



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF MALI
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Papal Residence, Castel Gandolfo

Friday, 18 May 2007

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I welcome you with joy, Pastors of the Church in Mali, on your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. For you yourselves and for the life of your diocesan communities, it is an important moment which shows the communion of your local Churches with the Successor of Peter and the universal Church, and will help you to persevere with missionary dynamism. May your local Churches know that they have a place in the Pope's heart and prayers!

I thank Bishop Jean-Gabriel Diarra, President of your Bishops' Conference, for his kind words on your behalf and for his presentation of the Church's situation in your Country.

I am pleased to note the esteem in which the Catholic community in Mali is held by the Authorities and by the rest of the population.

I would like to greet warmly the priests, men and women religious, catechists and all the lay faithful of your Dioceses. I encourage them to live generously Christ's Gospel, which they have received from their Fathers in the faith.

I also address a greeting to all the inhabitants of Mali, as I ask God to bless each one of their families and grant that all may live in peace and brotherhood.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, in seeking your interior unity and the source of your energy in pastoral charity, the soul of your apostolate, as well as in the affection you show the flock entrusted to you, your ministry will achieve its full development and fresh effectiveness. Be ardent

Pastors who guide the People of God as men of faith with confidence and courage, and knowing that you are close to everyone in order to inspire hope even in the most difficult situations.

Indeed, "in the image of Jesus Christ, and following in his footsteps, the Bishop also goes forth to proclaim him before the world as the Saviour of mankind, the Saviour of every man and woman. As a missionary of the Gospel, he acts in the name of the Church, which is an expert in humanity and close to the men and women of our time" (*Pastores Gregis*, n. 66).

Guided by sincere charity and special concern, you are a father, brother and friend to each of your priests. They cooperate generously in your apostolic mission, and often while living in humanly and spiritually difficult situations.

While the diocesan clergy today are called to play a more active role in evangelization, in fraternal and trusting collaboration with the missionaries - whose courageous work I acknowledge -, priests must live their priestly identity by giving themselves to the Lord for the impartial service of their brethren without losing heart in the face of the difficulties they have to confront.

In ever more intimate communion with the One who called them, they will find unity in their life and, despite their diverse daily occupations, strength for their ministry at the service of the men and women entrusted to their care.

Prayer life and sacramental life are an authentic pastoral priority for priests, which will help them to respond with determination to the call to holiness they have received from the Lord, and to their mission to lead the faithful on the same path. May they never forget, as I wrote in my Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: "People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone" (n. 36).

If priests are to be effective in their work of evangelization and contribute to the spiritual growth of the Christian community, their formation must be planned with great care. Formation, in fact, is not limited to passing on abstract notions. It must train candidates for the priestly ministry while being effectively linked to the realities of mission and of the presbyteral life.

Human formation is the basis of priestly formation. Special attention to the candidates' emotional maturity will enable them to give a free response to life in celibacy and chastity, a precious gift from God. It will also enable them to have a soundly established awareness of this throughout their lives.

While the Church on your Continent is preparing to celebrate the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, the commitment of the faithful to the service of reconciliation, justice and peace is urgently needed.

Lay people must therefore acquire a fresh awareness of their special mission in the heart of the

one mission of the Church, and of its spiritual requirements for their lives.

In engaging with determination to build a just, supportive and fraternal society, they will thus be authentic messengers of the Good News of Jesus and will contribute to the coming of the Kingdom of God by sanctifying the world and imbuing it with a Gospel spirit.

If this participation in society's transformation is to be effective, it is indispensable to train competent lay people to serve the common good. Their formation, in which knowledge of the Church's social doctrine is an essential feature, must take into account their involvement in civil life so that they may be capable of dealing with their daily tasks in political, economic, social and cultural milieus, showing that probity in public life paves the way to trust on the part of all and to a balanced management of its affairs.

Through the action of the religious communities and committed lay people, the Church also makes an appreciable contribution to the life of society, especially by her educational work for the young generations, her care for people who are suffering and, in a general way, through her charitable institutions.

Nonetheless, these institutions must effectively be an expression of God's loving presence beside people in need.

As I emphasized in my Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, the Church's charitable activity has a specific profile; hence, it is important that it "maintains all of its splendour and does not become just another form of social assistance" (n. 31).

The effective support of the Nation's leaders for these scholastic, social and health-care institutions which are at the service of the whole population without exception, can only be a precious help for the development of society itself.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, your quinquennial reports reveal that the pastoral care of marriage is a real concern in the life of your Dioceses. Indeed, when the number of Christian marriages remains relatively small, it is the Church's duty to help the baptized, especially the young, to understand the beauty and dignity of this Sacrament in Christian life.

In response to the frequently expressed fear of the definitive character of marriage, a sound preparation with the collaboration of lay people and experts may thereby enable Christian couples to stay faithful to their marriage vows. They will become aware that the faithfulness of the spouses and the indissolubility of their covenant, whose model is the faithfulness shown by God in the indestructible Covenant which he himself contracted with man, are a source of happiness to those who marry.

And this happiness will also be shared by their children, who mirror the love their parents have for each other. A human and Christian education imparted from infancy and based on the parents' example will enable children to receive the seeds of faith and will allow them to develop within them.

In this spirit, I give thanks for those young people who are prepared to listen to God's call to serve him in the priesthood and in the consecrated life.

Lastly, I would like to express to you my satisfaction at knowing that the Catholic faithful of Mali maintain cordial relations with their Muslim compatriots. It is thus of paramount importance that proper attention be paid to deepening these relations and to fostering a fruitful friendship and collaboration between Christians and Muslims.

For this reason it is legitimate that the proper identity of each community be visibly expressed in mutual respect, in recognition of the religious diversity of the national community, and that it encourage peaceful coexistence at all levels in society. It will then be possible to proceed together with a common commitment to justice, harmony and peace.

As I conclude, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I offer you my warm encouragement for your mission at the service of Christ's Gospel. The Christian hope that must enliven you is a support for faith and a stimulus for charity. May Our Lady of Mali protect all the families of your Nation!

To each one of you, to the priests, men and women religious, seminarians, catechists and all the lay people of your Dioceses, I wholeheartedly impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing.

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