



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF BURUNDI
ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT***

Monday, 5 May 2014

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I welcome you on the occasion of your pilgrimage to Rome for your *ad limina* visit! I thank Bishop Gervais Banshimiyubusa, President of your Episcopal Conference, for the words which he addressed to me on your behalf. Through you, I greet all the faithful of your diocesan churches, especially the priests, men and women religious, as well as the lay faithful engaged in pastoral service, and all the people of Burundi. I express my sincere hope that the Apostles Peter and Paul may sustain you and strengthen you in the exercise of your apostolic ministry. In following Jesus, they poured out their own blood in service of the Gospel; after their example, we are called to go to the very end in our dedication to the people who have been entrusted to us. Here I would like to remember Bishop Michael A. Courtney, Apostolic Nuncio, who remained faithful to the mission entrusted to him in service of Burundi unto the supreme gift of life.

I am pleased to emphasize the spirit of communion that you are careful to preserve with the See of Peter. Unity, in fact, is an indispensable condition for the fruitfulness of the proclamation of the Gospel. I hope to see it strengthened even further, in a climate of trust and fraternal collaboration. Moreover, this cooperation is also necessary in the relationship the Church wishes to maintain with the State. The Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Burundi, which was signed in November 2012 and entered into force last February with the exchange of the instruments of ratification, full of future promise for the proclamation of the Gospel, is one of its choicest fruits. I cannot but encourage you to be fully engaged — and you are already doing so — in social and political dialogue, and without hesitation to meet with public figures. The people who exercise authority are the first to need your witness of faith and your courageous proclamation of Christian values, in order to come to know better the Social Teaching of the Church, appreciating

its value and drawing inspiration from it in managing public affairs.

Indeed, your country has known terrible conflict even in the recent past; the people of Burundi too often remain divided, deep wounds have not yet healed. Only an authentic conversion of the heart to the Gospel can lead men to fraternal love and forgiveness, for “to the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity” for all (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 180). The profound evangelization of your people rightly remains your principle concern, for “in order to arrive at genuine reconciliation ... the Church needs witnesses who are profoundly rooted in Christ” (*Africae Munus*, n. 34), witnesses who live in harmony with their faith.

And the first witnesses called to live this authenticity of conversion are of course priests. I greet them with affection, and I invite them to live in truth and joy their priestly commitments which express their total gift of self to Christ, to the Church and to the Kingdom of God (cf. *Africae Munus*, n. 111). Furthermore, I cannot but encourage you to attend to the formation of seminarians, whom the Lord is calling in great numbers in your country, and I rejoice at the recent opening of a fourth Major Seminary. In addition to an indispensable intellectual formation, future priests must also receive a solid spiritual, human and pastoral formation. These are the four pillars of formation! Indeed, through the course of their lives, in their daily human relations, they will bring the Gospel to everyone; in the priestly ministry an administrative approach should not prevail over a pastoral approach, nor concentrated administration of the sacraments without other forms of evangelization (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 63). The personal dialogue that the seminarian keeps with the Lord is the basis for every vocational journey. From this source flows the missionary impetus of the priest, who is called to “go forth” resolutely from himself in order to preach the Gospel (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 24). Vocations today are fragile, and young people need to be carefully accompanied on their journey. They must have as formators priests who are true examples of joy and priestly perfection, who stay close to them, who share their lives, who are truly listening to them in order to understand them properly for the sake of guiding them better. Only at this price can one exercise a correct discernment and avoid unfortunate mistakes.

Thus consecrated in turn bear witness to their faith in Jesus with their whole lives. “They are a necessary and precious aid to the Church’s pastoral activity but also a manifestation of the deepest nature of our Christian vocation” (*Africae Munus*, n. 118). I acknowledge the admirable work that the religious congregations are carrying out in the social sphere of education and healthcare, or of help to refugees who are present in great numbers in their country. They reveal the “inseparable bond between our acceptance of the message of salvation and genuine fraternal love” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 179). I invite you to take great care of the religious life that has developed deeply in your local Churches. The many new communities which are being formed need your careful and prudent discernment in order to guarantee a solid formation for their members and to assist the changes they are called to live out in view of the good of the entire Church.

A large number of the laity, through various movements and associations, cooperate generously in social works. It is appropriate to strengthen continually this fruitful and indispensable cooperation between the various ecclesial bodies, in a spirit of solidarity and sharing, such that the Christian people as a whole may be missionary in Burundi.

The formation of young people, both human and Christian, is a key for the future of a nation in which the population is rapidly being renewed; I know that it is one of your priorities. In a world on a path of secularization it is necessary to give the new generations an authentic vision of life, society and the family. I encourage you to persevere further in the work of education that you already carry out in a commendable way: the number of Catholic schools is noteworthy, and good quality teaching is provided. Do everything possible to ensure that educators at every level are themselves firmly rooted in the Faith and in practicing the Gospel. Do not hesitate to enable the greatest number possible of young people to benefit from the proclamation of the Faith, even in public institutions; may the Church be present as well in higher education and in universities, in order to raise awareness of Christian values in those who are responsible for the future of society, so that it may be ever more human and just.

Dear Brothers, your country has experienced a difficult recent history, marked by division and violence, in a context of extreme poverty that unfortunately persists. Despite this, the courageous efforts of evangelization you have carried out in your pastoral ministry are bearing abundant fruits of conversion and reconciliation. I invite you not to waiver in your hope, but to go forward courageously with a renewed missionary spirit, in order to take the Good News to all those who are still awaiting it or who have need of it, so that they may know at last the mercy of God.

I entrust all of you, as well as the priests, consecrated, catechists and lay faithful of your dioceses, to the protection of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing.