



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF MALAWI
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT***

Thursday, 6 November 2014

[Multimedia]

Dear Brother Bishops,

I offer a joyful welcome to you who have come from “the warm heart of Africa”, as you make your pilgrimage to Rome, “the warm heart of the Church”. I pray that the Lord will richly bless you during these days of prayer, meetings and dialogue. May Saints Peter and Paul, whom you have come to venerate, intercede for us all, so as to strengthen the bonds of spiritual communion between the Successor of Peter and the Church in Malawi. I thank Bishop Joseph Zuza for the kind words he offered on your behalf and on behalf of the priests, religious and laity of Malawi. I ask you kindly to assure them of my spiritual closeness.

I wish to begin by expressing my esteem for each one of you and for the good work that you do – indeed, that the Lord does through you – in your ministry to God’s holy people in Malawi. The effectiveness of your pastoral and administrative efforts is the fruit of your faith as well as of the unity and fraternal spirit that characterize your episcopal conference. The communion that you live, which is a sign of the oneness of God and of the unity of the universal Church, has enabled you to speak with one voice on matters of importance to the nation at large. In this way, together with your priests, you are ensuring that the Gospel message of reconciliation, justice and peace (cf. *Africae Munus*) is proclaimed for the good of all society. I pray that your fellowship in “one heart and one soul” (*Acts* 4:32) may continue to be a hallmark of your ministry, and that it may always grow and continue to bear rich fruit.

I wish also to express my appreciation for the admirable spirit of the Malawian people, who, though faced with many serious obstacles in terms of development, economic progress and

standards of living, remain strong in their commitment to family life. It is in the family, with its unique capacity to form each member, particularly the young, into persons of love, sacrifice, commitment and fidelity, that the Church and society in Malawi will find the resources necessary to renew and build up a culture of solidarity. You yourselves know well the challenges and the value of family life, and, as fathers and shepherds, you are called to nurture, protect and strengthen it in the context of the “family of faith”, which is the Church. Indeed, for Christians, family life and ecclesial vitality depend on and reinforce each other (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 62, 66-67).

In this regard, dear brothers, it is essential that you keep always before you the needs, experiences and realities of families in your efforts to spread the Gospel. There is no aspect of family life – childhood and youth; friendship, engagement and marriage; spousal intimacy, fidelity and love; interpersonal relations and support – which is excluded from the healing and strengthening touch of God’s love, communicated through the Gospels and taught by the Church. There is scarcely a greater commitment that the Church can make to the future of Malawi – and indeed, to her own development – than that of a thorough and joyful apostolate to families. “Pastoral activity needs to bring out more clearly the fact that our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 67) – a humanizing and sanctifying process that begins, and finds its natural fulfilment, in the family. Thus, by doing everything you can to support, educate and evangelize families, especially those in situations of material hardship, breakdown, violence or infidelity, you will bring inestimable benefit to the Church and all of Malawian society.

A natural result of this apostolate will be an increase in young men and women who are willing and able to dedicate themselves to the service of others in the priesthood and religious life. As the Church in Malawi continues to mature, it is imperative that the strong foundations laid by generations of faithful missionaries be built upon by local men and women evangelizers. We can never be satisfied with past gains, but must always strive to share blessings and advance the mission of the Church (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 69). This is a sure sign that our motivation is a love which seeks the good of the other. Where genuine love for Christ and neighbour is fostered, there will be no shortage of generous priests and men and women consecrated to God in the religious life.

In a special way, I would ask you to be close to your priests, to listen to them and to support them. They often feel pulled in so many different directions, responding with charity and often at great personal sacrifice. They need to know that you love them as a father should. One indispensable way to show this paternal care is by providing candidates for the priesthood with an ever more complete human formation – upon which an integrated spiritual, intellectual and pastoral training depend. I encourage you to further your efforts to ensure that seminarians and religious be adequately prepared for ministry in your country, so that God who has begun the good work in them may bring it to completion (cf. *Phil* 1:6). Well formed priests and religious in turn will be able joyfully and selflessly to offer the fruits of their formation in the service of the new evangelization,

so necessary for Malawi and the whole world.

I know that you are conscious of the Church's responsibility to youth, who are a precious part of Malawi's present and the promise for her future. Do not hesitate to offer them the truths of our faith and to show them the joy of living out the moral demands of the Gospel. Preach Christ with conviction and love, thus promoting the stability of family life and contributing to a more just and virtuous culture.

Dear brothers, the number of people in Malawi living in poverty and who have a much reduced life expectancy is a tragedy. My thoughts go to those suffering from HIV/AIDS, and particularly to the orphaned children and parents left without love and support as a result of this illness. Continue to be close to those in distress, to the sick, and especially to the children. I ask you, particularly, to offer my gratitude to the many men and women who present Christ's tenderness and love in Catholic healthcare institutions. The service which the Church offers to the sick, through pastoral care, prayer, clinics and hospices, must always find its source and model in Christ, who loved us and gave himself up for us (cf. *Gal* 2:20). Indeed, how else could we be followers of the Lord if we did not personally engage in ministry to the sick, the poor, the dying and the destitute? Our faith in Christ, born of having recognized our own need for him who has come to heal our wounds, to enrich us, to give us life, to nourish us, "is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 186). I thank you for being close to those who are ill and all the suffering, offering them the loving presence of their shepherd.

With these thoughts, dear brother Bishops, I commend all of you to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and with great affection I impart my Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to all the beloved priests, religious and lay faithful of Malawi.