



# The Holy See

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PASTORAL JOURNEY  
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

MEETING WITH PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS,  
SEMINARIANS, CATECHISTS AND MISSIONARIES

*ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*

*Cathedral of Khartoum  
Wednesday, 10 February 1993*

*Dear Brother Bishops,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. My first impulse is to reach out to you, in order to assure each one of you—priest, Religious, seminarian, catechist, whether Sudanese or missionary—that you have a very special place in the mind and heart of the Vicar of Christ. Your life and activity goes on in the midst of grave difficulties, and you may sometimes think that you are forgotten by the rest of the world. But never are you far from the mind and heart of God. Your every prayer and effort is known to him. You are not forgotten by the Church, by the Successor of Peter, by Christians everywhere who pray constantly for you.

I greet you in the love of the Most Blessed Trinity: "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour" (1Tt. 1: 4). And I send a special greeting to the other priests, Religious and lay men and women who bear daily witness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in this land, but who cannot be here today. I hope that somehow they will hear my voice and know that the whole Church loves them and prays for them.

2. I am well aware of the sad circumstances of your country, tormented by a civil war that has brought untold misery, suffering and death to the Sudanese people, especially in the South. The

life of your communities is deeply affected also by a breakdown in the good relations that should exist between Christians and Muslims. Moreover, you and your fellow-Christians are poor in the goods of this world, even to the point of extreme hardship.

With admiration and with intense gratitude to our heavenly Father for your fidelity, I encourage you to "stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel" (Phil. 1: 27). In my own country I have known something of the horrors of war and of the ways in which the history of the catacombs has been repeated in this century. As the Successor of Peter, in my solicitude for all the Churches, I share the trials and sufferings of our brothers and sisters all over the world. Still, in this part of Africa, I see clearly a particular reproduction of the mystery of Calvary in the lives of the majority of the Christian people. And what answer can I give you? What consolation can I offer you?

In a short while we shall celebrate the Eucharist, "the acceptable sacrifice which brings salvation to the whole world" ("Præx Eucharistia IV"). With unshakable trust we shall proclaim our faith:

"Lord by your Cross and Resurrection  
you have set us free.

You are the Saviour of the world".

Brothers and sisters, if there is one message that the Pope wants to leave with you it is this: *Make the Paschal Mystery the centre of your lives! Gather the People of God to celebrate the mystery of faith.* Nourish yourselves and your communities with the word of life and the sacraments of our salvation.

3. *Dear Brother Priests:* on the day of your Ordination you were configured to Jesus the High Priest for the service of the Gospel. May you never lose sight of that outpouring of grace which invested you with great responsibilities, but also strengthened and confirmed you for the labours ahead. Never lose sight of "Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Hebr. 12: 2).

The faithful look to you for support and encouragement, both in the pursuit of Christian holiness and in their demands for respect for their human and civil rights. You know that your role is not one of merely social or political action. Rather, you are "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1Cor. 4: 1). The true "insignia" of your charge are your zeal for the Father's will, your constant prayer, the witness of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, the acts of humble service which reflect the compassion of the Good Samaritan.

It is important for you, both personally and in order to place your ministry in its proper context, to maintain a lively sense of communion and practical cooperation with your Bishops, and through them to be in union of mind and heart with the one, universal Body of Christ. May you be true instruments of reconciliation and peace, particularly in administering the Sacrament of the

forgiveness of sins.

I entrust you and your ministry to the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin. May her intercession give you all the encouragement you need.

*Dear Seminarians:* you are discovering what it means to follow Jesus more closely and prepare yourselves for the ministry. Use every opportunity to acquire a deep and solid formation! Above all, day by day allow the Good Shepherd to shape your hearts after his own (Cf. Jer. 3: 15) so that when hardships come you will be able, like him, to bear all for the love of the flock.

4. *Dear Religious:* you too have a special place in the Pope's heart and prayers. Your role in the Christian community is fundamental and of extraordinary importance, not only because of what you do in all the many different forms of apostolate in which you are engaged, but especially because your faithful observance of the evangelical counsels effectively speaks to others, whether Christian or not, of the truth and significance of the Beatitudes, the core of the Christian life.

Take courage from those words which the Second Vatican Council addressed to Religious: "The more ardently that they unite themselves to Christ through a self-surrender involving their entire lives, the more vigorous will become the life of the Church and the more abundantly will her apostolate bear fruit" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1). In the economy of salvation you are the living seeds of a marvellous spiritual fruitfulness. In particular I wish to assure *the Sisters of the unique part you have in the Church's life and mission*. Your consecration, your example of genuine holiness and the ardour of your service make a decisive statement, in the actual circumstances of your apostolates, concerning the dignity of women. In the Church's name I say: Thank you!

I wish to encourage you all to go on promoting vocations to the Religious Life, giving a solid formation to those who are called, and ensuring care and spiritual support for any Brother or Sister in need. May Mary, who hastened to assist her cousin Elizabeth, be a model of Christian charity for you all.

5. *Dear Catechists:* allow me to address you in the words of Saint Paul to the Corinthians: "I have great confidence in you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort" (2Cor. 7: 4). You are at the centre of the local Christian community, often organized in Small Christian Communities. It is your task to speak the word of God in a language that is as close as possible to the needs and experience of your brothers and sisters. Through your words and actions Christ comes closer to the daily struggles of your people. Indeed, through you, to the extent that you assimilate the Gospel message, Christ becomes truly Sudanese. May the example of Blessed Bakhita, who never lost confidence and hope no matter how hard the conditions of her life, inspire you with love and mercy towards all.

6. Finally I wish to say a specific word of gratitude to the men and women *Missionaries* present in

the Sudan. The Church in this land continues its mission with courage and determination, despite difficulties and restrictions, thanks also to your selfless service. You are a sign of the Church's universality, of her unity of faith and openness to the communion of all the particular Churches in the same saving mission. May the Lord abundantly reward your unselfish commitment.

7. Brothers and Sisters: the Paschal Mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is all the Church's wealth and confidence. It is the source of our strength and hope. When man's justice fails, it alone heals our wounds and gives meaning to our efforts. In the Eucharist which we shall celebrate this afternoon I will hold you close, "remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope" (1Thess. 1: 3). The whole Church entrusts you to God's loving providence, knowing that, in the words of the Letter to the Romans: "the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8: 27). The Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.