



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION AND DEDICATION OF THE NEW ALTAR IN THE CATHEDRAL OF ALBANO

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Pancratius' Cathedral, Albano

Sunday, 21 September 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's celebration is particularly rich in symbols and the Word of God that has been proclaimed helps us to understand the meaning and value of what we are doing. In the First Reading we heard the account of the purification of the Temple and of the dedication of the new altar of burned offering built by Judas Machabee in 164 B.C., three years after the profanation of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes (cf. 1 Mc 4: 52-59). The Feast of Dedication which lasted eight days was established to commemorate the event. This feast, initially associated with the Temple to which the people would go in procession to offer sacrifices, was observed with manifestations of joy with the illumination of houses and in this form survived the destruction of Jerusalem.

The holy author rightly stresses the joy and gladness characteristic of this event. Yet, dear brothers and sisters, how much greater must be our joy in knowing that on the altar we are preparing to dedicate the sacrifice of Christ that will be offered every day. On this altar he will continue to sacrifice himself in the sacrament of the Eucharist, for our salvation and for that of the whole world.

Jesus makes himself truly present in the Eucharistic Mystery, which is renewed on every altar. His is a dynamic presence that takes hold of us to make us his, to liken us to him. He attracts us with the force of his love, bringing us out of ourselves to be united with him, making us one with him.

The Real Presence of Christ makes each one of us his "house" and all together we form his Church, the spiritual building of which St Peter speaks. "Come to him, to that living stone, rejected

by men but in God's sight chosen and precious"; the Apostle writes, "and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2: 4-5). St Augustine remarks, developing, as it were, this beautiful metaphor that through faith people are like the wood and stones collected in the forests and on the mountains for building; then through Baptism, catechesis and preaching they are rough-shaped, squared, and polished; but they become houses of the Lord only when they are put together with love. When believers are interconnected in accordance with a specific order, mutually close and cohesive, when they are joined by love, they truly become a dwelling of God that is in no danger of collapsing (cf. *Serm.*, 336).

Thus the love of Christ is the love that "never ends" (1 Cor 13: 8), the spiritual energy that unites all who share in the same sacrifice and are nourished by the one Bread, broken for the world's salvation. Indeed, how is it possible to communicate with the Lord if we do not communicate with one another? How can we present ourselves divided, distant from one another, at God's altar? May this altar on which the Lord's sacrifice will shortly be renewed, be a constant invitation to you, dear brothers and sisters, to love; you will always approach it disposed to accept love in your hearts, to spread it and to receive and grant forgiveness.

In this regard the Gospel passage that has just been proclaimed offers us an important lesson for life (cf. Mt 5: 23-24). It is a brief but pressing and incisive appeal for brotherly reconciliation, a reconciliation that is indispensable if we are to present the offering at the altar with dignity; an appeal that takes up the teaching already clearly present in the preaching of the prophets. Indeed, the prophets also forcefully denounced the uselessness of acts of worship that are not accompanied by a corresponding moral approach, especially in relations with others (Is 1: 10-20; Am 5: 21-27; Mi 6: 6-8). Thus, every time you approach the altar for the Eucharistic Celebration, may your soul be open to forgiveness and fraternal reconciliation, ready to accept the apologies of those who have injured you and ready, in turn, to forgive others.

In the Roman liturgy, when the priest has made the offering of the bread and the wine, he bows to the altar and prays quietly: "Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the sacrifice we offer you with humble and contrite hearts". In this way, together with the whole assembly of the faithful, he prepares to enter into the heart of the Eucharistic Mystery, into the heart of that heavenly liturgy to which the Second Reading from Revelation refers. St John presents an Angel who offers "much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne" of God (cf. Rv 8: 3). The altar of the sacrifice becomes in a certain way the meeting point between Heaven and earth; the centre, we might say, of the One Church that is heavenly yet at the same time a pilgrim on this earth where, amidst the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, disciples of the Lord proclaim his Passion and his death until he comes in glory (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8). Indeed, every Eucharistic Celebration already anticipates Christ's triumph over sin and over the world and in the mystery shows the radiance of the Church, "the spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb. It is she whom Christ loved and for whom he delivered

himself up that he might sanctify her" (*ibid.*, n. 6).

These reflections generate within us the rite we are preparing to celebrate in this cathedral of yours which today we admire in its renewed beauty, and which you rightly wish to continue to make ever more welcoming and decorous. This is a commitment that involves you all and, in the first place, asks the entire diocesan community to increase in charity and in apostolic and missionary dedication. In practice, it is a question of witnessing with your lives to your faith in Christ and to the total trust that you place in him. It is also a question of fostering ecclesial communion, which is first and foremost a gift, a grace, a fruit of God's freely given love, something, that is, which is divinely effective, ever present and active in history, over and above anything that might appear to the contrary. Ecclesial communion, however, is also a task entrusted to the responsibility of each person. May the Lord grant that you live an ever more convinced and active communion in collaboration and co-responsibility at every level: among priests, consecrated men and women and lay people, among the different Christian communities in your territory and among the various lay associations.

I now address my cordial greeting to your Pastor, Bishop Marcello Semeraro, whom I thank for his invitation and for the courteous words of welcome with which he received me on behalf of you all. I would also like to express to him my sentiments of fervent good wishes on the 10th anniversary of his episcopal ordination. I address a special thought to Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Dean of the College of Cardinals, titular of your Suburbicarian Diocese, who joins in our joy today. I greet the other Prelates present, the priests, the consecrated people, the young and the elderly, the families, the children and the sick, embracing with affection all the faithful of the diocesan community who are spiritually united here. I also extend a greeting to the Authorities who have honoured us with their presence, and in the first place to the Mayor of Albano, to whom I am also grateful for his courteous words at the beginning of holy Mass. Upon everyone I invoke the heavenly protection of St Pancratius from whom this cathedral takes its name, and of the Apostle Matthew, who is commemorated in today's liturgy.

In particular, I invoke the maternal intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On this day, which crowns your efforts, sacrifices and hard work to endow the cathedral with a renewed space for the liturgy by means of the appropriate renovation of the episcopal throne, the ambo and the altar, may Our Lady obtain that you write another page of daily and popular holiness in our time, to add to those that have marked the life of the Church of Albano through the centuries. Of course, as your Pastor recalled, difficulties, challenges and problems are not lacking, but there are also great hopes and opportunities to proclaim and to witness to God's love. May the Spirit of the Risen Lord, who is the Spirit of Pentecost, open you to his horizons of hope and nourish within you a missionary impetus to the vast horizons of the new evangelization. Let us pray for this as we continue our Eucharistic celebration.

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