



The Holy See

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

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND SEMINARIANS**

*Cathedral of Maseru (Lesotho)
Thursday, 15 September 1988*

“Ho rorisoe Jesu Kriste”!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. It gives me great pleasure to greet you with that beautiful greeting which Blessed Joseph Gérard taught to his first converts and which has become an honoured tradition among Catholic people of this country. Yes, praised be our Lord Jesus Christ! And praised be his Blessed Mother, especially today as we meet in this splendid church dedicated to her under the title of “Our Lady of Victories”.

Dear brother priests, dear Brothers and Sisters in religious life and my dear seminarians: After having celebrated the Mass of Beatification this morning, I am very pleased to have this time, later in the same day, to be with you who are so dear to my heart. The *beatification of Father Joseph Gérard*, a priest and a religious, is truly a landmark in the history of Lesotho. It is *a sign of God’s loving providence* at work in your midst. This is indeed a time to celebrate and give thanks to the Lord of history and the God of love who has called each of you by name and given you a share in his own divine life. And an important way of giving thanks to God is to recall the events of the past which have served as the channels of his blessings.

In the first place, we remember all the dedicated *missionary priests and religious of the past* – those men and women of strong faith and burning love who left behind their families and friends,

their own cultures and homelands, to bring the Gospel of Christ to the beloved people of this land. Those pioneer missionaries travelled through the mountains of this beautiful kingdom, sowing the seed of the Christian faith and laying firm foundations for a strong and vibrant Church. The very memory of those priests and religious calls to mind the words of the Prophet Isaiah: “*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of one who brings good news, who heralds peace, brings happiness, proclaims salvation*”[1].

Indeed, “how beautiful the feet of one who brings good news”! And that is what priests and religious are called to do. We must be joyful heralds of the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the rich heritage which is passed on to you today by the missionaries who have served in this land. Beginning with Father Joseph Gérard and his companions, the tradition of dedication to the preaching of God’s word and the work of total human development and liberation has been generously carried on by generations of priests and religious, most of them from foreign lands. To all those men and women of God we pay special tribute today. Through their labours, *the Church in Lesotho has experienced amazing growth*, in numbers and in works. The history of your country bears witness to the important contribution of priests and men and women religious, zealously working in many sectors of life, announcing Good News, heralding peace, bringing happiness, proclaiming salvation.

2. And now a new era is beginning in the life of the Church in Lesotho, *a new stage in the great task of evangelization*. It is a time marked by gratitude for the past and yet a readiness to face new challenges of the present and future, a time when the sons and daughters of Lesotho are now taking the place of many foreign missionaries, answering the call of Christ to carry on the Church’s pastoral care in continuity with what has gone before. Like Saint Paul, *the missionaries “succeeded as an architect and laid the foundations, on which someone else is doing the building”*[2]. The missionaries are still needed since they play an extremely important role, but it is right that ever greater responsibility should be assumed by the native sons and daughters of this land. At the same time, I rejoice that the Church here is now sending missionaries, especially women religious, to other lands. This too proclaims the abundant fruitfulness of the love of Christ in your midst.

As the Second Vatican Council taught, “The work of planting the Church in a given community of people reaches *a kind of milestone* when the community of the faithful, already rooted in social life and considerably adapted to the local culture, enjoys a certain stability and firmness. This means that the community is now equipped with its own supply, insufficient though it be, of local priests, religious and laity...”[3]. The Church in Lesotho has reached this milestone with the help of God’s grace and the efforts of many people. And the beatification of Father Joseph Gérard signals the attainment of a certain Christian maturity, a maturity that proclaims the greatness of God’s loving providence and the fruitfulness of divine grace at work in hearts that believe, a maturity that signals the local Church’s readiness for *a new era of growth in Christ*.

The Church in Lesotho, which has taken root so marvellously in this land, must now deepen the gift of faith and carry on the *unending task of evangelization*, particularly in those sectors which the Gospel has not yet reached. *The laity* must be helped to further the Kingdom of God in the ordinary events of daily existence. *The family* must be strengthened in unity and in its vital mission of life and love. *Society* must be uplifted and purified by the Gospel; social evils must be opposed and overcome, with justice and equality firmly established and secured by law. Then there are the special needs of *young people, the elderly, the sick and the disabled*. And the responsibility for this great enterprise falls, in a special way, upon the shoulders of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, the priests and future priests, the men and women religious, whom God has called to serve him and his people in this land.

3. Remember the words of our Saviour: “*You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last*”[4]. Christ has called you to be his “friends”. Christ has sent you forth. Christ has entrusted to you the work of evangelization. Of course, every baptized person receives this charge and has a part to play. But in a particular way the Lord asks you, priests and religious, to *take the lead in proclaiming the Good News of salvation and in bearing public witness to the Gospel*. To you he says, as he said to the Apostles: “Teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time”[5].

