



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 12 September 2014*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

It is with great joy that I address my fraternal greeting to Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya and each one of you, on the occasion of your visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. I thank Bishop Nicolas Djomo, President of your Episcopal Conference, who, expressing your sentiments of faithful communion, described some of the characteristics of the life of the Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Your pilgrimage to the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, joined in your witness to Christ who died and rose even to the supreme sacrifice, tightens your bonds of communion with the Apostolic See, as well as among you and with Bishops the world over. For my part, while expressing my deep appreciation for your dedication and your zeal in proclaiming the Gospel, I would also like to greet and encourage the priests, consecrated men and women and other pastoral agents who work with you, as well as all the faithful of your dioceses.

With you I thank the Lord for his many gifts to the Church in your country. The Family of God, on the path to the Kingdom, is comprised of living communities whose members actively participate in the celebration of the liturgy and bear a courageous witness of charity. As beautifully expressed by the Psalmist, the Lord has given what is good and our land has yielded its fruit (cf. Ps 85[84]:13).

Faithfulness to the Gospel implies that the Bishop, with wisdom, guides and governs the flock entrusted to him. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep and his sheep know him (cf. Jn 10:14). The presence, the closeness and the steadfastness of the Bishop in his diocese are necessary to reassure the priests and candidates to the priesthood, in order that all the faithful may feel

accompanied, followed and loved.

An outstanding feature of the Church in your country is that it is in a phase of expansion. It is so beautiful to observe that some Christian communities are growing! But for the Church, as you know, the essential is not the numbers but full obedience, without reservation, to God revealed in Jesus Christ. The quality of faith in Christ who died and rose, the intimate communion with Him, is the basis of the soundness of the Church. As a result, it is of vital importance to evangelize in depth. Faithfulness to the Gospel, to Tradition, and to the Magisterium are sure points of reference which guarantee the purity of the spring to which you guide the People of God (cf. Encyclical Letter, *Lumen Fidei*, n. 36).

The Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where several dioceses have recently celebrated the first centenary of their evangelization, is a young Church. But she is also a Church of young people. Children and adolescents, in particular, need the strength of God to resist the multitude of temptations that result from the instability of their life, from the impossibility of pursuing their studies or of finding work. I am sensitive to their difficult situation, and I know that you share their suffering, their joys and their hopes. I especially think with horror of those children, those youth, obliged to enlist in the army and compelled to kill their fellow countrymen! I encourage you to deepen the pastoral apostolate to young people. By offering them all possible help, above all through the creation of places for human, spiritual and professional training, you can reveal to them their deep vocation which prepares them to meet the Lord.

The most effective means of overcoming violence, inequality and also ethnic divisions, is to offer an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature values of the Gospel (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 64). Pastoral care should also be strengthened in universities, as well as in Catholic and State schools, by coordinating the work of education with the explicit pronouncement of the Gospel (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 132-134). Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I invite you to be apostles of youth in your dioceses.

In the same spirit, facing the the breakdown of the family, caused especially by war and poverty, it is essential to value and encourage all the initiatives designed to stabilize the family, the wellspring of all fraternity, the foundation and the first pathway to peace (cf. *Message for the 47th World Day of Peace 2014*, n. 1).

Faithfulness to the Gospel also implies that the Church contributes to building the city. One of the most precious contributions the local Church can offer your country is helping the people rediscover the relevance of faith in daily life and the need to foster the common good. In the same way, the nation's leaders, illuminated by the pastors, with respect for their respective roles, can also receive support in order to integrate Christian teaching in their personal life and in the exercise of their functions in service to the State and to society. In this sense, the Magisterium of the Church, the Encyclical Letter, *Caritas in Veritate* in particular, the Post-Synodal Apostolic

Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, as well as the recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, constitute invaluable aid.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I exhort you to work tirelessly for the establishment of a just and lasting peace, promoting pastoral dialogue and reconciliation among the diverse sectors of society, supporting the disarmament process and effective collaboration with other religious confessions. Now that your country is about to engage in high-level political meetings important for its future, it is necessary that the Church offer her contribution while, at the same time, avoid substituting for the political institutions and temporal organizations which must retain their autonomy (cf. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76). In particular, pastors must be careful not to occupy a post reserved to the lay faithful, whose mission it is to witness to Christ and the Gospel in politics and in all the spheres of their special competence (cf. Conciliar Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, nn. 4, 7). It is therefore fundamental that the lay faithful be trained in this view, and that you never cease to support them, to guide them and to provide them criteria for discernment in order to enlighten them. In this sense, I have no doubt that you will continue to work to raise the awareness of public authorities in order to conclude the negotiations for a signed Agreement with the Holy See.

It would be preferable, in the spirit of solidarity and sharing, that closer collaboration be developed with all agents of pastoral care engaged in the various areas of the apostolate and in social care, especially in education, healthcare and charitable assistance. Many expect vigilance and concern from you in the defence of spiritual and civic values: you are called to offer direction and solutions for the promotion of a society founded on respect for the dignity of the human person. In this respect, attention to the poor and the many in need, such as the elderly, people who are sick or disabled, should be the object of pastoral care that is appropriate and continually reexamined. In fact, the Church is called to concern herself with the wellbeing of these people and to draw the attention of society and of the public authorities to their situation. I greet and I encourage the work of all missionaries, priests, men and women religious and other pastoral agents who expend themselves serving life's wounded, the victims of violence, especially in the remotest and most isolated areas of the country. In mentioning this theme, I address a special thought to the internal refugees and to the many who come from neighbouring countries.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, lastly, I would like to reaffirm to all of you my affection and my encouragement. May you persevere in your generous commitment to the service of the Gospel! May you be men of hope for your people! May the bright testimony of Blessed Marie-Clémentine Anuarite Nengapeta and of Blessed Isidore Bakanja never cease to inspire you! I entrust you to the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles, I wholeheartedly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to all of your coworkers, priests, religious and lay people, and to each of your dioceses.
