



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA APOSTOLORUM" VISIT**

Thursday, 29 October 1998

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brother in the Priesthood,*

1. As you make your *ad limina* visit, I am pleased to welcome to this house you who have been given the responsibility of leading God's People by fulfilling the triple ministry of teaching, sanctifying and governing. Members of the Episcopal Conference of the Indian Ocean (CEDOI), in making this pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles you are expressing your living and dynamic communion with the universal Church by meeting the Successor of Peter and those who assist him. I hope that on this occasion your pastoral zeal for the service of the Gospel will be strengthened and that your communities will find a new impetus for their Christian life and their missionary commitment.

thank the President of your Episcopal Conference, Bishop Maurice Piat of Port-Louis, Mauritius, for expressing with sensitivity the feelings which motivate you and for having presented the recent developments in the Church's situation in your region. Through you, I cordially greet the priests, religious, catechists and lay people of your Dioceses, as well as all the peoples who live on the islands of the Indian Ocean. May God fill them with his blessings so that they may always live in peace and solidarity! May I mention here Cardinal Jean Margéot, to whom I ask you to convey my affectionate union in prayer.

2. The context in which you exercise your ministry involves great diversity. I hope that the human and religious groups which constitute each of your regions may actively continue their co-operation in building fraternal and peaceful societies where each person, recognized and accepted

with his differences, can rightly participate in the life of society.

The distinctive features of the human situations which you encounter are also a treasure for the witness of universality and unity which the Church of Christ must give among the nations. On the other hand, your widely scattered Dioceses on islands that are often very far apart is a call for you to strengthen collaboration within your Episcopal Conference and to continue developing your relations with the particular Churches that are closest to you, so that the clergy and faithful will find the necessary support for their efforts.

3. As we are about to enter the last preparatory year for the Great Jubilee, the whole Church is invited to broaden her horizons, “so that she will see things in the perspective of Christ: in the perspective of ‘the Father who is in heaven’ (cf. Mt 5:45), from whom the Lord was sent and to whom he has returned (cf. Jn 16:28)” (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 49). Each one of your communities thus finds itself committed in a particular way to turning its gaze to the Father of all mankind, in order to draw from its intimate relationship with him the source of love that gives it life and to which it has a vocation to witness boldly.

May this final stage enable the faithful to advance resolutely on the path of conversion, in order to enter the new millennium enlivened by the desire to live in ever greater fidelity to the Gospel message! I hope that your Dioceses may find in the celebration of the Jubilee an opportunity to be ardently involved in a new evangelization, supported by reading and meditating on the Word of God and by regular participation in the Eucharist, where the incarnate Word makes his sacrifice for the world’s salvation sacramentally present. On this occasion, while paying particular attention to the faithful who have distanced themselves from the ecclesial community, may the evangelizing mission of the Church make every effort to reach all people, in order to show them Christ’s love and to awaken new hope within them!

4. To live and grow, your communities need ordained ministers animated by a deep apostolic spirit. Through you I warmly encourage all priests who give themselves selflessly to the service of the Church by proclaiming the Good News of Christ to the distant isles. I invite them to form an ever more united presbyterate around their Bishop. May they be faithful to the mission they have received, recognizing the greatness of the gift God has given them. In a profound spiritual life and in mutual, fraternal sharing, they will find vigorous support for their dynamic apostolic and pastoral activity.

To encourage the vitality of Christian communities scattered over vast areas, it would be useful in your regions to promote the permanent diaconate, which is an important enrichment for the Church’s mission. As I have already had occasion to say, “a deeply felt need in the decision to re-establish the permanent diaconate was and is that of a greater and more direct presence of Church ministers in the various spheres of the family, work, school, etc., in addition to existing pastoral structures” (*General Audience*, 6 October 1993, n. 6; *L’Osservatore Romano* English

edition, 13 October 1993, p. 11; cf. Congregation for Catholic Education and the Congregation for the Clergy, *The Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons*).

I also extend my cordial wishes to the men and women religious, that they will continue fully to live their offering to God in ever greater availability for the work of the Spirit, and that the signs of God's sanctifying action among men may be found in them.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, in exercising your ministry, it is your duty to show special care for priestly and religious vocations. May your communities be concerned to pass on to young people the Lord's invitation to follow him in the service of the Church and of the world! I address a pressing appeal to the youth of your region to show their interior willingness to listen to Christ. I ask their families to help them generously respond to the Lord's call.

