



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO ZIMBABWE, BOTSWANA, LESOTHO, SWAZILAND AND MOZAMBIQUE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF LESOTHO

Maseru (Lesotho)

Wednesday, 14 September 1988

My dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

1. It is a great joy to be with you here in your homeland. In these few hours that I have been *in Lesotho*. I have already begun to experience and appreciate, in a more profound way, the vibrant faith of the local Churches which you serve. Yours are "*new Churches*" at least in comparison with those of ancient tradition. As such, you bring to the universal Church a fresh awareness of the immense gift God has bestowed on all of us by bringing us to know and believe in his only Son, and by enabling us to share in his own divine life. "*Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are*" (1Jo. 3, 1). That is what we are! We are children of God, created in his own image, endowed with an inalienable dignity that knows no barriers of tribe or race, language or place of origin. We are all "*one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3, 28).

Our meeting this evening is but one more expression of the unity and communion of the followers of Jesus, and more particularly of that special bond of charity and faith which unites the bishops with one another and with the Successor of Saint Peter. Together with you and your faithful people. I praise *the Providence of God* which has made it possible for me to come on a pastoral visit to your beloved country.

2. I am particularly pleased that I am able to be with you as you celebrate *the 125th anniversary* of the Catholic Church's efforts to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the Basotho people.

And it is indeed most fitting that the highlight of this celebration should be *the beatification* of one of those first missionaries, *Father Joseph Gérard* of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. What he and his companions began here in this mountain Kingdom one hundred and twenty-five years ago was the great work of *evangelization*. And that work remains today – indeed it is in every land, in every age – *the primary task of the Church*.

Like the yeast Jesus spoke about in his own preaching, the proclamation of the Good News of salvation to the Basotho people had a very humble, almost hidden, beginning. *The seed of God's word* had first to be sown in the soil of people's minds and hearts before the new life of faith could spring up and grow.

The first Catholic missionaries numbered only three: Bishop Allard, Brother Bernard and Father Gérard. But, as that great Apostle Paul knew so well from his own experience, *God's power is at its best in weakness* (Cfr. *2Cor.* 12, 9). These men sowed the seed of God's word, and the Spirit of God made it grow. In a short time, the first converts came forward, moved by the grace of God, inspired by the Gospel message and by the holy lives of the preachers, and eager to increase in the knowledge and love of "the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God" (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22). From these humble beginnings, the Church in Lesotho has steadily matured and borne fruit. The beatification of Father Gérard marks one more landmark in the history of evangelization in this land.

Yet, the great task of evangelization is never completed as long as we dwell on the earth. As Pope Paul VI said about the Church in his Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World, "She needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love... she always needs to hear the proclamation of the 'mighty works of God' which converted her to the Lord; she always needs to be called together afresh by him and reunited. In brief, this means that *she has a constant need of being evangelized*, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigour and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel" (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15). And this remains our primary task as bishops, to give impetus in every age to the mission of proclaiming in its entirety the Good News of salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. *Evangelization is a multifaceted task*. It involves the evangelization of the mind, the evangelization of the heart, the evangelization of culture. It requires the active collaboration of the whole People of God, with the vital leadership of priests and religious and the special contribution of well trained catechists, all of them working in unity with the local bishop.

What is especially needed if our efforts are to bear fruit is that they be *rooted in the love of Christ*. If we really love him we shall be eager to make others know and love him too. Or to put it another way, our efforts to proclaim Christ and the Gospel are the measure of our love for him.

This is the secret of the success of *Father Joseph Gérard*: he was *a man on fire with love for*

Jesus. His more than sixty years of missionary activity bear witness to the depth and fervour of that love. And it is my hope that the beatification of this brother priest will encourage everyone engaged in preaching and teaching God's word, especially here in Lesotho.

4. My brothers in the Lord, I pray that this event in the life of your local Churches will bear fruit in new *vocations to the religious life and the priesthood*. There is no better way to ensure the continued evangelization of your people and your culture for, while everyone has a share in handing on the Good News of Jesus Christ, religious and priests play a particularly vital part.

