



The Holy See

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

HOLY MASS IN THE "NATIONAL STADIUM"

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

*Gaborone, Botswana
Tuesday, 13 September 1988*

"Peace be with you... Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained" (Jo. 20, 21-23).

*Beloved Brothers and Sisters,
Dear Friends in Christ,*

1. In today's Gospel we read that following the crucifixion, on the first day of the week, Jesus' disciples gathered behind closed doors because they were afraid. As yet they had little time to ponder the reports of Peter, John and Mary of Magdala that the Lord had risen from the dead. Suddenly, Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them "Peace be with you", and immediately *their fear was turned to joy*.

Like those first disciples, *we too can experience this transformation*.

All our fears can be turned to joy by the presence of the Risen Lord who comes to us in a special way in this Sacred Liturgy. His words to the disciples, "Peace be with you", are now addressed to us.

His visible presence among them is equally real to us in the celebration of the Eucharist.

2. What are the causes of humanity's fears? The prayers and readings of today's Mass express a yearning for justice and peace. It is precisely the *absence of justice and peace*, in our lives and in the world, that so often troubles us and arouses our fears. We know that the vision of the Prophet Micah remains unfulfilled: Nation still lifts sword against nation. There is much training for war. So many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world long to sit untroubled in the shade of their vine and fig tree, as the Prophet says, but are prevented from doing so.

The Second Vatican Council tells us that the causes of discord in the world are many. These include excessive *economic inequalities* and a lack of resolve to apply the needed remedies. There is also the desire for power, a disregard for others, and at a deeper level, *envy, mistrust, pride and selfish passions* (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 83). The Council also speaks of fears that arise from within ourselves, from our *self-doubts and questioning*, our failures and anxieties, our groping for authentic human development and freedom, and above all from *the reality of sin* (cfr. *ibid.* 4.10.21).

3. The Church does not claim to have a ready answer or a simple solution for every problem or fear that besets the human family. But today, dear brothers and sisters, we gather together in the conviction that "fear is driven out by perfect love" (1 *Jo* 4.18). We proclaim and celebrate the fact that perfect love has been revealed in Jesus Christ. In him *God has reconciled the world to himself* and has given us the gift of peace through the power of the Holy Spirit. And what is more, God has entrusted the *ministry of reconciliation* to us, his Church: "The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you'. 'As the Father sent me, so I am sending you'... Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained" (*Jo* 20, 20-23). *Forgiveness*, then, is the key that unlocks the door to peace – the forgiveness that Christ won for us on the Cross. As Saint Paul tells us: "God wanted... all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his Death on the Cross" (*Col* 1, 19-20).

In today's Gospel the Risen Lord appears to his disciples as the *Crucified one*: "He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side" (*Jo* 20, 19-20). He showed them the marks of his suffering, the marks of his perfect love. It was very fitting then that we began this liturgy with the presentation of the Cross by the youth of Botswana. They have carried it throughout the land as a sign of their willingness to imitate their Lord and to obey him. For those who have faith, the Cross is no longer an instrument of fear and death, but *a trophy of life and peace*. We are called to take up the Cross every day "so that (God) may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths" in accordance with the vision of the Prophet Micah (*Mic.* 4, 2). At the same time we recognize that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, his ways are not our ways (Cfr. *Is.* 55,8). The Cross reminds us of our need for conversion, our need to turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel. *True justice and peace depend on conversion*, which requires a daily effort on the part of every person to live the Gospel faithfully in the face of temptations and of obstacles.

4. The reconciliation of all human beings with God and with each other which Christ accomplished on the Cross is at the heart of *every celebration of the sacraments*. As we read in one of our liturgical texts, "From (Christ's) wounded side flowed blood and water, the fountain of sacramental life in the Church" (Praef. "Sacri Cordis"). Dear brothers and sisters: we cannot emphasize enough the importance of this sacramental life. Sacraments make us *sharers in the reconciliation and communion* that are essential for our own peace and for the peace of the world. They strengthen us for the daily struggle to turn away from sin and to believe in the Gospel. They nourish us with the very life of God. For the Christian community the forgiveness of Christ comes to us in a special way through Baptism and the Sacrament of Penance.

5. Sacramental life, in its deepest sense, is *the very heart of the Church in Botswana*, as it is for every local Church. The first missionaries had a burning desire to bring to this land a new life in Christ both by word and sacrament. Their witness to the Gospel was inseparable from their commitment to justice and peace and from their vision of a world reconciled and redeemed. The sacraments not only sustained them, but also made their labours fruitful in the lives of your forebears and in the lives of each of you today, for we know that as actions of Christ, sacraments bring about what they signify; they are alive with the power of God.

Each of you has responded to God's offer of reconciliation and peace by your *faith and baptism* and by your *commitment to participate* in the Church's sacramental life.

The desire to bring others to full participation in Christ's saving mysteries has not been limited to the clergy and religious of Botswana. Mention must be made of the *first catechists* who travelled tirelessly from village to village in order to teach and instruct those preparing to receive the Eucharist, so that they might be fully initiated into the Church. *Today* many people continue to give of their time to *help instruct both children and adults* for baptism. Efforts are likewise made to deepen the faith of those who hold responsible positions in the Church and in society. There are also those lay people who, from the very beginning until now, have opened their homes to the community for the celebration of the sacraments so that their brothers and sisters could be nourished by Christ's Body and Blood. In all of these ways, both in the past and in the present, the life of the Church in Botswana has centred on sacramental participation in Christ's Paschal Mystery.

The Mass which we celebrate today is indeed a very special and historic occasion. It is a great joy for me, the shepherd whom Christ has appointed for the whole Church, to offer his Eucharistic Sacrifice with all of you – the clergy, religious and laity of Botswana. Through communion with your bishop and with the Successor of Saint Peter, you are united with every other local Church in *bonds of unity, charity, and peace*, as this liturgy so beautifully expresses. At the same time, I know that the deep faith and Christian commitment that fill this stadium today are much more than passing sentiments. They arise from living the Gospel every day, humbly and without fanfare, and are nourished by faithful participation in the Church's sacramental life.

Dear brothers and sisters: *never lose your love for these divine gifts* which confer new life in Christ. When you fall into sin, do not fail to seek pardon and peace in the *Sacrament of Penance*, remembering that “God the Father of Mercies, through the Death and Resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins” (“Ritus Poenitentiae”). You must frequently nourish your heart and soul on Christ’s body and blood in the *Eucharist*, for he tells us. “If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you will not have life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day” (*Io* 6, 53-54).

6. The world in which we live presents *many challenges* to those who seek to be ministers of reconciliation, promoters of justice, and builders of peace. The lack of justice and peace is an obstacle to authentic human development; an obstacle that can be overcome only by a firm commitment on the part of Christians and all people of good will to work for a more just and peaceful world, both nationally and internationally. But we must also remember that reconciliation begins with our own *conversion*, and grows within the intimate circle of those with whom we live and work every day. This applies in a special way to *marriage and family life*. As I stated in my Apostolic Exhortation “*Familiaris Consortio*”: “The family is the first and fundamental school of social living: as a community of love, it finds in selfgiving the law that guides it and makes it grow”... (*Familiaris Consortio*, 37). “The spiritual communion between Christian families... constitutes an inner energy that generates, spreads and develops justice, reconciliation, fraternity and peace among human beings” (*Ibid.* 48).

Like many other people in the world today, you are experiencing a *weakening* in your country of many *traditional customs* and safeguards surrounding marriage and the extended family. Sometimes there is a clash of ideas between spouses as to their proper relation to each other. Young people do not always accept the values of their parents. Economic factors, especially the need to find work, also take their toll on family life. Among Catholics there is an increased acceptance of divorce. Those in mixed marriages are sometimes tempted to abandon their faith.

In the face of these difficulties we must not be timid or afraid, like the disciples in the Gospel who at first remained locked behind closed doors. Remember how their fear was turned to joy by the presence of the Risen Lord. “Peace be with you” he told them. “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you” (*Io* 20, 21). If the Risen Lord is with you, you need not be afraid. *Do not be afraid*, then, *of the demands of love*, especially the demands of married love. For the love which makes demands is the same love which leads to life and to the fullness of joy in the Lord. Confident of God’s help, we must seek to preserve the dignity of marriage by upholding its *sacredness and indissolubility* in accordance with the Church’s teaching, which is the teaching of Christ.

There are many dimensions to our Christian witness concerning marriage. The whole Church in Botswana must work to *prepare couples before marriage*, and to encourage and help them afterwards through prayer, retreats and other efforts which deepen their appreciation of this

sacrament. A special effort must be made to help those couples and families who are experiencing difficulties. Young people, in particular, need *encouragement to act responsibly* and to show true Christian love for one another based on self-control and mutual respect.

