



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF SENEGAL-MAURITANIA-CAPE
VERDE-GUINEA BISSAU
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Monday, 10 November 2014

[Multimedia]

Dear Brother Bishops,

I am happy to meet you on the occasion of your pilgrimage to Rome on your visit *ad limina*. I extend a cordial greeting to Cardinal Sarr, as well as to each one of you, and I thank Bishop Benjamin Ndiaye, President of your Episcopal Conference, for the words he addressed to me. Be so good, when you return to your dioceses, as to convey my affection in thought and prayer to all your faithful, to the priests, to the consecrated persons, and in particular to the families, who are on the path of their Christian life. I likewise count on the prayers of each of you and of each of your communities.

Your pilgrimage is an occasion to reinforce the fraternal communion that the Particular Churches have with the Church of Rome and with her Bishop. It is also the occasion to strengthen the bonds of love that exist among you — for each Bishop must have concern in his heart for all the Churches — and hence to experience collegiality. This presents a real challenge for an Episcopal Conference which includes Bishops from four countries — Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau —, countries diverse in language, geography, culture and history, but which nevertheless feel the need to meet and mutually support each other in the ministry. It is important that you be able to manifest this communion in the difference which, in and of itself, renders a genuine witness to the Risen Christ, in a world in which too many conflicts divide peoples, for “the message of peace [...] the conviction that the unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity. It overcomes every conflict by creating a new and promising synthesis” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 230). I invite you to persevere in reciprocal exchanges, in your encounters and in

your common works without becoming discouraged when confronting difficulties, for it is the Spirit of Christ that unites you and “grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 259).

Among the challenges that you all must face is that of implanting the faith more deeply in hearts so it may truly be put into practice in life. Certainly, this is particularly true in the regions of the first evangelization, but it is also true where the Gospel has long been proclaimed, because the faith is a gift which always needs to be strengthened and which today is threatened in many ways, whether by religious proposals that are easier and more attractive on the moral plane which are appearing from every side, or by the phenomenon of secularization which also concerns African societies. In order to remain ever faithful to Christ, despite the difficulties, it is necessary to love Him and to remain united to Him with passion, and to perceive the point at which encountering Him “gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 1).

It is therefore necessary that lay people receive a sound doctrinal and spiritual formation and constant support to enable them to testify to Christ in their environment, in order that society be abidingly permeated with the principles of the Gospel, while at the same time preventing the faith from becoming marginalized in public life. Productive cooperation among priests, religious and lay institutes, as well as pastoral care provided to associations and movements, will surely aid in accomplishing this objective.

The pastoral care of families — as the recent Synod of Bishops underscored — must in its turn be the subject of special attention, because the family is the basic unit of society and of the Church, it is the place in which the basics of the faith, the elementary principles of life in common, are taught and is quite often the birthplace of the priestly and religious vocations needed by your Churches.

The formation of priests is crucial for the future. Your countries experience very different situations, but the primacy of quality over quantity remains essential everywhere. On one hand it is important that priestly formation — which must be at the same time and in an interactive manner, spiritual, intellectual, communitary and pastoral — be of high quality; and I know what this represents for you in terms of effort and resources. On the other, I ask you to be close to your priests, especially the young ones, and to ensure that, after ordination, they persevere in on-going formation as well as in a life of prayer, and that they receive spiritual accompaniment. It is in this way that they will be able to face the challenges that arise, such as: for some a certain isolation, for others material poverty and a lack of resources, for yet others worldly attractions, etc.

Similarly, particularly in some of your dioceses, as Islam is a strong majority there, contact with other religions is a reality with conditions of reciprocal inter-community relations which vary greatly from one place to another. I think it is important that clerics receive a more structured formation in the seminary, in order to develop a realistic and constructive dialogue with Muslims, a dialogue ever more necessary to be able to live with them in peaceful coexistence. Indeed, “if all of us who

believe in God desire to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, we must work together to banish every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism” (*Africae Munus*, n. 94). Moreover, the Church must ceaselessly bear witness to the love of God, Creator of all mankind, while making no religious distinctions in her social action (cf. *ibid.*). More generally, I feel it is important that you should not hesitate to take your place in civil society. I know that you work with perseverance, above all in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, for peace and reconciliation, a fact I am very happy about: my prayers accompany you in these efforts. I advise you to take care to maintain good relations with the Political Authorities, in order to promote official recognition of the ecclesial structures that greatly facilitate the work of evangelization. Some of you, as, for example, the Bishops of Cape Verde, already benefit from the existence of a Framework Agreement between the State and the Holy See.

Where the Church is a small minority — and even completely on the margins of civil life — she is nevertheless appreciated and acknowledged for her significant contribution in the areas of human development, health and education. You are recognized for the works accomplished in your dioceses — most often through the determined commitment of religious congregations and of numerous lay associates, whom I thank heartily — and which have already established genuine evangelization in action. Feel free to reflect systematically on these issues and to set up real solidary, educational projects for young people.

Dear brother bishops, some of your Churches are small, fragile, but courageous and generous in proclaiming the faith, and you have testified to their real dynamism. I give thanks to God for the wonders he has performed among you, and I thank you, and I also thank all those who take part in this common work of evangelization. Of course, there are challenges, but I encourage you to go forward resolutely, certain that the Spirit of Jesus guides you: “for it is he who ‘helps us in our weakness’ [...] can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavour [...], knows well what is needed in every time and place” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 280).

I repeat my affection and my warmest encouragement to you, I entrust you, as well as all the priests, men and women religious and lay faithful of your dioceses, to the protection of the Virgin Mary, and I wholeheartedly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.