

May 9, 2014

Dear Brother Bishops,

I offer you a warm welcome on the occasion of your Visit ad Limina Apostolorum, as you come on pilgrimage to pray at the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul. This is a joyful occasion, for your presence strengthens your bonds of love and communion with the Successor of Peter. I trust that these days of reflection and prayer may be a source of refreshment for you, and that they may deepen the ties of your friendship in Jesus Christ and your fraternal cooperation in the service of the Gospel. I wish to offer a



particular word of appreciation to Archbishop Souraphiel for his greeting offered in your name and that of the faithful of your local Churches. I ask that you convey my greeting to all of them and offer the assurance of my deep affection and spiritual closeness.

Your visit also provides an opportunity for us to reflect together on the life of the Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea and to discuss the joys and challenges which you face daily. Though you are from different countries and belong to different rites, each with its own particular richness, your mission in service of Christ and his Church is the same: to proclaim the Gospel and to build up the faithful in holiness, unity and charity. When that mission is exercised in collaboration and mutual support, the Church, united in the Spirit, breathes with the two lungs of East and West and burns with love for Christ (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones*). I am grateful for all that you do to demonstrate this collegial communion which is itself a witness to the unity of the People of God born of faith in Jesus Christ.

That faith, present in your lands from the earliest days of the Church (cf. Acts 8:26-40), has been nourished and renewed throughout the years by devoted missionaries who, compelled by their love of Christ, proclaimed the Gospel so that “all who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor 5:15). In our own day, we require again this missionary spirit to announce the saving message of new life in Christ to all of society, not only to those who do not know him, but also to the faithful, so they may hear once more the freshness of the Gospel and be encouraged to find ever new and creative ways to live and celebrate their faith (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 11).

This great task of evangelization, entrusted to you as successors of the Apostles, is one which you carry out above all in communion with your priests. I join you in gratitude for the priests serving your local Churches, both those raised up from among your communities and those who have come as missionaries. Through their sacramental ministry and preaching, as well as their charitable works, these priests make visible the presence of Christ and manifest his love for humanity. If they are to be holy and effective heralds of the Gospel, however, it is essential that they themselves be constantly evangelized anew. This should first take place in the seminary through integral human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation. Such formation will help to instil in the priests a lifelong love of prayer, learning and self-sacrifice. But they also need your active interest in their lives and ministry. I urge you to be good and generous fathers to your priests, present to them and attentive to their human and spiritual needs, and their ongoing formation in the priesthood. In addition, it is important that a true fraternity among the priests be fostered so that they may accompany one another in their ministry and bear one another's burdens. In such a way, they will be able to respond more generously to the grace of God in their lives and give witness to the joy of Christian discipleship.



The mission of the Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea has been advanced by the support of so many men and women religious who, for many generations, have generously cooperated in building up your local communities. Many have left their own homelands and families to come to the horn of Africa to join local religious in teaching the young, caring for the sick, and responding to the pastoral circumstances of your communities. In so doing, they have reflected the merciful face of Christ and assisted your Churches in living out the Gospel. I join you in thanking Almighty God for these men and women religious, past and present, for their sacrifices and indispensable service. As part of your episcopal ministry, I ask you to encourage and support their continued efforts to serve the spiritual and material needs of the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea today.

As the Second Vatican Council made clear, the work of evangelization is not reserved to the clergy or religious, but is the competence of all the Christian faithful, who are called to proclaim the saving love they have experienced in the Lord Jesus (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 6). I appreciate the efforts you have made to create new opportunities for the catechetical formation of the faithful and to reach out to the young, who are at that pivotal time of their lives when they are challenged to deepen their relationship with Christ and his Church, and looking to start families of their own. Confronted by so many challenges in contemporary society, including an increasingly secularized culture and fewer opportunities for dignified work, it is essential that

wise and committed lay men and women guide young people in discerning the direction of their lives and in securing their future. For a more effective catechetical outreach, it is also important to continue to identify and prepare qualified lay leaders to assist in forming the faithful and thus make present “the fragrance of Christ’s closeness and his personal gaze” (Evangelii Gaudium, 169).

Dear brother Bishops, together with the priests, men and women religious, and lay faithful of your local Churches, you are called to diffuse this fragrance of Christ in the midst of Ethiopia and Eritrea (cf. 2 Cor 2:14). Many years of conflict and continuing tensions, in addition to widespread poverty and drought conditions, have brought great suffering to the people. I thank you for the generous social programmes which, inspired by the Gospel, you provide in collaboration with various religious, charitable and governmental agencies, aimed at alleviating this suffering. I think especially of the many children you serve who experience hunger and who have been orphaned because of violence and poverty. I am mindful too of the young people who like so many of their friends and family would otherwise flee their homeland in search of greater opportunities, and risk losing their lives during dangerous journeys. And of course, we must always remember the many elderly who could so easily be forgotten in the midst of such hardships. Your efforts on their behalf, which give such a powerful witness to the love of God in your midst, are an extraordinary grace for the people. In your loving concern for the poor and downtrodden, may you continue to seek new opportunities to cooperate with civil authorities in advancing the common good.

Conscious of the difficulties you face and the blessings you have received, I join all of you in praying for a renewed outpouring of grace upon the beloved Church in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Entrusting you to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the priests, consecrated men and women, and lay people of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

From the Vatican, 9 May 2014