

# SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM BULLETIN

## II ORDINARY SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS 4-25 OCTOBER 2009

*The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.  
"You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:13,14)*

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### English Edition

**03 - 04.10.2009**

#### **SUMMARY**

#### **- SOLEMN INAUGURATION OF THE II SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

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#### **- HOMILY BY THE HOLY FATHER**

At 9.30 this morning, 4 October 2009, XXVII Sunday in ordinary time, in St. Peter's Basilica, at the tomb of the Apostle Peter, the Holy Father Benedict XVI presided at the Solemn Concelebration of the Eucharist with the Synodal Fathers, for the Inauguration of the II Special Assembly for Africa of Bishops, to be held in the Synod Hall of the Vatican until 25 October 2009, on the theme: The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. "You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:13,14).

The entrance into the Basilica began at 9.15 with the singing of the Laudes regiae. The Concelebrants, led by the Masters of Ceremony took their places around the Altar of Confession. Then Their Eminences and the Components of the Presidency of the II Special Assembly for Africa of Bishops joined the Holy Father in the entrance procession

Concelebrating with the Pope were 239 Synod Fathers (33 Cardinals, 3 Synod Fathers of the Eastern Churches, 75 Archbishops, 120 Bishops and 8 Priests) and 55 Collaborators.

At the start of the Concelebretion, during the Rite of the Aspergillum presided over by the Holy Father, the choir and assembly sang “Asperges me” and “Nakoma peto” (“That may be made pure”), song in lingala.

The Presidents Delegate H. Em. Card. Francis ARINZE, Prefect emeritus of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (VATICAN CITY), H. Em. Card. Wilfrid Fox NAPIER, O.F.M., Archbishop of Durban (SOUTH AFRICA), H. Em. Card. Théodore-Adrien SARR, Archbishop of Dakar (SENEGAL); General Relator H. Em. Card. Peter Kodwo Appiah TURKSON, Archbishop of Cape Coast, President of the Association of the Episcopal Conference of Western Africa (A.C.E.A.O.)(GHANA); General Secretary H. Exc. Mons. Nikola ETEROVIĆ (VATICAN CITY); Special Secretaries H. Exc. Mons. Damião António FRANKLIN, Archbishop of Luanda (ANGOLA) and H. Exc. Mons. Edmond DJITANGAR, Bishop of Sarh (CHAD) all joined at the Altar for the Eucharistic Prayer.

The First reading was in french, the responsorial Psalm in italian and the second reading in english. The Gospel was proclaimed in latin. The Prayer of the faithful was in swahili, portuguese, amharic, hausa, lingala and arabic. The song in kikongo “Ee Mkufu, Yamba Makabi” (“Lord, accept this offering”) accompanied the Offertory. At the end of the celebration, a final hymn in lingala, to Mary “Tokobondela yo e, Mama Maria” (“We pray to you, Mother Mary”).

During the Sacred Rite, after the proclamation of the Gospel, the Holy Father pronounced the following homily:

### **HOMILY BY THE HOLY FATHER**

My Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,  
Illustrious Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear brothers and sisters!

Pax vobis - peace to all of you! With this liturgical greeting I address all of you who are gathered together in the Vatican Basilica, where 15 years ago, on 10 April, 1994, the Servant of God John Paul II opened the first Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. The fact that today we find ourselves here to inaugurate the second, signifies that the first was indeed a historical event, but not an isolated one. It was the point of arrival on a path, that was pursued later on, and that now reaches a new significant stage of verification and impulse. We praise the Lord for this! I address a most cordial welcome to Members of the Synod Assembly, who concelebrate this Holy Eucharist with me, to the experts and auditors, particularly to those who come from the African land. With special gratitude I greet the Secretary General of the Synod and his collaborators. I am very pleased to have among us His Holiness Abuna Paulos, Patriarch of the Tewahedo Orthodox Church of Ethiopia, whom I cordially thank, and to the fraternal Delegates of the other Churches and other ecclesial Communities. I am also pleased to welcome the Civil Authorities and the Ambassadors who wished to participate in this occasion; with affection I greet the priests, the religious women and men, the representatives of the organisms, movements and associations, and the Congolese choir, who, together with the Sistine Chapel, enliven our Eucharistic Celebration.

