

Pope's speech to Sudanese Bishops

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

With great joy I welcome you, the Bishops of Sudan, on your quinquennial visit to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. I am grateful to Bishop Deng Majak for the kind words which he has addressed to me on your behalf. In the spirit of communion in the Lord which unites us as successors of the Apostles, I join you in giving thanks for the "higher gift" (cf. *1 Cor* 12:31) of Christian charity which is evident in your lives and in the generous service of the priests, men and women religious and the lay faithful of Sudan. Your fidelity to the Lord and the fruits of your labours amid difficulties and sufferings bear eloquent witness to the power of the Cross which shines through our human limitations and weakness (cf. *1 Cor* 1:23-24).

I know how much you and the faithful of your country long for peace, and how patiently you are working for its restoration. Anchored in your faith and hope in Christ the Prince of Peace, may you always find in the Gospel the principles needed to shape your preaching and teaching, your judgements and actions. Inspired by those principles, and echoing the just aspirations of the entire Catholic community, you have spoken out with one voice in rejecting "any return to war" and in appealing for the establishment of peace at every level of national life (cf. Sudan Bishops' Statement, *For a Just and Lasting Peace*, 4).

If peace is to plant deep roots, concrete efforts must be made to diminish the factors contributing to unrest, particularly corruption, ethnic tensions, indifference and selfishness. Initiatives in this regard will surely prove fruitful if they are based on integrity, a sense of universal brotherhood and the virtues of justice, responsibility and charity. Treaties and other agreements, indispensable building blocks in the peace process, will only bear fruit if they are inspired and accompanied by the exercise of mature and morally upright leadership.

I urge you to draw strength from your recent experience at the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops as you continue to preach reconciliation and forgiveness. The effects of violence may take many years to heal, yet the change of heart which is the indispensable condition for a just and lasting peace must even now be implored as a gift of God's grace. As heralds of the Gospel, you have sought to instil in your people and in society a sense of responsibility towards present and future generations, encouraging forgiveness, mutual acceptance and respect for commitments taken. You have likewise worked to advance fundamental human rights through the rule of law and have called for the application of an integral model of economic and human development. I appreciate all that the Church in your country is doing to assist poor people to live in dignity and self-respect, to help them find long-term work and to enable them to make their proper contribution to society.

As the sign and instrument of restored and reconciled humanity, the Church even now experiences the peace of the Kingdom through her communion in the Lord. May your preaching and your pastoral activity continue to be inspired by a spirituality of communion which unites minds and hearts in obedience to the Gospel, participation in the sacramental life of the Church, and fidelity to your episcopal authority. The exercise of that authority should never be seen "as something impersonal or bureaucratic, precisely because it is an authority born of witness" (cf. *Pastores Gregis*, 43). For this reason, you yourselves must be the first teachers and witnesses of our communion in faith and the love of Christ, sharing common initiatives, listening to your collaborators, helping priests, religious and

faithful to accept and support one another as brothers and sisters, without distinction of race or ethnic group, in a generous exchange of gifts.

As a significant part of this witness, I encourage you to dedicate your energy to strengthening Catholic education, and thus preparing lay people in particular to bear convincing witness to Christ in every aspect of family, social and political life. This is a task to which Saint Mary's University of Juba and ecclesial movements can make a meaningful contribution. After parents, catechists are the first link in the chain of handing down the precious treasure of the faith. I urge you to see to their formation and to their needs.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation for your efforts to maintain good relations with the followers of Islam. As you work to promote cooperation in practical initiatives, I would encourage you to stress the values that Christians share in common with Moslems as the basis for that "dialogue of life" which is an essential first step towards genuine interreligious respect and understanding. The same openness and love should be shown to people belonging to the traditional religions.

Dear Brother Bishops, through you I send warm greetings to the priests and religious of your country, to the families and, in a particular way, to the children. With great affection I commend you to the prayers of Saint Bakhita and Saint Daniel Comboni, and to the protection of Mary, Mother of the Church. To all I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of wisdom, joy and strength in the Lord.

Vatican, March 13th, 2010