



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
TO MADAGASCAR, LA RÉUNION,
ZAMBIA AND MALAWI

MEETING WITH THE PRIESTS,
MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS
AND SEMINARIANS OF MALAWI

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Limbe Cathedral in Blantyre
Thursday, 4 May 1989

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Dear Friends in Christ,

1. It is with affection and gratitude that I greet each of you and all the *priests, men and women religious and seminarians of Malawi*. I have just set foot in your country, and already I sense that your hearts radiate the love of Christ. I am deeply moved to recall what has been accomplished here over the years through the efforts of the early missionaries: dedicated men and women like yourselves who brought the Good News of salvation out of love for Christ and for others, who heeded the Lord's command "to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last" (*Jo. 15, 16*).

Many of you are *long-time residents* of Malawi who came here *from abroad*. You have taken to heart the words of the Gospel by leaving parents, relatives and homeland in order to put your hand to the plough without looking back (Cfr. *Luc. 9, 62*). I pray that your many sacrifices will redound to the glory of God. May you receive the heritage reserved for those who have made the Lord their chosen portion and cup (Cfr. *Ps. 16, 5-6*).

Others of you are part of an increasing number of *Malawian vocations* to the priesthood and to

religious life. I join the whole Church in praising God for this harvest, which manifests the growing maturity and depth with which the Gospel is received and lived among the families and communities of this country. These special vocations represent the finest flowering of a seed planted and nurtured by those who have gone before you.

2. My meeting with priests, men and women religious and seminarians is an important part of each pastoral visit that I make, and today is no exception. Our time together this evening provides a special opportunity for me *to confirm you in your faith, to encourage you in perseverance and hope, and to remind you of the love that Christ has for each one of you*. I have come as Bishop of Rome, as Successor of Peter, as Pastor, but I stand before you as a brother, as a fellow worker in the Lord's vineyard, who like you has been called to preach the Gospel of God's mercy and love and to manifest that love to others.

Our presence together in this cathedral likewise reminds us of the *mystery of hierarchical communion* which is at the very heart of the Church's life and mission. None of us labours alone in the Lord's vineyard. Bishops exercise their ministry as members of the College of Bishops with one another and with the Successor of Peter, who is the source and foundation of unity (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 18. 22). Priests, whether diocesan or religious, are co-workers and cooperators with their bishop with whom they constitute a single presbyterate in the service of the local Church; they are brothers to one another by virtue of their ordination and their common mission (Cfr. *ibid.* 28). And all men and women religious are called to respect one another and their pastors (Cfr. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 6); they are to heed the bishops in all that pertains to the unity of the local Church and to the apostolate undertaken within its boundaries (Cfr. *Christus Dominus*, 35).

3. Dear brothers and sisters: the "soul" of ecclesial communion and of these relationships within the Church is found in the commandment we heard a few moments ago in the Gospel. Jesus tells his disciples: "Love one another, as I have loved you" (*Jo.* 15, 12). *Today Jesus speaks these same words to his disciples in Malawi* and throughout the world, and he addresses them in a special way to us, the priests and religious of his Church. For we must be examples to the flock of the Good News of salvation that we proclaim in and through our respective vocations: *we must be examples of love*. Otherwise, as Saint Paul so pointedly reminds us, we are nothing more than "a noisy gong or a clashing cymbal" (*1Cor.* 13, 1).

Christ speaks of love in the context of his redemptive work: the "*laying down*" of his life for his friends. Concerning this, Saint John writes: "By this we know love, that Christ laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (*1Jo.* 3, 16). We are to love as Christ has loved us. We must see our priesthood and religious consecration as a "laying down" of our lives for the salvation of our friends, that is, of every human person.

For us the imitation of Christ includes a *free choice of celibacy*, which "has always been considered by the Church 'as something that signifies and stimulates charity': it signifies a love

without reservations, it stimulates to a charity which is open to all” (Pauli VI *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 24). Christ’s example of love is also the source of the special consecration that belongs to men and women religious. In the words of the Second Vatican Council: “They follow Christ, who, virginal and poor, redeemed and sanctified men by obedience unto death on the cross. Under the impulse of love, which the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts, they live more and more for Christ and for his Body, the Church” (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1).

