



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO TOGO, IVORY COAST, CAMEROON,
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, ZAIRE, KENYA AND MOROCCO

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE OTHER CHRISTIAN CHURCHES**

Nairobi (Kenya)

Sunday, 18 August 1985

1. Five years ago I had the pleasure of meeting many of you on a similar occasion during my first Pastoral Visit to your country. I spoke then of our one Baptism and of the common witness which is possible because of our profession of baptismal faith, despite the causes of division between us.

Today I come to you again, and I thank you for your willingness to take part in this meeting. You know that the occasion of my present visit in the Catholic Church's celebration of the Forty-third International Eucharistic Congress, an event which has brought together many Catholics not only from this country but from other lands near and far. In planning this Congress, as with other recent Congresses, care has been taken to make possible the participation of Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. How could this not be so today? The Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to the ecumenical task. It follows that, to reflect the Catholic Church as it should, a celebration such as the present Congress must give due expression to the ecumenical dimension. So I thank you, and through you the Communities you lead and represent, not only for meeting me today but also for your response to the invitation to play some part in the Congress.

2. "*The Eucharist and the Christian Family*", as you know, is the theme of the Congress; and it suggests what should today be one of the main themes of the witness we seek to bear together. For, as I said to Christian leaders in the Netherlands three months ago: "We have a common concern for the ideal of *Christian marriage and the Christian family*, for the transmission of the faith to the next generation, and for the growth in holiness of all Christian couples. We all long for one Eucharist, and we all seek to obey Christ's command, 'Do this in memory of me', since we regard

this Sacrament of Christ himself as his greatest gift to his Church” (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad Repraesentantes Confessionum Christianarum in urbe “Utrecht” habita*, die 13 maii 1985: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VIII, 1 (1985) 1322 ss.). True, our divisions pose problems to us here, but problems must never blind us to those underlying points of unity that already enable us to speak and to act together. In this great continent, well known throughout the world for the special value its peoples set on family life and family ties, and for their reverence for the wider family as well as for the immediate circle, there are surely great possibilities for Christians to collaborate in promoting the true values of family life. And there is surely also great need for this in an age in which, almost everywhere, these values come under increasing pressure.

3. It was at a meal with what may call the “family” of his Apostles that Jesus gave the Eucharist to his Church. The Church has been called “the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (*Eph. 2, 19-20*). Over the centuries this family of the Church has grown, yet that sacramental meal remains at the very heart of its life. Sadly, over the centuries the family of Christians has known division and separation. The ties of Baptism and fellowship remain, but we are no longer united in one faith at one altar, one Eucharistic table. In any family it is a cause of deep sadness if there are members who cannot, for whatever reason, come to the family table; indeed we may sometimes be more aware of the empty places than we are of the full ones! So too in our celebrations of the Holy Eucharist, we never forget our brethren who cannot be with us. Thus *every Eucharist becomes a great prayer for the unity of all Christians*, for whom Christ, our Lord and Brother, gave himself up to death on the Cross.

4. But we all belong to a yet wider family. We must look beyond the ranks of our Christian family, great as it is, to *the immense family of all humanity*. Millions are in need of even a minimum of daily bread; and all are in need of the Bread of Life. Christ calls us, through our unity in him, to provide for the material and spiritual needs of others. “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (*Ibid. 3, 14-17*). May Christ bring us all to that full unity in faith and love that he wills; and may our meeting and our prayer today lead us nearer to that day when we are indeed one family in him, one in that “bread of God . . . which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world” (*Io. 6, 33*). Amen.

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