The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE COMMUNITY
OF THE PONTIFICAL ETHIOPIAN COLLEGE IN THE VATICAN

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 11 January 2020 [Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

I am happy to receive you today and to give thanks with you for the centenary of the Ethiopian College. I greet the Bishops who have come from Ethiopia and Eritrea, among whom are two Metropolitan Archbishops, Cardinal Berhaneyesus and Archbishop Tesfamariam; the community of students with their Superiors, in particular Father Rector and the Vice-Rector; the women religious, who are very committed to caring for you, and the lay staff. I greet Cardinal Sandri and Archbishop Vasil' and I thank the Congregation for the Oriental Churches which supports the life of the College. Thanks also to the benefactors, to whom I also express my gratitude. I greet the Capuchin Friars with the Minister General, representatives of the Pontifical Oriental Institute; and the many Ethiopian and Eritrean priests and friars.

The Ethiopian presence within the Vatican Walls, at first as the pilgrim church and hospice and in the last 100 years, as the College, leads us back to one word: *welcome*. Throughout the centuries, children of peoples geographically distant from Rome, but very close to the faith of the Apostles in professing Jesus Christ the Saviour, have found shelter and hospitality near the tomb of the Apostle Peter.

Very beautiful are the words of the great monk Tesfa Sion, Peter the Ethiopian, buried in the Church of Saint Stephen of the Abyssinians, inscribed on his memorial, where today and tomorrow you will celebrate the liturgy. The quotation reads: "I myself am Ethiopian, a pilgrim from place to place… but nowhere, except in Rome, have I found peace of mind and body: peace of mind because here is the true faith; peace of body, because here I have found the Successor of Peter, who provides for our needs". With his wisdom, he enriched the Roman Curia and edited the text of

the New Testament in the Ethiopian language.

Still today, you, student priests from Ethiopia and Eritrea, two Churches united by the same tradition, bring among us the richness of the history of your lands, with ancient traditions, the coexistence among men and women belonging to the Jewish faith and the Islamic religion, in addition to the numerous brothers of the Orthodox Tewahedo Church. I was able to meet here in Rome H.H. Patriarch Mathias of Ethiopia to whom I send my fraternal greetings.

In meeting you, I think of many of your brothers and sisters in Ethiopia and Eritrea, whose lives are marked by poverty, and until a few months ago, by a fratricidal war, for whose end we thank the Lord and those in the two countries who were involved in first person. I always pray that you may set store by the years of suffering experienced by both sides and that there will be no more division among ethnic groups and between countries with the same roots. May you priests always foster good relations, be builders of peace. May you teach the faithful who will be entrusted to you to nurture this gift of God, dressing the inner and exterior wounds that you will encounter while seeking to promote paths of reconciliation for the future good of the children and young people of your lands.

It is sad to have to recall that many of them, spurred by hope to leave their land, at enormous cost and effort, subsequently often experienced tragedies on land and at sea. I give thanks for the reception that your faithful were able to experience and for the commitment that some of you now experience in following them pastorally in Europe and on other continents. More and better can still be done both in your homeland and abroad, bringing to fruition the years of study and sojourn in Rome, in humble and generous service always on the basis of the union with the Lord to whom we have given our entire lives.

I encourage you to keep your precious ecclesial tradition, always united to the missionary outreach. I hope that the Catholic Church in your countries will be guaranteed the freedom to serve the common good, both by allowing your students to study in Rome or elsewhere, and by protecting the educational, healthcare and welfare institutions, in the certainty that the Shepherds and the faithful will, with all the others, desire to contribute to the good and the prosperity of your countries.

As children of the Church of Ethiopia and Eritrea, you love the Holy Mother of God, Mary Most Holy, very much. Indeed you define yourselves as *Resta Maryam*, “fief, property of Mary”, and in the monthly liturgical rite Kidane Mehret, “Pact of Mercy”, you know you can entrust every prayer, every plea to her intercession. In recalling that, I ask you to always also say a prayer for me and for my intentions.

I thank you and impart to you my Apostolic Blessing. May it reach your families, your Eparchies, your people, everyone. Thank you.

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