Dear brothers and sisters: I urge you to reflect often on the love of Christ which is the origin and goal of your respective vocations. Always look for ways to deepen your fidelity to that love with your eyes fixed on him – the Eternal Priest, Shepherd and Bridegroom of your souls. For it is love that draws people to communion with the Lord in the Church. It is a life of self-sacrifice and self-giving that confirms the truth of the message we preach.

4. This evening’s Gospel text also presents another aspect of Christ’s love which has important consequences for priests and religious. The disciples are Christ’s friends because “he has made known to them everything he learned from the Father” (Cfr. *Io.* 15, 15). His love for them led him to reveal the life-giving mysteries of God’s kingdom. *Love made him their teacher.*

From this passage and from others in the Gospel, we know that Christ commissioned those he loved to be teachers after him, “to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last”. *He entrusted to the Church the sacred mission of teaching* in his name to the ends of the earth, and in fulfilling this mission priests and religious have always exercised a special role.

If we would know how to teach, we must also know how to love “as Christ loved us”. He was often called “teacher” (Cfr. *ibid.* 1, 38), and he taught with authority – not an authority which he imposed, but one which people recognized as authentically from God. By his manner of teaching he perhaps reminds us of the elders of African villages to whom people go for guidance and instruction. These elders share their knowledge and experience freely, and for this they are respected.

Christ made known everything he had learnt from the Father (Cfr. *Ibid.* 15, 15). Since the first Pentecost this knowledge has been passed on and shared by those with an official teaching office, but also by others, especially within the family and school. From our own experience we know what it means to be taught by parents for whom teaching and love are inseparable. It is from their example above all that we learn the meaning of human life and of virtue. Just as their teaching is very often unspoken or limited to small gestures, so too our own good influence on others may be greatest in work that goes unnoticed or in example that strikes no one as extraordinary. Priests and religious who have been “schooled” in Christ can accomplish wonders – “*mirabilia Dei*” – by the love which transforms every action, however humble or routine, into a living example of the Gospel. It is this kind of love radiating from Christ’s friends that draws others to him.

This evening I wish to encourage all of you to be *teachers after the heart of Christ*, both in formal teaching settings and in the influence you exercise elsewhere by your example. He has made himself known to you out of love so that you in turn might bring him to others. Rest assured that *the more faithful you are to your own special vocation in the Church the more effective you will teach the love of Christ to others.*

5. I would now like to say a few words to the *seminarians* who, God willing, will one day share the life of service of which I have spoken this evening. You are the future pastors and teachers of God's people. You too are Christ's friends.

Your years of training in the seminary are a precious period of *growth* and development *in your personal relationship with the Lord*. Before you can give your life to the rewarding yet challenging service of the Gospel, you need to deepen through prayer and study your understanding of the mystery of Christ and of his Church. *Priesthood is a permanent commitment* by which you are called to love as Christ loved us, that is, by laying down your life and by teaching as Christ did. If you persevere in this commitment of love not only up to the day of ordination but through all of life, you can be certain that God's grace will never fail you. You will know abundant joy and peace in the service of the Lord.

In a special way I commend to you young men the closing words of this evening's Gospel: "You did not choose me but I chose you" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 15, 16). Yes, the gift of a vocation to the priesthood is not something you seek for yourselves. It has nothing to do with status or privilege as the world understands these things. *Your great privilege will be to lay down your lives with Christ the Eternal Priest* if you are truly called to this vocation. May God help each of you to discern his will so that you too may "go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last".

6. Upon all of you – the priests, men and women religious and seminarians of Malawi – I invoke an outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit for building up Christ's Body, the Church. And in this cathedral dedicated to Mary, the Queen of Hearts, Mother of Divine Love, I commend your daily labours to her powerful protection. With confidence in her prayers for you and for all those who make her Son known and loved in the world, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.