



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO MADAGASCAR, LA RÉUNION,
ZAMBIA AND MALAWI

MEETING WITH THE PRIESTS,
RELIGIOUS AND SEMINARIANS OF ZAMBIA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Cathedral of Lusaka

Tuesday, 2 May 1989

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. I wish to thank Archbishop Mungandu for the gracious words of welcome spoken on your behalf at the beginning of this service. In coming here this evening to meet you – the priests, religious and seminarians of Zambia – I wish to *express my love for you* and my esteem for all that you are doing to build up the Church in your country. As Successor of Saint Peter and Universal Pastor I can assure you that your joys and sorrows are also my own.

It is very fitting that our meeting should take place within the context of prayer and the celebration of God's word. Our reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans reminds us of a fundamental truth about our Christian existence: we have been *called to live a new life in Christ*. This vocation is the basis of our further commitment in the priesthood or the religious life.

Referring to Baptism, Saint Paul writes: "We were buried with Christ, so that as he was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life... You must see yourselves as being dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus" (*Rom. 6, 4.11*). *Baptism is the source of new life*. It is the source of every believer's vocation in Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we die to sin and are raised up to communion with God, to a life of grace, to the

holiness that is a gift from God. In Baptism we are incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ; we become part *of the mystery of Christ himself*.

2. We are fast approaching the *centenary* of the coming of Christianity to this country. It is an appropriate moment to look both to the past and to the future. How could we forget the pioneering missionaries, people like Father Van Oost, Father Depaillat and Bishop Dupont of the White Fathers; the first Jesuits – Father Kraupa, Father Moreau and Father Torrend, who arrived from the East and the South? Nor can we forget the Dominican Sisters and the White Sisters, especially Mother Jean de Valois and Mother Claver.

The efforts of the first missionaries and their hopes for evangelization are now in your hands. You in turn will pass the work on to those who are now in formation. I ask you to *keep alive the missionary spirit* and to cultivate the seed that has been sown here. Ever since those early days of the first stirrings of Christianity in this land, there has been an extraordinary bond of closeness between priests, religious and laity. We can thank God that this close relationship has remained strong in spite of political and social changes. Over the years people have looked to the Church for direction, for sound leadership based on charity and fidelity to authentic teaching. They continue to do so today, and they expect you to help lead them with similar zeal into the Third Millennium.

Like the first missionaries, many of you – both men and women – have come from other countries to continue the work of sowing, cultivating and reaping. On behalf of the whole Church, I thank you for your generous gift of self, made out of love for Christ and his people. I encourage you *to persevere* in fulfilling the mission that you have so gladly undertaken.

3. The great work of *evangelization* in Zambia, both past and present, has *one purpose*: that people may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, they may have life in his name (Cfr. *Jo.* 20, 31). Here again we are confronted with the great mystery of dying and rising with Christ in Baptism. The new life of grace impels us to preach the Gospel of salvation to others, to love and serve them as Christ did in bearing witness to the Kingdom to come.

Through Baptism every person shares in the *sacramental mission of the Church*, but for those who are called to the priesthood or religious life there is a renewed consecration to the service of God. All the greater then is your Christian obligation to die to sin and to live a new life, the life of grace, life according to the Spirit. All the more compelling is your Christian duty to seek perfection in keeping with the Lord's command: "You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Matth.* 5, 48). The life of every priest or religious is no longer just his or her own; it is given in total service to Christ for the building up of his body, the Church.

4. Dear brothers in the priesthood: through the Sacrament of Holy Orders we have been made living instruments of Christ, the Eternal Priest. We have been endowed with a special grace that enables us to live in Christ despite our human weakness, to become one with him, who became a

high priest for our sake, “holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners” (*Hebr. 7, 26*). *The holiness of priests is of the greatest importance in the work of evangelization.*

As ministers of the sacred mysteries, especially the Eucharistic Sacrifice which is “the source and summit of Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium, 11*), you act in the person of Christ himself. You fulfil your principal mission and manifest your priesthood most fully when you celebrate the Eucharist – all the more so when this mystery penetrates people’s hearts and minds because you, their priests, *live the mystery* that you celebrate (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Dominicae Cena*, 2). May the celebration of Mass for and with your people always be your greatest joy and strength.

