third millennium without fear. May these years of preparing and celebrating the Great Jubilee encourage that "life in abundance" which the Saviour comes to bring to all your local communities, especially that of the beloved Diocese of São Tomé and Príncipe, which I remember with great affection before the Lord. May its Gospel workers not let themselves be dismayed by the seemingly scarce fruit of their apostolic labours; as I think of each one of them and of you, dear and venerable Brother, Bishop Abílio, I recall Jesus' words: "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent ... for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10).

I still have before my eyes the enchanting and vivid image of your islands, nourished by a generous and fruitful climate. In my heart I see this nature as an allegory of the inhabitants of São Tomé, who must respond to divine grace in the same way and measure, certainly no less generous or life-giving than the climate. Remembering that only saints are truly happy, may they let themselves be raised to heaven, which never ceases to call and draw them, and may they be closely joined in their hearts and lives to the ecclesial "land" where they have been transplanted by Baptism and are nourished especially by the Eucharist.

Lastly, as I implore God for true physical and spiritual well-being for all the inhabitants of São Tomé and Angola, with respect for their dignity as persons loved by God and redeemed by the blood of Christ, I wholeheartedly bless them, especially those who are suffering in body or soul, deprived of their relatives or far from home. I impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to those who work with you in building up the Church and to each one of you.

© Copyright 1997 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

©Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana