

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
TO CAMEROON AND ANGOLA
(MARCH 17-23, 2009)

MEETING WITH THE BISHOPS OF ANGOLA AND SÃO TOMÉ

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI

*Chapel of the Apostolic Nunciature - Luanda
Friday, 20 March 2009*

*Dear Cardinal do Nascimento,
Dear Bishops of Angola and São Tomé,*

I am delighted to meet you in this house which Angola has given to the Successor of Peter – ordinarily in the person of his Representative – as a visible expression of the bonds uniting the people of Angola and São Tomé to the Catholic Church, which for over five hundred years has rejoiced to count you among her children. May our prayer of praise rise up, harmonious and fervent, to God the Father who, by the workings and grace of the Holy Spirit, unceasingly gives birth to the Mystical Body of his Son. Here, in these lands, the Church bears the distinctive features of your native peoples, yet without losing the Jewish, Roman, Portuguese and other characteristics she had acquired earlier, for “as many of you as were baptized into Christ ... are one in Christ Jesus” (*Gal 3:27-28*). Venerable Brothers, God in his goodness, in order to carry forward today this work of bringing to birth the whole Christ through faith and Baptism, willed to call upon you and me. It should be no surprise, then, that we sense the pangs of birth until Christ is completely formed in the heart of your people (cf. *Gal 4:19*). God will reward you for all the apostolic work which you have accomplished in difficult conditions, both during the war and at the present time, in spite of so many limitations, thus helping to give the Church in Angola and in São Tomé and Príncipe that dynamism which everyone acknowledges.

Conscious of the ministry I have been called to carry out in the service of ecclesial communion, I ask you to assure your communities of my constant concern for them. I greet them all with heartfelt affection in the person of the individual members of this Episcopal Conference. I offer a particular greeting to your President, Archbishop Damião Franklin, whom I thank for his words of welcome in your name, emphasizing your commitment to clear discernment and, as a result, to a unified plan to be implemented in your diocesan communities for the purpose of “equipping the saints ... until all of us come to the maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (*Eph 4:12-13*). Indeed, as a corrective to a widespread relativism which acknowledges nothing as definitive and, even more, tends to make its ultimate measure the individual and his personal caprice, we hold out another measure: the Son of God, who is also true man. Christ is the measure of true humanism. The Christian marked by an adult and mature faith is not one who is borne along by the waves of fashion and the latest novelties, but one who lives deeply rooted in the friendship of Christ. This friendship opens us up to all that is good, and it provides us with the criterion for discerning between error and truth.

Certainly a decisive factor for the future of the faith and the overall direction of national life is the area of culture. Here the Church enjoys renowned academic institutions, which must make it a point of honour to enable the voice of Catholics to be constantly heard in discussion of cultural issues affecting national life, thus reinforcing the ability to explore rationally, in the light of faith, the many questions emerging in the various areas of science and of life. Culture and models of behaviour are nowadays more and more conditioned and shaped by the images set forth by the communications media. For this reason, I wish to acknowledge your praiseworthy efforts to develop, in this area too, a communications strategy which will enable you to provide everyone with a Christian interpretation of human events, problems and realities.

One such human reality, presently faced with numerous difficulties and threats, is the family. Families are particularly in need of evangelization and practical support, since, in addition to the fragility and lack of inner stability of so many conjugal unions, there is the widespread tendency in society and culture to call into question the unique nature and specific mission of the family based on marriage. In your pastoral concern, which extends to every human being, continue to raise your voice in defence of the sacredness of human life and the value of the institution of marriage, as well as in promotion of the family's proper role in the Church and in society, at the same time demanding economic and legislative measures to support the family in bearing and raising children.

I rejoice that your nations have so many vibrant communities of faith, a committed laity devoted to many works of the apostolate, and a significant number of vocations to the ordained ministry and the consecrated life, especially the contemplative life. They represent a genuine sign of hope for the future. As the clergy becomes increasingly indigenous, I wish to pay homage to the work which has been patiently and heroically carried out by the missionaries in proclaiming Christ and his Gospel and in giving birth to the Christian communities for which you today are responsible. I urge you to be deeply concerned for your priests, attentive to their continuing formation on both the theological and spiritual levels, and alert to the conditions in which they live and exercise their specific mission, so that they can be authentic witnesses of the word they proclaim and the sacraments they celebrate. In the gift of themselves to Christ and to the people whom they shepherd, may they remain faithful to the demands of their state of life, and live out their priestly ministry as a true path to holiness, striving to become saints and in this way to raise up new saints all around them.

Dear Brothers, I entrust myself to your prayerful remembrance before the Lord, while for my part I assure you of a particular prayer to the one who is truly the Spouse of the Church, which he loves, protects and nourishes: the only-begotten Son of the living God, Jesus Christ our Lord. May he sustain your pastoral commitments by his grace, so that they will prove fruitful in accordance with the example and under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary. With these sentiments I impart my Apostolic Blessing to each of you, to your priests, and to the consecrated persons, seminarians, catechists and all the lay faithful who are members of the flock which God has entrusted to you.