Today's Bible readings speak of matrimony. But, more radically, speak of the design of creation, of the source and, therefore, of God. The second reading also converges on this level, taken from the Letter to the Hebrews, where it states: “For consecrator - that is Jesus Christ - and consecrated - that is man - are all of the same stock; that is why he is not ashamed to call

them brothers” (Heb 2:11). From both readings, the Primacy of God the Creator springs forth in a very evident manner, with the eternal validity of his original imprint and the absolute precedence of his lordship, that lordship which children welcome better than adults, and because of this Jesus points to them as models to enter the kingdom of heaven (Cf. Mk 10:13-15). Now, the acknowledgment of the absolute Lordship of God is one of the salient and unifying features of the African culture. Naturally in Africa there are many different cultures, but they all seem to be in agreement on this point: God is the Creator and the source of life. Now life - as we well know - manifests itself primarily in the union between the man and the woman and in the birth of children; divine law, written in nature, and thereby stronger and prominent with respect to any human law, according to the clear and concise assertion by Jesus: “What God has united, human beings must not divide” (Mk 10:9). First of all the prospect is not a moral one: it, before duty, concerns the being, the order inscribed in Creation.

Dear brothers and sisters, in this sense today’s Liturgy of the Word - beyond the first impression - reveals itself as particularly apt in accompanying the opening of a Synodal Assembly dedicated to Africa. I would like to highlight in particular certain aspects that strongly emerge and call us to the work that awaits us. The first, already mentioned: the primacy of God, Creator and Lord. The second: matrimony. The third: children. As to the first aspect Africa is the repository of an inestimable treasure for the whole world: its deep sense of God, that I had the occasion to observe directly in the meetings with the African Bishops during their ad limina visit, and more so in the recent Apostolic Visit to Cameroon and Angola, still a pleasing and moving memory for me. It is to this pilgrimage in African lands that I would like to mention, because during those days I ideally opened this Synodal Assembly, by handing over the *Instrumentum laboris* to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences and to the Heads of the Synods of Bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

When we speak of the treasures of Africa, our thoughts immediately turn to the resources its land is rich in and that, unfortunately, have become and often continue to be a reason for exploitation, conflict and corruption. The Word of God, instead, makes us look at another inheritance: the spiritual and cultural one of which humanity has even greater need than it does of raw materials. As Jesus said, “What gain, then, is it for anyone to win the whole world and forfeit his life?” (Mk 8:36). From this point of view, Africa represents an enormous spiritual “lung” for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope. But this “lung” can take ill as well. And, at the moment, at least two dangerous pathologies are attacking it: first of all, an illness that is already widespread in the West, that is, practical materialism, combined with relativist and nihilist thinking. Without entering into the merit of the origins of such sicknesses of the spirit, there is absolutely no doubt that the so-called “First” World has exported up to now and continues to export its spiritual toxic waste that contaminates the peoples of other continents, in particular those of Africa. In this sense, colonialism which is over at a political level, has never really entirely come to an end. But from this same point of view we also have to point out a second “virus” that could hit Africa, that is, religious fundamentalism, mixed together with political and economic interests. Groups who follow various religious creeds are spreading throughout the continent of Africa: they do so in God’s name, but following a logic that is opposed to divine logic, that is, teaching and practicing not love and respect for freedom, but intolerance and violence.

