



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF SOUTH AFRICA
ON THEIR «AD LIMINA» VISIT**

Tuesday, 27 April 1982

Dear Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. For the past week we have been meeting individually, in encounters of fraternal solidarity, speaking about the life of your individual local Churches. These have been moments of ecclesial communion; they have been moments of shared pastoral love for God's people, moments of hope for you and for me and for the Church. And now we have come to our collective meeting, which takes on a fuller *dimension of our collegiality* and becomes the expression of our common efforts to serve the People of God throughout the vast areas covered by the four ecclesiastical provinces of Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria and Bloemfontein, as well as the two Vicariates Apostolic in Namibia.

2. You are in Rome as pastors of a great portion of Christ's flock. As divinely constituted representatives of your local Churches, as successors of the Apostles, you are here to renew *the offering of your local Churches to Jesus Christ*, who is "the chief Shepherd" (1 Petr. 5, 4) of the whole flock. This you are doing together with the Successor of Peter and in ecclesial communion with all your brother Bishops throughout the world.

The will of Jesus Christ for his Church is the supreme criterion of all our pastoral action, of everything we say and do, of our plans for the future and our evaluation of the past. In our collegial action of examining our own pastoral ministry and of providing for the well-being of the Church that belongs only to Christ, we must remember the exhortation of the Letter to the Hebrews: "Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection" (Hebr. 12, 2). Hence we are gathered together in the power of Christ's Spirit, desiring only to discern and obey the Lord's will for his Church. The one who speaks to you today is particularly moved by the words of Jesus,

who, while promising to build the Church on Peter, nevertheless insists that it belongs to him: “And on this rock I will build *my Church*” (*Matth.* 16, 18). It is for the good of Christ’s Church - the People of God, the Body of Christ - that we pledge again all our efforts, endeavouring to profess apostolic courage and pastoral love.

3. Dear Brothers in Christ, you have come to the See of Peter, bearing the problems and difficulties, the joys and the anxieties, the aspirations, longings and hopes of your people. You come as pastors of ecclesial communities where, despite the vicissitudes of history and the weaknesses of human nature, Christianity has been faithfully lived by countless individuals and numerous communities over the years. In you and in your ministry I wish *to render honour to all the great works of supernatural charity and fraternal concern* that have been carried out, and are being carried out, in your Dioceses, Vicariates and Prefectures by yourselves, your priests, religious and beloved laity.

I am thinking of everything that has been done to manifest Christ’s love for the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden, the sick, the handicapped, the aged, the lonely, the abandoned, and those in mental and spiritual anguish. I am thinking of all the efforts made to ensure the Catholic education of the youth and to bring the transforming and uplifting message of the Gospel to individuals and communities. I am thinking of the generous dedication of generations of catechists who have endeavoured to lead their brothers and sisters to a greater knowledge of the mystery of Jesus Christ and his saving love. All of this, combined with the daily fidelity of thousands upon thousands of Christ’s followers, is *an eloquent testimony to the power of the Crucified and Risen Lord* that is at work in the hearts of the faithful. All of these are reasons for gratitude to God, for hope and confidence, for renewed commitment to our pastoral responsibilities. It is in the power of the Paschal Mystery that you and your faithful will always find encouragement and strength: “*Sursum corda!*”.

4. But there is more. I wish to thank you in the name of Christ and his Church for all your dedicated efforts on behalf of peace. You have striven vigorously *to help implant the peace of Christ in human hearts*, in families, in communities that have racial differences and are faced with serious racial discrimination, and throughout your nations. But its very nature, your work for peace, situated as it is in the historical framework of your local situations, has had to be concerned for freedom and for everything that freedom entails. You have worked conscientiously and perseveringly for justice and for human dignity, rightly insisting on non-violence and the need for reconciliation among brothers and sisters - so that all people may enjoy the freedom of the children of God, that freedom for which Christ set us free (*Cfr. Gal.* 5, 1). In fulfilling your ministry, you have endeavoured to apply fundamental Christian principles, some of which I alluded to in the context of the 1981 World Day of Peace: “Without a deep and universal respect for freedom, peace will elude man . . . Freedom is wounded when the relationships between peoples are based not upon respect for the equal dignity of each but upon the right of the most powerful . . .” (*IOANNIS PAULI PP. II Nuntius ob diem ad pacem fovendam toto orbe terrarum Calendis*

lanuariis a. 1981 celebrandum, 2, die 8 dec. 1980: Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, III, 2 (1980) 1629 s.). And again: "The freedom of the individual finds its basis in man's transcendent dignity: a dignity given to him by God, his Creator, and which directs him towards God. . . . To be free is to be able to choose and to want to choose; it is to live according to one's conscience" (*Ibid.* 5, die 8 dec. 1980: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, III, 2 (1980) 1632*).