I am aware that you have already been experiencing a most encouraging increase in religious and priestly vocations. May God continue to bless you abundantly in this regard, and I urge you to keep as a high priority the fostering of vocations. On your part, there naturally flows a great interest and active involvement in *the formation of these co-workers of the Gospel*. I am confident that you will continue to consider regular visits to the seminary and houses of formation, together with supervision of their entire programmes of discipline and study, as an important facet of your Episcopal ministry.

Since priests are our closest collaborators in the Church, indeed our brothers and sons in Christ, it is only right that *a relationship of mutual respect and fraternal support* should already begin while young men are preparing for sacred ordination. At the same time, the years of seminary formation provide an excellent opportunity for you, as bishops, to *instil in these future priests an enthusiasm for evangelization* and a pastoral concern for all God's people, in particular for the poor and sick.

5. While emphasizing the need for special solicitude for priests and religious, I in no way wish to overlook the pastoral care which we are called by our Saviour to give to *the lay men and women of the Church*.

The last Synod of Bishops held in Rome has made us all more aware of *the role of the laity in the life and mission of the Church*. The Synod drew attention to the need for solid religious education to continue throughout *a person's life* and not only during the time of youth, education which is given through well-prepared Sunday homilies to be sure, but which also requires additional initiatives to help our brothers and sisters to fulfil their responsibility in building up the Kingdom of God in the ordinary activities of life and work.

The needs are many, and much has to be done in order to respond adequately to the challenges that have to be faced. For example, I know that the *problems faced by migrant workers* are a particular concern for the Church in Lesotho. I know that you have made great efforts to reach out to them and their dear ones, to assure them of the Church's interest and love, to offer them solidarity and support in Christ. In this you have followed the magnificent example of Saint Paul, who once described his pastoral activity in the following words: "We felt so devoted and protective towards you, and had come to love you so much, that *we were eager to hand over to you not only*

the Good News but our whole lives as well" (1Thess. 2, 8).

Yes, *the temporal needs* of people are part of the Church's concern. Whatever affects our daily life affects our relationship with God and influences our readiness and ability to cooperate with grace and mercy. Thus, the Church teaches that "earthly progress is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God to the extent that it can contribute to the better ordering of human society" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 39). Your own endeavours to promote justice and true development are undoubtedly an authentic response to the demands of the Gospel.

6. I also want to support you in your efforts to strengthen and enrich *marriage and family life*. As the Second Vatican Council reminded us, the family is the "domestic Church" and the "beginning and foundation of society" (Cfr. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11). Thus the vitality and stability of our families are a measure of the vitality and stability of society, and a major factor in the Church's daily life. Whatever in society harms the family at the same time harms the Church. *Whatever in a culture enriches the family enriches the Church as well*. That is why a deep love for the Church always urges us as pastors of the People of God to exercise particular care for the family.

At the heart of the family lies the lifelong *communion of husband and wife*, a communion of life and love which begins with the *free and informed consent* of both the woman and the man. As Jesus reminded his listeners, the marriage covenant brings it about that husband and wife "are no longer two but one flesh" (Cfr. *Matth.* 19, 6). They are united by a freely made promise of mutual self-giving. They are called to deepen every day of their lives this indissoluble communion of love. It is their joy and their responsibility to share with each other what they have and what they are, all their hopes, their sorrows and their joys.

We pastors of the Church serve *married couples* by ensuring that *the Church's teaching on the nature of marriage* is clearly understood, and by helping them to be faithful to it through the word of God and the sacramental ministry. It is also our task *to protect the family* from practices or common misunderstandings which are harmful to conjugal fidelity and to the dignity of man and woman.

7. Dear brothers in Christ, our Episcopal ministry is truly an awesome responsibility, one that the Lord has given to us not because we are worthy but according to his own providence and mercy. As we seek to be faithful to him in the service of the Church which we love, we come to see in an ever deeper way the wisdom of the words of Mary in *the Magnificat*. "*The Almighty has done great things... Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age* for those who fear him" (*Luc.* 1, 49-50).

Yes, "the Almighty has done great things". His Providence brought to Lesotho Father Gérard and his companions. That same Providence has made fruitful your own pastoral endeavours as bishops and the whole work of evangelization.

On this my pastoral visit to Lesotho, I gladly offer you my fraternal encouragement and prayerful support. And I willingly join you in praising the goodness of God: "Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age".

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