

'God Bless Africa'

Following is the text of Pope John Paul II's message to the people of Zaire during his recent trip to Africa.

God bless Zaire! God bless the whole of Africa!

It is a very great joy for me to reach the African continent for the first time. Yes, as I kiss this soil, my heart overflows with emotion, joy and hope. It is the emotion of discovering the African reality and of meeting in it this considerable part of humanity, which merits esteem and love, and which is also called to salvation in Jesus Christ. It is the paschal joy that dwells in me and that I would like to share with you. It is the hope that a new life, a better life, a more free and brotherly life is possible on this earth, and that the Church which I represent can greatly contribute to it. This visit and the meetings it will make possible are graces for which I want first of all to thank the Lord. God be blessed!



To all the inhabitants of Africa, whatever may be their country and their origin, I express my warm and friendly greetings, and my feelings of trust. I greet first of all my Catholic brothers and sons, and other Christians. I greet all those who, deeply animated with religious sentiments, are bent on submitting their lives to God or seeking his presence. I greet the families, fathers and mothers, children and old people. I greet especially those who are suffering in body and soul. I greet those who are working for the common good of their fellow citizens, for their education, their prosperity, their health, their safety. I greet each of the African nations. I rejoice with them that they have taken their destiny into their own hands. I am thinking at the same time of the noble heritage of their human and spiritual values, their meritorious efforts, and all their present needs. Each nation has still a long way to go in order to forge its unity, deepen its personality and its culture, carry out the development that is necessary in so many fields, and do so in justice, with concern for the participation and interest of everyone; to take its place actively in the concert of nations. For this purpose and disinterested aid, it needs peace. To one and all, I express cordial and fervent wishes.

I come here as a spiritual leader, the Servant of Jesus Christ in the line of the Apostle Peter and of all his successors, the bishops of Rome. I have the mission, with my brothers the bishops of the local Churches, to strengthen the sons of the whole Church in true faith, and in love according to Jesus Christ, to watch over their unity and increase their witness. A large number of Africans now belong to the Christian faith and I would like my visit to be a consolation for them, at this significant stage of their history. Two of these Churches have invited me especially for the centenary of evangelization, which others are also preparing to celebrate.

I come here as a man of religion. I appreciate the religious sense so deeply rooted in the African soul and which requires, not to be set aside, but on the contrary, purified, elevated and strengthened. I esteem those who are anxious to lead their existence and construct their city in a vital relationship with God, taking into account the moral requirements he has inscribed on the conscience of each one, and likewise the fundamental human rights, which he guarantees. I share with those who have this spiritual view of man the conviction that materialism, wherever it may come from, is a form of slavery from which man must be defended.

I come here as a messenger of peace, anxious to encourage the peacemakers, like Jesus. True love seeks peace, and peace is absolutely necessary in order that Africa may be able to dedicate itself completely to the great tasks that await it. With all my African friends, I would like every child of this continent to be able tomorrow to find nourishment for the body and nourishment for the spirit, in a climate of justice, safety and concord.

I come here as a man of hope.

Without waiting any longer, I thank Africa for its welcome. I was profoundly touched by the hospitality that so many countries of this continent have so generously offered me in the last few months. It was really impossible for me to accept all the invitations, during this first ten-day journey. I deeply regretted this, and I am thinking particularly of the expectation of certain countries that are particularly meritorious

and rich in Christian vitality, which I would have liked so much to visit. But these are visits postponed until later. I hope that Providence will give the Pope the opportunity to carry them out in the future. I have firm hope that I will return to this continent. Let all these countries be assured straightaway of my esteem and good wishes! I will think of them, moreover, of their merits, their joys and their human spiritual concerns when I tackle the different themes of my journey and address the various categories of interlocutors. My message is for the whole of Africa.

And now, I turn specially to this country of Zaire which is in the heart of Africa and which is the first to receive me. This great promising country, which I am so happy to visit, this country called to great tasks, tasks which are difficult. My first word is to thank Mr. President (Mobutu) and his government, and to thank the bishops, for their pressing invitation.

I know the attachment of a large number of Zaireans to the Christian faith and to the Catholic Church, thanks to an evangelization which has

progressed very rapidly.

It is now the centenary of this evangelization that I have come to celebrate with you, dear friends. It is good to look at the road travelled, along which God has not been sparing of his graces for Zaire. A host of workers of the Gospel came from far away, and dedicated their lives so that you, too, might have access to salvation in Jesus Christ. And the sons and daughters of this country accepted the faith. It has yielded abundant fruit, in a large number of baptized. Priests, Sisters, bishops, a cardinal, have sprung from the Zairean people, to animate, with their brothers, this local Church and give it its true face, fully African and fully Christian, linked with the universal Church which I represent among you. During the days that follow, we will speak of all this again. The prospect of all these meetings fills me with deep delight. Let all these Brothers and Sons, all the inhabitants of this country, receive my warm greeting straightaway and the friendly wishes that my heart forms for them.

God bless Zaire! God bless Africa!

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