As regards matrimony, the text of Chapter 2 of the Book of Genesis reminds us it is the permanent foundation, as Jesus himself confirmed: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gn 2:24). How can we forget the admirable cycle of catechesis that the Servant of God John Paul II dedicated to this topic, starting from an exegesis of unprecedented depth of this very Biblical text? Today, putting this forward for ourselves at the opening of the Synod, the liturgy offers us the abundant light of truth revealed and made incarnate in Christ with which we can consider the complex theme of matrimony in the ecclesial and social context of Africa. Also on this point, though, I

would like to briefly take up a suggestion that precedes any moral reflection or instruction, and that is still connected to the primacy of the sense of the sacred and of God. Matrimony, as it is presented to us in the Bible, does not exist outside of the relationship with God. Married life between a man and a woman, and therefore of the family that springs from that, is inscribed into the communion with God and, in the light of the New Testament, becomes the symbol of Trinitarian love and the sacrament of the union of Christ with the Church. To the extent to which it looks after and develops its faith, Africa could discover immense resources to give in favor of the family that is built on matrimony.

If we include in the evangelical pericope the text on Jesus and the children (Mk 10:13-15), the liturgy invites us to bear in mind right from now, in our pastoral concern, the reality of childhood that constitutes a large and, unfortunately, suffering part of the African population. In the scene where Jesus welcomes the children, indignantly opposing his own disciples who wanted to chase them away, we see the image of the Church that, in Africa, and in every other part of the planet, demonstrates her maternal concern especially for the littlest, even before they are born. Like the Lord Jesus Christ, the Church does not view them primarily as the recipients of assistance, nor of pity and exploitation, but as full people in their own right, who by their very way of being show the best road to enter the Kingdom of God, namely that of entrusting themselves unconditionally to His love.

Dear brothers, these indications coming from the Word of God are inserted in the vast horizon of the Synodal Assembly beginning today, and that is tied to the preceding one dedicated to the African continent, whose fruits were presented by Pope John Paul II, of venerated memory, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*. Naturally, the primary task of evangelization remains valid and actual, or rather a new evangelization that bears in mind the rapid social changes of our era and the phenomenon of world globalization. The same can be said for the pastoral choice of edifying the Church as the Family of God (Cf. *ivi*, 63). The second Assembly, which has as its theme: “The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace

‘You are the salt of the earth... You are the Light of the world’” (Mt 5:13-14), follows in the wake of all this. In recent years the Catholic Church in Africa has known great dynamism, and the Synodal assembly is the occasion to thank the Lord for this. And since the growth of the ecclesial community in all areas also bears ad intra and ad extra challenges, the Synod is the propitious moment to rethink pastoral activity and renew the impulse of evangelization. To become the light of the world and the salt of the earth one must always aim at the “high measure” of Christian life, that is to say holiness. All the Shepherds and all the members of the ecclesial community are called to saintliness, the lay faithful are called to spread the perfume of the holiness in the family, in workplaces, in schools and in every other social and political field. May the Church in Africa always be a family of true disciples of Christ, where the difference between the different ethnic groups becomes a reason and a stimulus for mutual human and spiritual enrichment.

With its work of evangelization and human promotion, the Church can most certainly give Africa a great contribution to all of society, which unfortunately experiences poverty, injustice, violence and wars in many countries. The vocation of the Church, the community of persons reconciled with God and with each other, is that of being the prophesy and leaven of reconciliation among the various ethnic, linguistic and even religious groups, within each individual nation and throughout the continent. Reconciliation, a gift of God that men must implore and embrace, is the stable foundation upon which one builds peace, the necessary condition for the true progress of men and society, according to the project of justice wanted by God. Open to the redeeming grace of the Holy Spirit, thus Africa will be enlightened evermore by his light and, allowing itself to be guided by the Risen Lord, will become a blessing for the universal Church, bringing its own qualified contribution to the edification of an evermore just and fraternal world.

Dear Synodal Fathers, thank you for the contribution that each one of you will bring to the works during the next weeks, which will be for us a renewed experience of abundant fraternal communion benefitting the entire Church, especially in the context of this Year of the Priest. And to you, dear brothers and sisters, I ask you to pray for us. I ask this of those present; I ask this of the cloistered monasteries and the religious communities spread throughout Africa and in every part of the world, of the parishes and the movements, of the ailing and the suffering: I ask all to pray that the Lord may make this Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops fruitful. We also call upon the protection of Saint Francis of Assisi, who we remember today, of all the African saints and, in a special way, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Our Lady of Africa. Amen!

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