In particular, I know that you are looking forward with positive hope to the difficult but necessary process that must result in a just and peaceful solution to the problem of Namibia for the good of its people. I am close to you in this pastoral concern of yours and I continue to keep this intention in my heart and to remember it in my prayers.

5. In striving to fulfil the practical demands of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *you find strength in the universal communion of Christ's Church*. Your union with the Bishops of the world and with me gives you support for your apostolic ministry. Millions of Catholics are praying everyday for the Church and her pastors, so that we may faithfully proclaim the liberating, reconciling and healing message of Jesus Christ. Sustained by the People of God, and fortified by the grace of the Saviour, you must continue confidently to uphold all the implications of evangelical freedom. The very words of Jesus are a constant inspiration for us and our people: "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (*Io. 8, 36*).

6. Through the sacramental grace of our ordination, the Holy Spirit enables us to act in all circumstances as Bishops of the Church of God. The Holy Spirit prompts us to see all situations in the light of the Church's mission, and in the light of our own specific pastoral role. As Bishops we are called to be leaders of a Church that rightly seeks those conditions of freedom and justice that are necessary for the initial stage of God's Kingdom on this earth. At the same time, as Bishops we have a prophetic role with regard to *the fullness of Christian freedom and life*. As I wrote in the abovementioned World Day of Peace Message: "To be set free from injustice, fear, constraint and suffering would be useless, if we were to remain slaves in the depths of our hearts, slaves to sin. To be truly free, man must be set free from this slavery and transformed into a new creature. The radical freedom of man thus lies at the deepest level: the level of openness to God by conversion of heart, for it is man's heart that the roots of every form of subjection, every violation of freedom, are found. Finally for the Christian, freedom does not come from man himself; it is manifested in obedience to the will of God and in fidelity to his love (IOANNIS PAULI PP. II *Nuntius ob diem ad pacem fovendam toto orbe terrarum Calendis ianuariis a. 1981 celebrandum*, 11, die 8 dec. 1980: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, III, 2 (1980) 1638*).

7. For this reason, as Bishops we must not hesitate to keep urging our people to *conversion of life*, just as Christ did. And Christ's example remained the pattern for Peter's preaching at Pentecost (Cfr. *Act. 2, 38*) and for all of us ever since then. Our proclamation of conversion is accompanied by the great announcement of God's unlimited mercy and loving forgiveness. This understanding of God's plan for his people incites us to apostolic fidelity and fortitude in expounding, in

accordance with the expression of the Second Vatican Council “the whole mystery of Christ” (*Christus Dominus*, 12). As you pursue this task, preaching a crucified Christ, know that the Lord Jesus is with you, and remember always that he personally is able by the power of his Spirit to condition human hearts to receive the revealed message of truth, even in its greatest demands, its highest ideals and its most challenging applications. With Saint Paul, each of us should confidently solicit the support of the people: “Pray for me to be given an opportunity to open my mouth and speak without fear and give out the mystery of the gospel . . .; pray that in proclaiming it I may speak as boldly as I ought to” (*Eph.* 6, 19-20).

8. Dear Brothers, by your presence here this morning, as by your entire episcopal ministry, you express *your faith in the power of the Risen Jesus*. It is only through the dynamism that flows from his death and Resurrection that we are able to proclaim his Gospel and to offer hope to our people. In spite of the various obstacles that affect your ministry, in spite of a lack of sufficient partners in the Gospel, in spite of the vastness of territory in which so many of you work, you have placed your hope in the Risen Lord and in his power to elevate human life and to transform human hearts from within.

9. When you return to your local Churches, I ask you to present my greetings to your people. I send a special remembrance to all the priests, deacons and religious who offer their lives so that the hope that was manifested at the Resurrection of Christ may permeate the lives of God’s people. I commend the success of your apostolate to Mary, the Mother of the Saviour and the Queen of Peace. I pray that she will help all your faithful *to understand the meaning of paschal hope*, and to be able to repeat those words with which the Apostle Peter once encouraged the early Christians: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (*1 Petr.* 1, 3).

With all our strength, dear Brothers, let us proclaim faithfully this “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”.