I also rejoice in your wish to give seminarians a common formation structure which will help them maintain their concern for the true values of their region, enabling them to become priests who are spiritually solid and available, devoted to the cause of the Gospel (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 95). In this way it will be easier for you to form a united presbyterate which is prepared for closer collaboration.

5. The family apostolate is one of your constant concerns. While many people living together question the need for marriage, it is a primary requirement of the Church's mission to instil a deeper awareness of its human and spiritual significance, as well as that of the family. These are realities willed by God, which are essential for the life of the Church and of society.

The family's first duty is "to live with fidelity the reality of communion in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons" (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, n. 18). Christian married couples have the urgent mission of bearing witness to the unity and indissolubility of this communion, whose foundation and strength are found in Jesus Christ.

I firmly hope that the young people of your region assume their responsibilities in this important area and prepare themselves to form families which are united and open to life. I encourage you to continue your commitment to educating young people in human love. When dealing with situations of permissiveness or when the essential values of human life are questioned, it is necessary for young people to be able to discover the greatness and role of the sacrament of marriage, which makes spouses co-operators with the love of God the Creator in transmitting the gift of human life. In giving them the grace to love one another with the same love as Christ's, this sacrament will be a precious help to them in perfecting their human love, in strengthening their unity as a couple and in advancing on the paths of holiness. It is essential that young couples be given constant support, so that they can live their love in generosity and truth. May they be offered the example of radiant, faithful Christian families who are open to others!

6. A sound human and spiritual education should help young people deepen their formation, develop all the dimensions of their being and take their place in society. For this, Catholic schools, found in many of your Dioceses, play an important role in helping to transmit the Gospel message and true moral and spiritual values.

The Church's educational activity must also prepare lay Christians to take an active part in every area of their country's life, to bear witness there to justice and truth by being the salt of the earth in daily life. In fact, as I wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, "the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in 'public life', that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good" (n. 42). I therefore invite Catholics, in collaboration with people of goodwill wherever possible, to work ardently and in a spirit of service, to promote a society of justice and solidarity.

7. The Church must show God's loving presence to all society, remembering that she "travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world: she is to be a leaven, and as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 40). The Gospel message of freedom and hope addressed to the people of our time is even more pressing in this year when you are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery, that shameful trade which also preyed on the men, women and children of your islands.

The last preparatory year for the Jubilee which is about to open invites us to stress more clearly the Church's preferential option for the poor and excluded. In fact, the witness of charity is essential in Christian life. In your Dioceses, there are numerous people who very generously put themselves at the service of the most lowly and needy in society. Thus they testify that God, the Father of all human beings, cannot be indifferent to any of his children, especially those in distress.

Through her charitable efforts, the Church also wants to show that it is the very meaning of human life and dignity which is at stake. "To rediscover and make others rediscover the inviolable dignity of every human person makes up an essential task, in a certain sense, the central and unifying task of the service which the Church, and the lay faithful in her, are called to render to the human family" (Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, n. 37). I therefore keenly hope that the Church's social doctrine will be a guide for the faithful and an ever more vigorous encouragement to live the charity of Christ.

8. Meeting the members of other religious traditions is one of the realities experienced by Catholics in your region. I am happy to know that, in a general way, cordial relations are maintained between the different communities. It is important, in fact, that mutual respect based on mutual understanding should preside over relations between human and religious groups, in

order to foster a common service of man and to promote his dignity. I hope that fruitful contacts can develop on the important questions posed to contemporary man regarding problems such as ethics or human rights, in order to put shared values at the service of society. It is in the search for increased mutual knowledge, especially through the dialogue of life, that the fraternal ties and understanding which guarantee the stability of societies and respect for religious freedom can be reinforced.

9. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, as our meeting draws to a close, I give thanks with you for God's work in your region. The vitality of the Christian faith in the islands of the Indian Ocean is marked by the luminous figures of Bro. Scubilion and Fr Jacques-Désiré Laval. May the example of these blessed inspire those who are striving to build a more fraternal world today and who seek to abolish all the forms of slavery which still scar our world! May they be models for all the disciples of Christ in their quest for holiness and the service of others.

I entrust you to the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary, the perfect example of love for God and neighbour, as I cordially impart my apostolic Blessing to you and willingly extend to all the members of your Dioceses.

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