



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO BISHOPS OF MALAWI
ON THEIR « AD LIMINA » VISIT**

Saturday, 15 October 1983

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. As pastors of God's people in Malawi, you have come to Rome to fulfil the sacred functions of an *ad Limina* visit. On my part I welcome you with all my heart. But it is more than a welcome that I extend to you. I wish to express my profound gratitude for your apostolic labours, to tell you of my deep personal esteem, to assure you of my prayers, and to express to you *my fraternal love in Christ Jesus*. In the words of Saint Paul, I want you to know that I remember "before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (*1 Thess.* 1, 3).

2. The great importance that I attach to this visit of yours is also linked to the fact that you represent and personify the local Churches in Malawi. These local Churches that exist in your country are vital sectors of the universal Church; they are organically structured within the Body of Christ and they beautifully manifest ecclesial unity. What we are celebrating therefore is *the mystery of the Church*.

In your persons and in all the communities which are spiritually present with you here at the See of Peter, the mystery of the Church is made present in its *missionary aspect*. It is precisely because "the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature" (*Ad Gentes*, 2), that the faithful of Malawi are today an honoured portion of God's flock. It was through the missionary dynamism of the universal Church that your local Churches came into being. Today I cannot let this occasion pass by without praising the plan of God, formulated in his Eternal Word, to bring all history to fulfilment in Christ Jesus, "in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (*Eph.* 2, 21). Through the action of the Holy Spirit, the faithful of Malawi have duly entered into the temple of the Lord.

3. I wish likewise to pay homage to the means chosen by divine wisdom to bring the redemptive work of Jesus into the lives of your people. In the name of Christ and his Church *I thank in particular all the missionaries* for those generous activities whereby they offered the Gospel of life to all who would freely listen to their message. In our collegial unity today we recall the witness of their lives, their faithful preaching, and their arduous labours to build up each Christian community in the faith of Jesus Christ. In reflecting on the mystery of the Church in her missionary nature, we evoke this dimension not only to explain the origin of your local Churches but to clarify their role and *to illustrate how they are called to perpetuate the zeal of Christ* who says: "I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do" (*Luc. 4, 43*).

In celebrating the mystery of the missionary Church, *we are also celebrating the presence of Christ in the midst of your people*. This presence of Christ in the community is the result of missionary activity. As the Decree *Ad Gentes* states: "By the preaching of the word and by the celebration of the sacraments, whose centre and summit is the most Holy Eucharist, missionary activity brings about the presence of Christ, the Author of salvation" (*Ad Gentes*, 9). At the same time the Christ who lives in his people inspires them to further efforts at evangelization.

4. The reason why you yourselves are called to live and work and die among your people is to establish through the Church this presence of Jesus Christ. The Church exists *in order to manifest out of herself the light of Christ to all nations*. And in her relationship to Christ, she becomes a *sign and instrument of unity for all humanity* (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 1). The Church in your midst, endeavouring to live the life of Christ and to proclaim his uplifting message, is a Church that is called to serve the unity of all humanity. Through the fervour and witness of their Christian lives, the faithful are able to contribute greatly to the well-being of all their brothers and sisters. It is truly necessary for them to make every effort to present the content of the faith to all those who will freely choose to listen. But it is likewise necessary that the Christian charity of every individual and every community in the world should embrace all groups without distinction of race, social condition or religion. The faithful are called to collaborate with all others in the proper regulation of the affairs of economic and social life and to work together to better the human condition and to promote peace and harmony (Cfr. *Ad Gentes*, 12).

5. Your *ad Limina* visit, dear Brothers, is a splendid opportunity to ponder together the deep reality of your local Churches and to draw fresh strength from a renewed awareness of the greatness of the pastoral mission entrusted to you by Jesus Christ and his Church. *All your activities as pastors of God's people must be seen in the light of the mystery of the Church*. This mystery of the Church likewise inspires you in all the individual initiatives that you are called to exercise in the name of Christ. I would briefly allude to three areas of great importance for the life of the Church in Malawi: catechesis, vocations, and seminary training.

6. I wish, above all, to express my gratitude for the efforts that have been made *to prepare*

catechists to help in the mission of spreading God's word and of building up the Church. The Council characterizes their efforts as being "an outstanding and altogether necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church" (Cfr. *Ad Gentes*, 17). You can be sure that the Pope and the whole Church support you as you strive to provide worthily for the doctrinal and spiritual training of your catechists and to instruct them well in Sacred Scripture, liturgy, the catechetical method and pastoral practice, so that with you they may truly be heralds of the faith.

Together with you I thank God for *the vocations* to the priesthood and religious life that he has raised up in your midst. As Bishops you have shown great interest in religious and have offered them support and guidance. The Lord has also heard your prayers for vocations to the priesthood, even though the need is not yet fully satisfied. Be assured that he will assist you in your efforts to make ever more effective training available to your seminarians.

7. *This seminary training must indeed have a special priority in your ministry*, since the future of your local Churches depends to a great extent on its results. I ask you to continue personally to encourage your seminarians to strive for holiness of life through an ever more intimate union with Jesus Christ in prayer. Make every effort so that they will be formed in the word of God as it is found in the Scriptures and as it is expounded in the genuine teaching of the Church. Endeavour with all your strength to communicate to the seminarians the greatness of the challenge to which they are called by Christ himself. With God's grace continue to propose to the young people of Malawi the highest ideals of Christ's priesthood and the great privilege it is to serve God's people in this way.

I ask you to take back to all your priests, religious, seminarians and laity the expression of my love in Christ Jesus. My special Apostolic Blessing goes to the sick and lonely and to all those who suffer in any way for the sake of the Kingdom of God. I commend all the families of Malawi to the loving protection of Mary the Mother of God and Mother of the Church. With the assurance of my prayers and fraternal support, I embrace you in the *great hope that is ours as we proclaim and live the mystery of the Church of Christ*. Venerable and dear Brothers, the Apostle to the Nations urges us to immense confidence as he tells us: "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen" (*Eph. 3, 20-21*).