7. I appeal to all the young men and women of Botswana: Do not allow yourselves to be misled by a *false permissiveness* that appears to be freedom, but is really slavery. Always remember that true freedom means *being able to choose what is right and good*, and not what is one's pleasure. It is freedom from selfishness and sin. Do not allow materialism and consumerism to impoverish your souls to the detriment of married love and family life, Remember, too, that you are not just individuals, in competition for selfish aims. As part of the human family and as members of God's holy people, you are called to work with others for the good of all. Only in this way can you fulfil your mission as followers of Christ, "who did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Marc 10, 45*).

This call to service also includes the *priesthood and religious life*, vocations of vital importance to the life and mission of the Church. As you think of your future, do not exclude the possibility that God may be calling you to serve his people as a priest, or as a Brother or Sister I ask all the Catholic people, and parents in particular, to pray for an increase in these vocations among your sons and daughters, your neighbours and friends. Be generous in encouraging them to follow the Lord along these paths in accordance with his will.

8. In today's liturgy we have heard the Psalmist proclaim: "I will hear what the Lord God has to say, a voice that speaks of peace, peace for his people and his friends and those who turn to him in their hearts... Justice shall march before him and peace shall follow his steps" (*Ps 85 [84], 13*).

My brothers and sisters of Botswana: through Baptism you became members of God's holy people. By turning your hearts to him in Christian living and the sacraments, you grow in his grace, his friendship.

In your search for justice and peace, listen to "what the Lord God has to say". Follow in Christ's footsteps *without fear*. Christ who is our reconciliation; Christ who is God the Father's *word of peace* to us: Christ Crucified and Risen from the dead.

"Justice shall march before *him* and peace shall follow *his* steps" (*Ibid. 18*). Amen.

**ACT OF ENTRUSTMENT TO MARY
AT THE CONCLUSION OF MASS**

Holy Mother, Mother of the Church, Mother of all humanity: I, John Paul the Second, entrust the *land and people of Botswana* to your loving care.

Through your maternal intercession, may this *local Church* grow in holiness and grace, and may its *benefactors* be blessed for their kindness and generosity.

I entrust to you *Bishop Setlalekgosi* and all the *clergy and religious* of the Diocese of Gaborone. May they be filled with apostolic zeal and compassion, and may they grow in their love of what is unseen, so that their witness to God's kingdom will be strong and fruitful. Intercede for this Church, Blessed Lady, that it may be enriched by an increase of *vocations* to the priesthood and to religious life. Help all those who aspire to these special vocations to persevere if God has truly called them.

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, I entrust to you all the laity of Botswana. You know how they desire to be faithful to their baptismal promises to turn away from sin and to believe in the Gospel. Lead them to an ever greater love for your Son, Jesus Christ. Sustain them in their daily efforts to be the "salt of the earth and the light of the world" (Cfr. *Matth.* 5, 13-14) so that they may lead others to salvation.

Be present to the *catechists* of Botswana. May they learn knowledge and understanding from you as they seek to deepen the faith of others. Turn your loving glance to all who *teach* in the Catholic schools, to all who *minister to the sick* in Catholic health care facilities, to all the *laity in every walk of life* who seek to build up God's kingdom in this country and throughout the world.

Immaculate Virgin Mary, I entrust to you in a special way all *husbands and wives*. May their marriage and family life be for them a path to holiness and joy. May their sons and daughters, the young people, who are the future of the Church and of Botswana, be delivered from all temptation and harm, and always remain faithful to Christ.

Holy Mother of our Redeemer, inspire the hearts of all the faithful with an ever greater love for the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Lead back those who have *fallen away* from the practice of the faith to full participation in your Son's Paschal Mystery.

O Mary, Mother of Compassion, I entrust to you all *those who have experienced trial and suffering* in their lives, whether moral, spiritual or physical. May their patient endurance help to further the redemptive work of your Son. Give help and fresh courage to the homeless and unemployed, to those whose family life is troubled, and to the men, women and children who have known the sorrow of broken homes. I entrust to you all those whose lives demand special respect and care: *the unborn, the handicapped, the sick, the elderly and the dying*.

Look with kindness, Holy Mother, upon *all the people of Botswana, whom I entrust to you today. Help them to work for that development* which is truly human and at the service of the dignity and rights of every person. May they never lose their respect for religion and religious freedom.

Queen of Peace, preserve this land in domestic peace. Give wisdom to *leaders* in society and government, so that all the citizens of Botswana may live in *freedom, justice, peace and true prosperity*, now and in the days to come. Amen.

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