



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO NIGERIA, BENIN

GABON AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
AT THE DEPARTURE FROM NIGERIA***

Lagos

Wednesday, 17 February 1982

1. The moment has come, Mr President, Your Eminence, my brother bishops, Government leaders, and all you wonderful people of Nigeria, for me to say good-bye.

I am filled with gratitude. I am full of joy. You have spared no effort to arrange everything so beautifully for my travel and for the celebrations and encounters.

I thank the President, the Vice-President, and all the Government officials at all levels for their very cordial reception and hospitality and for their generous assistance.

I thank the Catholic bishops and all the Catholic committees that have worked with so much competence and dedication.

My gratitude goes likewise to all the pilots, drivers, security men, and to every man, woman and child who have shown such wonderful hospitality and lively interest.

2. I take away with me very vivid memories of a great nation, a generous people, a dynamic Church, a richly endowed and warm-hearted youth, a country which honours the family, respects the elderly and regards children as a blessing. In short, I take with me an unforgettable memory of a country which is a credit to Africa, to the world and to the Church of Jesus Christ.

Although I have to go now, my heart remains with all of you. Shall I be able some time in the future to visit Nigeria again? Will the Providence of the Almighty and Merciful God dispose that I come back again to kiss your soil, embrace your children, encourage your youth and walk once more amidst the love and affection of the noble people of your land? We leave the future to God, to his wisdom and his fatherly care. It is to him – to the God and Creator and Father of us all that

I entrust the future and the destiny of Nigeria.

3. And now I wish to address my final word to a very special person who is there in your midst – everywhere I look. It is the Nigerian child: each boy and girl created in the image and likeness of God. It is to the child of this great land, the child endowed with human dignity and inalienable rights, the child who reflects the love of God in his or her eyes and expresses it with a smile, that I leave my message of brotherhood, friendship and love. I ask you, dear child – for I know you are listening to me – to pass on this message to your brothers and sisters and to the children who will come after you.

Whoever you are, this message of love belongs to your religion as it does to mine: what I am saying is that you and every other child are loved by God and worthy of love. And that this love must spread everywhere and take possession of every single heart. The love that I am talking about means that you have to love God in return for this love; and you do this by loving every other child of God on this earth. This love means that there is no place for selfishness, for lying, for meanness, for hatred, for discrimination, for violence in this world. It means that you and every other child on earth are equal in dignity before God: whatever your age, your race, your nationality; whether you are a boy or a girl; whether you are rich or poor; whether you are strong or weak; whether you are healthy or sick or handicapped. The love that I ask you to have for every brother and sister, every person alive, is the love of generosity and kindness, of sacrifice, of friendship and peace.

What I am saying can be summed up in just a few words and it can be said in different ways. But let me say it to you in my way, the way that I learned it, the way I was taught by my mother, who told me when I was a child: “Treat others the way you would have them treat you”. Dear child of Nigeria: by acting in this way, you have more power than all the nuclear power station in the world, because you have the power to bring peace and happiness to the world. I am talking about the power that is yours under God, the power to love, the power to love every other child. Dear child: God has loved you; now you must love in return.

Good-bye and God bless all Nigeria!

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