



The Holy See

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

Monday, 24 March 2014

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I welcome you on the occasion of your pilgrimage to Rome for your *ad limina* visit! You have come to tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, who bore witness to Christ crucified and Risen even to giving their very lives. Still today, they are models for all pastors to whom the Lord entrusts his people. You can rely on them to enlighten and support you in the fulfillment of your duties.

I thank Bishop Emmanuel Félérou, President of your Episcopal Conference, for the words which he addressed to me on your behalf. To each of you, and through you to your priests, to the men and women religious, and to all the lay faithful of your dioceses, I would like to express my profound affection. Allow me also to mention here Cardinal Robert Sarah, who after having generously served the Church in your country, is now one of my esteemed collaborators.

I also wish to express my joy and gratitude for the good work of evangelization which is being carried out in Guinea. Christ's disciples there form a living body that manifests the joy of the Gospel by the enthusiasm of its faith, even though the conditions in which the Good News is being proclaimed are often difficult. To the human eye the means of evangelization might seem derisible. Far from becoming discouraged, you must never forget that it is Jesus' own work, which surpasses anything which we can discern and understand (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 12). However, you are not alone because all of your people together with you are missionary (cf. *ibid.*, n. 119). You ought therefore to have great trust and resolutely put out into the deep.

Yet in order that the Gospel might deeply touch and convert hearts, we must remind ourselves that we can only bear witness to the truth of the Gospel if we are united in love: "That they may all be

one ... so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21), Jesus tells us. The Church needs you to be in communion among yourselves and with the Successor of Peter. Discord among Christians is the greatest obstacle to evangelization. It fosters the growth of groups that take advantage of the people's poverty and credulity to propose easy but illusory solutions to their problems. In a world wounded by so many ethnic, political and religious conflicts, our communities must become "authentically fraternal and reconciled" so that in them "they will find that witness luminous and attractive" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 100). God gives us the grace, if we know how to receive it, to make unity prevail over conflict. "Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love" (*ibid.*, n. 101).

In order that the proclamation of the Gospel may bear fruit, our whole life should be consistent with the Gospel we proclaim. I am pleased to see that this is already a living reality, from many points of view, in your dioceses. I think first of the lay faithful who are engaged in pastoral work, and in particular of the catechists who carry out an irreplaceable work of evangelization and inspiration within the Christian communities. May they be heartily thanked. You have opened formation centres to train them, and I cannot but invite you to persevere in your efforts to ensure the quality of this formation. I also exhort you to support families, whose Christian model must be proposed and lived without ambiguity, since polygamy is still widespread and mixed marriages are increasingly on the rise.

You also have the fundamental duty to invite the faithful to pray and live in authentic closeness to God, since the whole missionary dynamism comes from the quality of one's love of God (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 264). Through the worthy celebration of the Eucharist, the faithful are able to enter into the mystery of the Lord who gives his life for them, and find therein the joy of hope, consolation amid trial, strength to continue along the journey.

I also suggest that you invite the laity, in particular the youngest, to bear witness to their faith through greater involvement in society, thereby manifesting their attachment to their country. In collaboration with the various active members of societal life, may they always and everywhere be builders of peace and reconciliation in fighting the extreme poverty Guinea has to confront. From this perspective, despite the difficulties you encounter, I encourage you to deepen your relations with your fellow citizens who are Muslim, by learning to accept one another's different ways of being, thinking and expression.

My thoughts also go to the men and women religious who, in the variety of their charisms, bring to the people of Guinea the irreplaceable offering of their prayer of adoration, praise and intercession. Often living in situations of great poverty, in cooperation with the laity, they manifest the love of Christ through their work of assisting the people both in the sphere of healthcare and in the field of education and formation. I assure them of my support and prayer. They are carrying out a true evangelization by their works, and they bear authentic witness to God's tenderness for all people, especially for the poorest and the weakest, a witness that touches hearts and firmly

roots the faith of the faithful. Despite the scarcity of means and the immensity of the task, I invite you to support them always, both spiritually and materially, so that they might courageously persevere in the work of evangelization and the upbuilding of society.

The apostolate of priests, generously dedicated to the duties of the ministry, is often made difficult, particularly by their exiguous number. I assure you of my closeness and my encouragement. Be to them fathers and friends who support and guide them with a fraternal heart and spirit. Priests must also live in a manner that is consistent with what they preach; the very credibility of the Church's witness is at stake. It is essential to do everything possible to elicit abundant and strong vocations to the priesthood. I welcome the recent opening of the "Benedict XVI" Major Seminary, an event which holds great promise for the future. Make the most of this development that is unfolding in the history of the Guinean clergy to spark a new impetus in priestly life. Seminary formation must offer young men a serious path of intellectual and spiritual growth. May priestly holiness be authentically proposed to them, beginning with the example of priests who live out their own vocation with joy; may future priests truly learn to live the demands of priestly celibacy, as well as a balanced relation to material goods, the rejection of worldliness and careerism — for the priesthood is not a means of social advancement —, and also the real commitment to accompany the poor.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I entrust you, as well as the priests, the consecrated, catechists and lay faithful of your dioceses to the protection of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and with all my heart I impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.