



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF LESOTHO
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Tuesday, 16 April 1996

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. It is with great joy that I greet you, the members of *the Lesotho Catholic Bishops' Conference* who, like the Apostle Paul in the early days of the Church, have come to see Peter (Cfr. *Gal.* 1, 18). Your visit *ad limina Apostolorum* gives concrete expression to the ties which bind the whole Church of God in communion and fellowship, making us all "one in Christ Jesus" (*Ibid.* 3, 28). In greeting you, I embrace the clergy, the men and women religious and the lay faithful of your Dioceses. In the full joy of the Easter season we must raise our voices in prayer and thanksgiving to God, for "by his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 *Petr.* 1, 3).

This living hope, this faith, emboldens us to proclaim that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Act.* 4, 12). This must ever be the basis of our preaching and teaching as we tend Christ's flock and seek to lead new disciples to him. My predecessor, Pope Paul VI, said it well: "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed" (Pauli VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22). The power of the Holy Spirit sustains us as we fulfil our obligations in this regard. The work of evangelization, once begun, must not be interrupted. People everywhere thirst for the transcendent dimension which the Good News brings to their lives; new generations await the proclamation of the Gospel.

2. The Church has a duty to present the Gospel in such a way that it can be grasped and understood by people of every background. Thus, each particular Church ought to develop "the

ability to express Christ's message in its own way" and at the same time foster "a living exchange ... between the Church and the diverse cultures" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 44). This is the *inculturation* which is necessary "for a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Ecclesia in Africa*, 59). It is a twofold process, involving "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity" and "the insertion of Christianity into the various human cultures" (Eiusdem *Redemptoris Missio*, 52). Your task as Bishops is to *oversee* this effort and to *guarantee its genuineness*. In Africa, as I have had the privilege to note personally on many occasions, including my most recent visit last year, there are many elements in the life of the continent's peoples which can serve as channels to make the Gospel message better known and understood.

These same elements, once imbued with the spirit of the Gospel, bring about the transformation of situations and circumstances which require healing. Such contact with the boundless grace of Christ (Cfr. *Rom. 5, 17.20*) is what the people of Lesotho long for, and it is what you are called to help them achieve.

Yes, dear Brothers in the Episcopate! "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (*Jo. 1, 16*). This must be the object and substance of your proclamation, as you constantly remind your people of the *hope which is ours in Christ Jesus* (Cfr. *1 Tim. 1, 3; 4, 10*). "For we have not a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses" (*Hebr. 4,15*). The compassion, comfort and peace of Christ must be your faithful and consistent message to the people of Lesotho, especially to those who face some of the more difficult situations which you have referred to in your *ad limina* reports: the migrant workers who are forced by economic conditions to earn a living far from home, often for long periods of time; the women who must bring up their children on their own; the married people who must cope with the loneliness caused by a spouse's long absence; the children who are without the loving care and influence of one of their parents; the labourers and professional people coming home only to find increasing unemployment and hardship.

3. I am aware that in addressing these and other situations you *work in close contact and co-operation with the other Ecclesial Communities* present in your country, especially within the framework of the Christian Council of Lesotho. Without losing sight of the ultimate aim of *ecumenical dialogue*, which is the search for the full unity of Christ's disciples, there is already ample room for joint action in the defence of human dignity and freedom, in the service of the common good, and in bringing assistance and relief to those in need.

4. In fulfilling your pastoral responsibilities, you are assisted by the priests, consecrated "for building up the Body of Christ" (*Eph. 4, 12*), whom God has given you as your co-workers. As "a true father who excels in the spirit of love and solicitude" (*Christus Dominus*, 16), a Bishop should encourage and sustain his priests. Nothing can replace the personal role which you play in helping them to "rekindle the gift of God which is within them through the laying on of hands" (Cfr. *2 Tim. 1,6*). Support them as they strive for continual conversion and seek to deepen their identification with Christ the High

Priest.

