



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF NAMIBIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

14 June 1997

Dear Brothers in Christ,

1. In the love of the Saviour, I cordially greet the whole Church of God in Namibia, and I welcome you, the Pastors of the Archdiocese of Windhoek, the Diocese of Keetmanshoop and the Apostolic Vicariate of Rundu. As an Episcopal Conference, this is first time that you have come to Rome on your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum*: to venerate the tombs of the blessed Martyrs, Peter and Paul, whose blood sealed the unique service of this "greatest and most ancient Church" (St Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.3.2); to "see Peter" (cf. Gal 1:18) in the person of his Successor and to give an account of your stewardship (cf. Lk 16:2). Together, we can rejoice that the good seed of the Gospel is bearing a rich harvest in your country, so promising in its youthful vigour. The setting up of the Hierarchy in 1994, the establishment of diplomatic relations between Namibia and the Holy See in 1996, and the recent formation of the Namibian Catholic Bishops' Conference are positive signs that the Lord who began his good work in you will bring it to completion (cf. Phil 1:6).

As Pastors of the Church you are guardians and builders of ecclesial communion, which has its deepest source in the sharing of believers in the intimate life of the Trinity. A strong sense of ecclesial communion will enable you to carry out your pastoral ministry in a spirit of loving cooperation with the priests, Religious and lay people. As wise shepherds you have a duty to promote the different gifts and charisms, vocations and responsibilities, which the Spirit entrusts to the members of Christ's Body. At the same time, you must discern prayerfully and prudently the authenticity of the Spirit's actions (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 24), and work for the affective and effective communion and cooperation of all. Your ministry aims at gathering together the People of God as a brotherhood inspired by charity, firmly anchored on its unique foundation, the living presence of Jesus Christ, *the same yesterday, today and for ever* (cf. Heb 13:8).

2. In this respect it is of special importance to foster among all Catholics in Namibia a lively sense of shared responsibility for the Church's mission and apostolate. Be ever willing to listen to your priests and people, to give prudent counsel and, with regard to the laity, to support them in their vocation to "seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God" (*Lumen Gentium*, 31). I am confident that for the good of the Church you will make every effort to prepare a mature and responsible laity in "suitable centres and schools of biblical and pastoral formation," where due attention is paid to "solid formation in the Church's social doctrine" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 90). Encourage the lay faithful in the witness they wish to give to honesty in public administration, respect for the rule of law, solidarity with the poor, the advancement of the equal dignity of women and the defence of human life from conception to natural death.

3. You build the communion of your particular Churches with the help above all of those whom Saint Paul calls "God's fellow workers" (1 Cor 3:9; cf. 1 Thess 3:2), the priests, with whom you have bonds of brotherly and apostolic fraternity forged by the grace of Holy Orders. Though too few in number to meet all your needs, they are doing God's work with generous commitment, striving earnestly to offer a transparent image of Christ the High Priest (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 12). *Fidei Donum* priests continue to represent "a unique sign of the bond of communion existing among the Churches" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 68), and I pray that their commitment to Namibia will be strengthened. More numerous are the Religious priests, whose presence is a great source of enrichment. The spiritual and apostolic traditions of their Institutes make an invaluable contribution to your ecclesial life. Ever faithful to their founding charisms, consecrated men and women show their genuine love for the Church by working "in full communion with the Bishop in the areas of evangelization, catechesis and parish life" (*Vita Consecrata*, 49).

The lack of a sufficient number of priests and Religious, which also means that many communities go without the regular celebration of Sunday Mass and other sacraments, should give rise in families, parishes and Institutes of consecrated life to fervent prayer to the Lord of the harvest (cf. Mt 9:38) for an increase of vocations. It is a sure sign of growing ecclesial maturity that the Archdiocese of Windhoek is in the process of establishing a seminary. My prayers are with the Church in Namibia that you may be able to count on *more numerous priests* who faithfully imitate Christ the Head, Shepherd and Spouse of the Church, so as to be ever more effective agents of evangelization. Likewise I join you in asking the Lord of the harvest to send many more Religious men and women to serve the needs of the brethren.

4. I am aware that you seek to promote fruitful ecumenical cooperation, and I encourage you, at this new stage of national life, to listen attentively to the voice of the Spirit (cf. Rev 2:7) who is stirring up fresh ecumenical initiatives. The united action of Namibian Christians to bring about reconciliation and to foster strong family values and sound ethical principles is a powerful form of proclamation which reveals the face of Christ in your nation (cf. Mt 25:40). It has "the clear value of a joint witness to the name of the Lord" (*Ut Unum Sint*, 75).

I invite you to join the whole Church in preparing to cross the threshold of the Third Christian Millennium. I exhort you "to raise to the Lord fervent prayers to obtain the light and assistance necessary for the preparation and celebration of the forthcoming Jubilee ... The Spirit will not fail to arouse enthusiasm and lead people to celebrate the Jubilee with renewed faith and generous participation" (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 59). I thank you for your tireless efforts on behalf of the Gospel and I pray that God will confirm you - and all the priests, men and women Religious, catechists, families and young people, and all the lay faithful in your particular Churches - in faith, hope and love (cf. Lk 22:32). Entrusting you to Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, I pray that through her intercession the Holy Spirit will "rekindle the gift of God that is within you" (2 Tim 1:6) and fill you with joy and peace. With my Apostolic Blessing.

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