



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
OF THE NORTHERN REGION OF AFRICA (CERNA)
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Saturday, 9 June 2007

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I am pleased to greet you, Pastors of the Catholic Church in the countries of North Africa. In making your *ad limina* visit you have come to the tomb of the Apostles to renew your faith and strengthen the ties of your local Churches with the Successor of Peter and with the universal Church.

I thank the President of your Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Vincent Landel of Rabat, for his words expressing the diversity of the Church's commitments in your countries and the love of your communities for the land where they live.

In returning to your Dioceses, please convey the Pope's affectionate sentiments to the priests, the men and women religious and all the faithful, particularly those bound more closely to your countries.

I also warmly greet each one of the peoples among whom you live. May God bless them and help them to progress in their efforts to build an ever more fraternal and just society.

The diversity of the human and ecclesial situations in your countries is not an obstacle to the brotherhood that you wish to promote within your Bishops' Conference. You find in it an appreciable support for your ministry, especially in the trials that have marked some of your local Churches.

Your unity is a truthful witness borne of the Lord's teaching: "That they also may be in us, so that

the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17: 21).

Together with the priests of your Dioceses, who are faced with situations that frequently demand a great sense of Church and deep spiritual conviction as well as constant attention to the new appeals of the Spirit, you courageously assume the service of the people entrusted to your care.

May the Lord who accompanies you be the power and the joy of your ministry.

The brotherly encounter of the men and women in whose midst you live is one of the aspects you would like to improve as part of the Church's mission in your region.

In this perspective, I warmly encourage you to guide the faithful towards an authentic meeting with the Lord, who leads them to encounter their brothers and sisters and is already mysteriously present in the heart of each one and in everyone's quest for truth and happiness (cf. *Ad Gentes*, n. 11).

For this reason, may the Eucharist be the centre of your communities' life, just as it was intensely experienced by Fr Charles de Foucauld, whom your diocesan Churches had the joy of seeing beatified a few months ago.

Indeed, in the celebration of this great mystery and in Eucharistic Adoration, which are acts of personal encounter with the Lord, a true and profound acceptance of the aspect of mission matures that consists in breaking down the barriers between the Lord and us, as well as the barriers that separate us from one another.

In the early centuries, the Christian communities of your region helped to build bridges between the shores of the Mediterranean. Even today, St Cyprian, St Augustine and so many other witnesses of the faith remain undisputed spiritual, intellectual and cultural references.

Today, the members of your communities differ widely, both in their origin and because of the duration of and reasons for their presence in the Maghreb. They thus give an image of the universality of the Church, whose Gospel message is addressed to all nations.

Here, I would like in particular to greet the young Christians of Sub-Saharan Africa who are studying in your countries. May their reciprocal solidarity, with the fraternal support of their guides, help them as disciples of Christ to witness generously to their faith among their brethren.

The vigour and authenticity of the ecclesial witness of the faithful of your Dioceses, in their families and in the places where they work, study or live, requires that Pastors be close to them in their troubles and give them the necessary spiritual assistance.

This will also make the faithful aware of the ecclesial significance of their presence in society, while at the same time they assume the responsibilities incumbent upon them in the community.

By supporting their faith with the celebration of the sacraments and a solid Christian formation, as well as the search for an evangelical perception of the social, cultural and religious situations in the countries, you will enable them to face courageously the often difficult situations they encounter in their daily life and work.

The spiritual quality of Christian communities founded on the certainty that the Lord is always present and acts in and through them is essential if they are to account for the hope that sustains them. United with their Pastors in a climate of brotherly charity, may they truly be places where communion is lived as a manifestation of God's love for all human beings.

In this perspective, interreligious dialogue has an important place in your Dioceses' pastoral activities. As I have already had the opportunity to stress, "we are in great need of an authentic dialogue between religions and between cultures, capable of assisting us, in a spirit of fruitful cooperation, to overcome all the tensions together" (*Address to Representatives of Muslim Communities*, 25 September 2006; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 27 September, p. 2).

So, I am delighted to note that with projects for dialogue and meeting places such as study centres and libraries, you are committed with determination to developing and deepening relations of esteem and respect between Christians and Muslims, with a view to fostering reconciliation, justice and peace.

Moreover, Christians and Muslims can find in the sharing of daily life the essential basis for a better mutual knowledge.

Through brotherly participation in one another's joys and sorrows, especially in the most important moments of life, as well as through multiple forms of collaboration in the areas of health care, education and culture or in service to the least, you show an authentic solidarity. This reinforces the bonds of confidence and friendship between people, families and communities.

Among the important issues that confront your region, the emigration of people from Sub-Saharan Africa who attempt to cross the Mediterranean to enter Europe in search of a better life, calls for your collaboration at the service of justice and peace. The situation of these people, particularly worrisome and sometimes dramatic, can only challenge consciences.

The generous help that your diocesan Churches give them contributes to the recognition of their dignity and is a witness borne of the Lord.

I fervently hope that the countries affected by this migration flow may seek the effective means to

enable all people to have the hope of building a future for themselves and their families, and that every person's dignity may always be respected.

I would like to further emphasize the importance of consecrated life in your Dioceses. The unselfish devotion of men and women religious in their service to the population, without distinctions of origin or belief, is appreciated by all.

This life, given without reserve in detachment from self and in inner freedom, witnesses first and foremost to a radical belonging to God, which gives rise to the ardent desire to approach one's neighbour and in a privileged way, the most marginalized.

This belonging to Christ acquires an even more radical meaning in the witnessing of monks and nuns, to whom I would like to offer a special greeting and encouragement. Their life of prayer and contemplation is a grace for the Church in your region as a whole. Their discreet fidelity to the population that welcomes them, as the striking example of the community of Tibhirine demonstrated, is an eloquent sign of God's love which they desire to express to all.

The ever broader collaboration of your Dioceses with the Churches of the Middle East and Africa is an invaluable witness for your region, which is a crossroads between Africa, Europe and the Arab world.

The development of such relations will also be an effective implementation of the Church's solidarity in Africa and in the Middle East in her apostolic concern for your region.

Your reception of priests and women religious, whom you take care to train with a view to ecclesial situations often very different from those in their own countries, is a precious pastoral support and an opening to the universal dimension of mission for everyone.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I warmly encourage you in your ministry at the service of the peoples of your region. After the example of Bl. Charles de Foucauld, may the Christians of your countries be credible witnesses of the universal brotherhood which Christ taught to his disciples.

I entrust your communities to the motherly protection of Our Lady of Africa and wholeheartedly impart to you, as well as to the priests, men and women religious and all the faithful of your Dioceses, an affectionate Apostolic Blessing.

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