



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO BENIN

18-20 NOVEMBER 2011

**MEETING WITH PRIESTS, SEMINARIANS,  
MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS AND LAY FAITHFUL**

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI***

*Courtyard of St Gall Seminary - Ouidah*

*Saturday, 19 November 2011*

[[Video](#)]

*Your Eminence,  
Bishop N’Koué, responsible for priestly formation,  
Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,  
Dear men and women religious,  
Dear seminarians and lay faithful,*

Thank you, Bishop N’Koué, for your kind words, and thank you dear seminarian, for your own welcoming and respectful ones. It is a great joy for me to be among you, in Ouidah, and in particular in this seminary placed under the protection of Saint Joan of Arc and dedicated to Saint Gall, a man of outstanding virtue, a monk who desired perfection, and a pastor full of meekness and humility. What could be more noble than to have him as your model, as well as the figure of Monsignor Louis Parisot, indefatigable apostle of the poor and promoter of the local clergy, and that of Father Thomas Moulero, the first priest of the then Dahomey, as well as Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, eminent son of your land and humble servant of the Church?

Our encounter this morning offers me the opportunity to express directly to you my gratitude for your pastoral commitment. I give thanks to God for your zeal, in spite of the occasionally difficult conditions in which you are called to give witness to his love. I thank him for the many men and women who have proclaimed the Gospel in this land, and indeed throughout Africa.

Shortly, I will sign the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*. It will treat the question of peace, justice and reconciliation. These three values stand out as an evangelical ideal fundamental to baptismal life, and they demand sound acceptance of your identity as priests, as consecrated persons and as lay faithful.

Dear priests, the responsibility for promoting peace, justice and reconciliation falls in a special way to you. Owing to your reception of Holy Orders and your celebration of the Sacraments, you are called in effect to be men of communion. As crystal does not retain the light but rather reflects it and passes it on, in the same manner the priest must make transparent what he celebrates and what he has received. I thus encourage you to let Christ shine through your life, by being in full communion with your Bishop, by a genuine goodwill towards your brother priests, by a profound solicitude for each of the baptized and by great attention to each person. In letting yourself be modelled on Christ, you will never substitute the beauty of your priestly being with ephemeral and at times unhealthy realities which the contemporary mentality tends to impose on every culture. I urge you, dear priests, never to underestimate the unfathomable riches of the divine grace placed in you and which you have been called to live at the service of peace, of justice and of reconciliation.

Dear men and women religious, either active or contemplative, the consecrated life is a radical following of Jesus. May your unconditional choice for Christ lead you to an unlimited love for your neighbour. Poverty and chastity make you truly free to obey unconditionally the one Love which, when it takes hold of you, impels you to proclaim it everywhere. May poverty, obedience and chastity increase your thirst for God and your hunger for his Word, who, by increasing, transforms hunger and thirst into service of those who are deprived of justice, peace and reconciliation. Faithfully lived, the evangelical counsels transform you into a universal brother or sister of all, and they will help you to walk resolutely on the way of holiness. You will arrive there, if you are convinced that, for you, to live is Christ (cf. *Phil* 1:21), you will make of your communities reflections of the glory of God and places where you have no debts to anyone, except that of mutual love (cf. *Rom* 13:8). By means of your proper charisms lived with a spirit of openness to the catholicity of the Church, you can contribute to a harmonious expression of the immensity of the divine gifts at the service of all humanity!

Turning now to you, dear seminarians, I encourage you to place yourselves in the school of Christ in order to acquire those virtues which will help you to live the ministerial priesthood as the locus of your sanctification. Without the logic of holiness, the ministry is merely a social function. The quality of your future life depends on the quality of your personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ, on your sacrifices, on the right integration of the requirements of your current formation. Faced with the challenges of human existence, the priest of today and tomorrow – if he wants to be a credible witness to the service of peace, justice and reconciliation – must be a humble and balanced man, one who is wise and magnanimous. After 60 years in priestly life, I can tell you, dear seminarians, that you will not regret accumulating intellectual, spiritual and pastoral treasures

during your formation.

Dear lay faithful here present, you who are at the heart of the daily realities of life, you are called to be *the salt of the earth and the light of the world*, I urge you to renew yourselves and your work for justice, peace and reconciliation. This mission requires first of all a faith in your family built according to the design of God and in fidelity to his plan for Christian marriage. He also demands of you to be true *domestic churches*. Thanks to the power of prayer, “personal and family life is transformed, gradually improved and enriched with dialogue, faith is transmitted to the children, the pleasure of being together grows and the home is further united and consolidated” without ceasing (*Message for the Sixth World Day of Families*, Mexico, 17 January 2009, 3). By having love and forgiveness reign in your families, you will contribute to the upbuilding of a Church which is beautiful and strong, and to the advent of greater justice and peace in the whole of society. In this way, I encourage you, dear parents, to have a profound respect for life and to bear witness to human and spiritual values before your children. And I am pleased to recall that, ten years ago, Pope John Paul II founded at Cotonou a section for French-speaking Africa of the Institute which bears his name, to contribute to theological and pastoral reflection on marriage and the family. Lastly, I exhort especially the catechists, those valiant missionaries at the heart of the most humble realities, to offer them always, with an unshakable hope and determination, an outstanding and absolutely necessary contribution to the spread of the faith through fidelity to the teaching of the Church (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 17).

To conclude this conversation with you, I would like to encourage you all to have an authentic and living faith, which is the unshakeable foundation of a holy Christian life and which is at the service of the building of a new world. The love for the God who reveals himself and for his word, the love for the sacraments and for the Church, are an efficacious antidote against a syncretism which deceives. This love favours the correct integration of the authentic values of cultures into the Christian faith. It liberates from occultism and vanquishes evil spirits, for it is moved by the power of the Holy Trinity itself. Lived deeply, this love is also a ferment of communion which breaks down every barrier, promoting the building of a Church in which there is no segregation among the baptized, for all are made one in Christ Jesus (cf. *Gal* 3:28). With great confidence, I count on each one of you, priests, men and women religious, seminarians and lay faithful, to bring such a Church to life. As a token of my spiritual and paternal closeness, and entrusting you to the Virgin Mary, I invoke upon all of you, your families, the young and the sick, an abundance of divine blessings. AKLUNO NI KON FENU TON LE DO MI JI [*Fon: May the Lord fill you with his blessings!*]