I am confident that, notwithstanding all the demands made on your resources, you will continue to give priority to *the training of candidates to the priesthood*, especially in what concerns that deep faith and Christian virtue which will enable them to be credible witnesses, in word and deed, to the Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ. Saint Augustine's Major Seminary is a precious asset of the Church in Lesotho. I am certain that the Rector, directors, teachers and students, who form "a kind of family" (*Optatam Totius*, 5), will make every effort to be a true community of faith, imbued with "harmony in spirit and behaviour" (*Ibid.*). Do not hesitate to send your best priests to serve in the Seminary (Cfr. *ibid.*); in every aspect of seminary life, candidates need to see the true identity of the priest, configured to Christ the Good Shepherd and called to make the Lord's love present for all (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 21-23).

5. *Consecrated men and women too have a particular claim on your pastoral care.* Encourage them in their way of life and their loving service, that they may continue to be outstanding heralds of the Gospel. It is especially through the work of Religious in education and health care in the Kingdom of Lesotho that the Church is able to make a significant contribution to the improvement of society. I would recommend to you, and ask you to recommend to your Religious, the recently published Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation « *Vita Consecrata* », as an instrument for reflection on their specific vocation in the Church: "A precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the People of God, since it is an intimate part of her life, her holiness and her mission" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Vita Consecrata*, 3).

When I remember my pastoral visit to the Church in Lesotho, I have a vivid recollection of the *catechists and lay leaders*, who have such a determinative role in the implantation and expansion of the Church in Africa (Cfr. EIUDEM *Ecclesia in Africa*, 91). I would like to express a special word of gratitude and appreciation to them. May they always find in you the help they need to obtain a proper formation and to develop a clear awareness of their particular role in the Church and in society.

As for the laity, they should be strengthened in their Catholic identity, so that they may bear convincing witness to Christ and his truth, in the home, in the workplace and in society at large. This is true above all of the Christian family, the "domestic church". No effort should be spared in supporting and defending this first and vital cell of society. *Couples in mixed marriages* need particular pastoral attention, in order that there may be no weakening of faith. In the task of securing a revitalization of faith, *small Christian communities* can be particularly effective in fostering knowledge of God's word and active involvement in parish life and community service. They are especially useful in helping the Church to respond to *the pastoral needs of the young*, who have to feel the support of the ecclesial family if they are to meet the challenges presented by new cultural models. If young men and women are encouraged to play a more active role in the life of the Church, more of them will be led to respond to the grace and call of Christ to follow him in a vocation to priesthood or the religious life.

6. The aim of all your pastoral efforts is that "serious deepening of the faith" which is particularly

necessary today, given the modern phenomena of "family uprooting, urbanization, unemployment and materialistic seductions of all kinds" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Ecclesia in Africa*, 91). In this regard, Lesotho's Catholic Schools are one of your greatest assets, and one of your principal pastoral concerns. I encourage your efforts to seek a better understanding with the Government in order to overcome the difficulties currently being experienced in the Lesotho school system. The effectiveness of your schools in serving the needs of the nation's children depends greatly on their *maintaining a specific Catholic identity*. The Church's presence in education, as well as in the areas of social service and health care, is the practical expression of Christian love, a love which has to expand to meet ever new challenges. The current socio-economic situation of your country is creating difficulties for virtually all sections of the population, thus making charity and solidarity all the more necessary. An authentic witness of spiritual and material service is always the test of the credibility of Christ's followers.

7. With the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 drawing ever nearer, the whole Church is called to prepare for the special graces which that commemoration will surely bring (Cfr. EIUSDEM *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 15). To this end, I encourage you to consider how you can lead your people to a more intense experience of the Church as Christian fellowship, a living unity wherein all members share their spiritual gifts and make visibly present the one divine life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I ask you to take back to your Dioceses my warm greetings and the assurance of my prayers and concern for them. I commend the Catholics of Lesotho to the loving intercession of Mary and of your own Blessed Joseph Gérard, and I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of strength and peace in our Risen Saviour.

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