Yes, *the Lord is with you always*. Never forget these reassuring words. May they be your consolation and your strength, your inspiration and your joy. The Lord is with you always, in whatever service you perform within the Church: in prayer, in the apostolate and in all your efforts on behalf of justice. Above all, the Lord is with you in the liturgical assembly. For this reason you must all be *men and women of the Eucharist*. For as the Church teaches: “The other sacraments, as well as every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are linked with the Holy Eucharist and are directed towards it. For the most Blessed Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself”[6].

In your communion with Christ you will find the strength to fulfil your mission in the Church. In Lesotho, as in any other country, this will mean an *evangelization of your culture*, that is an evangelization of your customs and traditions, your arts, your music, all those natural qualities and values that make up your society. All of these things should be purified and enriched by the light and power of the Gospel.

But how does one evangelize a culture? How does one assist the work of the Holy Spirit in your midst? One begins by *evangelizing people*, for culture is produced by people and is shaped by the quality of the relationships that they have with one another and with God. And thus the *first step* is to evangelize as Jesus himself did, namely by *calling people to conversion*. Remember the first words of Jesus in his public ministry, as recorded in the Gospel according to Saint Mark: “The time has come” he said, “and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good

News”[7]. The Christian life, in fact, entails constant conversion. A special help in doing this is the regular reception of the Sacrament of Penance. Every aspect of our personal and social life *must be purified and inspired by the truth and love of Christ*. Only then can the laws and institutions of society be made to conform to the demands of justice and human dignity. It takes time to change attitudes and practices, but indeed they can be changed. With the help of God’s grace and the power of Christ’s Death and Resurrection, each of us can put on the mind and heart of our Lord and God.

4. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: the mission you have received from God is indeed a vital one for the Church and for the world, a mission that will undoubtedly involve a share in the Cross of Christ and at the same time a share in his risen life. As Saint Paul reminds us: “*It is all God’s work. It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation*”[8].

We must never forget this truth: “God reconciled us to himself. Our vocation began as God’s work, God’s gift of reconciliation and communion with himself. In grateful appreciation of this gift, make every effort to *preserve and deepen your union with God*, especially through daily prayer and a joyful imitation of Jesus in his chastity, poverty and obedience. This is the secret of a fruitful ministry in the Church; it is the path that Blessed Joseph Gérard followed in his long life of priestly service. Jesus himself has told us: “*Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing*”[9].

Our communion with Christ will necessarily overflow in loving communion with one another. This is the commandment Jesus gave to his disciples: “*Love one another, as I have loved you*”[10]. *Among priests*, there exists a special brotherhood rooted in their sacramental ordination. Thus it is only natural that they should love one another as brothers, support one another, in the ministry of word and sacrament, and make constant efforts to encourage one another through prayer, charity and mute help.

Already in *the seminary* this spirit of priestly fraternity should have its beginning. Indeed, one of the purposes of priestly formation is to foster in each seminarian the human and spiritual qualities that will enable him to be an effective minister of reconciliation and a genuine brother in Christ to the other priests of his diocesan presbyterate.

Of course, *religious life* offers countless opportunities for growing in love not only of God but also of one another. Common prayer and a corporate apostolate are just two examples of ways that religious live a community life, rooted in mutual charity. Even more important for a deep spirit of brotherhood or sisterhood is the “*oneness of mind and heart*” that is fostered by their shared pursuit of holiness, their communal charism and their lifelong commitment to follow Christ in keeping with the Gospel and the Constitutions of their specific institute.

As God's "chosen ones" and as servants of the Church, all of you, priests and seminarians, religious Sisters and Brothers, are called to *build up and strengthen the unity of all who believe in Christ*. Special efforts are at times needed to foster fruitful collaboration between the clergy and religious or between different religious institutes. The laity must be accepted as true brothers and sisters in Christ, with a vital role in the mission of the Church and with a right to our friendship and encouragement. And no ministry in the Church can have lasting fruit if it is not carried out in faithful collaboration with the local bishop, in communion with the universal Church.

5. My brothers and sisters: I will close these remarks by making my own the exhortation of Saint Paul to Timothy: "*Fan into a flame the gift that God gave you...* God's gift was not a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power, and love, and self-control. So you are *never to be ashamed of witnessing to the Lord...* but with me, bear the hardships for the sake of the Good News, relying on the power of God"[\[11\]](#).

Never be ashamed of witnessing to the Lord!

Both in word and in deed, bear witness before the world to the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And may the Blessed Virgin Mary and Blessed Joseph Gérard help you by their prayers and heavenly protection.

God bless you all.

[\[1\]](#) *Is.* 52, 7.

[\[2\]](#) *1 Cor.* 3, 10.

[\[3\]](#) *Ad Gentes*, 19.

[\[4\]](#) *Io.* 15, 16.

[\[5\]](#) *Matth.* 28, 30.

[\[6\]](#) *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

[\[7\]](#) *Marc.* 1, 15.

[\[8\]](#) *2 Cor.* 5, 18.

[\[9\]](#) *Io.* 15, 5.

[10] *Ibid.* 15, 12.

[11] *2 Tim.* 1, 6-8.

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