You have also been entrusted with the power to bind and loose in *the Sacrament of Penance*. Here I wish to repeat what I said last year to the priests in Zimbabwe: “Love this Sacrament and receive it often” (Eiusdem *Allocutio ad presbyteros, “Bulawayo”, in Zimbabwe habita*, O, die 12 sept. 1988: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XI, 3 [1988] 711). If it is our duty to help others to be converted and live, all the more is it our responsibility to do the same: “Being converted means returning to the grace of our vocation... (and) meditating upon the infinite goodness and love of Christ... It means constantly rendering an account before the Lord of our hearts concerning our service, our zeal and our fidelity... (It) also means constantly rendering an account of our negligences and sins, of our timidity, our lack of faith and hope, of thinking only as men think and not as God thinks” (Eiusdem *Epistula ad universos Ecclesiae Sacerdotes adveniente Feria V in Cena Domini*, 10, die 8 aprile 1979: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II [1979] 857 ss.).

Within the context of the Sacrament of Penance I also encourage you to remember the Lord’s words: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine... and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?” (*Luc. 15, 4*). Our priesthood requires us to go out of our way to bring faith and reconciliation to those who do not yet know Christ or who have wandered from the practice of their faith.

5. My dear brothers and sisters in *religious life*: I also give thanks to God today for you and for all that you are doing to bring forth a rich harvest in the Lord’s vineyard in Zambia. Each one of you has a special gift to offer, whether through your apostolate in the world or, like the Poor Clares, through a life “hidden with Christ in God” (Cfr. *Col. 3, 3*). The contemplative state serves to remind all religious of their call to be “*specialists in prayer*” (Cfr. Pauli VI, die 28 oct. 1966: *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, IV [1966]).

Through the profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, you bear witness to God’s Kingdom and build up the Body of Christ by leading others to a life of conversion and holiness. I urge you to remain faithful to the charism of your Institutes and to work closely with the bishops in carrying out your apostolate (Cfr. *Mutuae Relationes*, 8). Allow the mystery of “new life in Christ” to penetrate every aspect of your lives, so that whatever you do, in word or deed, is done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Cfr. *Col. 3, 17*).

A life of chastity, poverty and obedience, willingly embraced and faithfully lived, *contradicts the accepted wisdom of the world* about the meaning of life. But your religious witness can transform the world and its ways of thinking and acting precisely through your love for all, your detachment from material things and your self-giving.

In your commitment to Christ, who “emptied himself” for our sake (Cfr. *Phil. 2, 7*), you must be ever conscious of your compatriots who are struggling with economic and social crises. So many of them are living in poverty, faced with insecurity and fear of the future. Both your way of living and your apostolate should be at the service of these people and should always reflect your close association with them. I urge you therefore to manifest *a real and tangible solidarity with the life, struggles and uncertainties of your brothers and sisters*. Only if you accept this essential aspect of your religious vocation will you find the joy that is Christ’s gift to those who have left everything to follow him. How extremely valuable is the witness of your lives – if authentic and joyful – for the people of Zambia as they continue to find joy and fulfilment in their age-long traditions, now enriched by the values of the Gospel.

6. Finally, I wish to address *the seminarians* present here today. Much of what I have said thus far also applies to you. You have come here today from all the dioceses of Zambia, and I thank God for the youthfulness, enthusiasm and vigour that I see in your faces.

I am also grateful to God for the increasing numbers of vocations to the priesthood and to religious life in this land. You are the *spes gregis* – the hope of Christ’s flock – upon whom the people depend. Your faith and generosity in heeding the call that you believe God has given to you speaks volumes to other young people. It is my fervent prayer that the generous spirit of service that fills your hearts today will remain with you and grow, “so that seeing your good works, people may give glory to your Father in heaven” (Cfr. *Matth. 5, 16*).

I urge you to make good use of your years of preparation for the priesthood. Deepen *your personal knowledge of Christ* through prayer and study, through reflection and self-discipline. I am happy that a Spirituality Centre has recently been opened in which candidates for the Major Seminary can deepen their spiritual life in order to better serve God’s people as priests.

To speak of the priesthood is to speak of a *lifelong commitment to celibacy*. This charism too is made possible by the “new life in Christ” that we received at Baptism. Remember that whenever God gives us a particular vocation he also gives us the grace needed to fulfil it. But we must put all our trust in him without reserve. We are merely the earthen vessels, he is the potter. He is free to mould us as he chooses (Cfr. *2Cor. 4, 7*).

7. Finally, dear brothers and sisters – priests, religious and seminarians of Zambia – I say to you: rejoice; rejoice in the Lord and in the new life that you share through Baptism. Christ speaks to you, saying: “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (*Jo. 16, 24*). We can be confident

that God will not refuse any good gift to those who seek to dedicate themselves completely to his service, for the salvation of the world. I commend all of you to his loving Providence and I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.