



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI FOR THE 98TH MEETING OF GERMAN CATHOLICS

*To my Venerable Brother Robert Zollitsch
Archbishop of Freiburg,
to the Bishops, to the Priests, to the Deacons, to the Religious and
to all the participants in the Katholikentag of Mannheim,*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Daring to Start Afresh”: in these days many of the faithful are meeting in Mannheim for the 98th Katholikentag with this motto. I greet with affection all of you who have gathered for the solemn opening in Marktplatz, in the heart of the city. My greetings go in particular to the Archbishop of Freiburg and President of the German Bishops’ Conference, Robert Zollitsch, to the Cardinals and Bishops present, as well as to the Central Committee of German Catholics which, together with the Archdiocese of Mannheim is the hosting this Katholikentag.

I also greet the representatives of ecumenism and of public life, and all the people keeping in touch through the media. On this occasion I remember with pleasure and deep gratitude my Pastoral Visit to our homeland last year and the many edifying meetings at that great festival of faith with people from every sector of the population.

“Daring to Start Afresh” is the theme of your meeting in Mannheim. What in fact do these words mean? Starting means getting going, setting out. Yet it often also involves the decision to change and to renew. Only those prepared to leave the old behind them and to meet the new are able to set out. But what does this mean for the community of the Church which, according to the Apostle Paul is the Mystical Body of Christ?

Christ is the Head and we are the members. We cannot manipulate the Church through her Head; rather, we as her members are called to orientate ourselves continuously to the Head, the “pioneer

and perfecter” of our faith (cf. Heb 12:2). Renewal bears fruit only if it is based on what is truly new in Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6). Hence departure concerns every believer in a personal and intimate manner. Through Baptism we are renewed in Christ. The Lord has set our humanity free from the slavery of sin and has “enabled it to set out” for the life-giving relationship with God.

This departure granted by God must therefore always become a personal departure for God. Each and every one must attend to their personal faith, must live it out in practice and continue to develop it. But we are not alone in our faith, isolated from others. We believe with and in the community of the Church. Every baptized person who sets out is at the same time a departure in the Church and with her!

In every epoch there have always been people who have dared to set out in this way and to whom God’s presence was revealed particularly clearly. The testimony of faith of the Saints and of the great host of Christians who, joyful and undaunted have proclaimed the Gospel message to others, can encourage us today too to make a fresh start and can spur us to new courage in faith.

Sacred Scripture and the history of the Church have experienced a multiplicity of people to whom what was common in their time did not and could not suffice. With a restless and open heart, they were able to hear in their lives and in the demands of daily routine God’s “call to come out”. It was not human inconsistency that prompted them to set out but a longing for the truth through listening to the Word of God. A true departure, as they show us, consists of obedience and of trust in the instructions and in God’s call. Those who feel called by God and who model their life on this conversation with God, surmount narrowness and fear and thus can “account for the hope that is in them” (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).

The Jesuit priest Alfred Delp, a son of the city of Mannheim who was to become a martyr, wrote in a reflection just a few weeks before his death, people who dare to set out following God’s call, people “who seek, who wander because they believed in the interior call and in its exterior sign — which without an inner hunger and curious attention they would never have noticed — rather than in safe and comfortable stability” (*Im Angesicht des Todes*, 97 s.).

Dear brothers and sisters, Katholikentag is being hosted by a city in which there is an immense multiplicity of ideas and concepts, of projects of life and of religion. The adventure of a new departure in such an environment means recognizing its opportunities and dangers and making room for an authentic coexistence. Indeed, only unanimity in which the “civilization of love” prevails can true and enduring peace be enjoyed. It is our task, as Church, to proclaim openly and clearly the requirements and message of the Gospel. The contribution of all the baptized to the new evangelization is indispensable. Our country too needs to make a fresh missionary and apostolic start.

I would like to devote a few special words to the young and to young adults. I was able to meet many of you last year at the World Youth Day in Madrid and, a few weeks later, at the Vigil in Freiburg. Those, like you, who have their life before them are continually asked to make decisions and, also in the case of disappointment, to take courage and make an effort to shape the future. May you have the courage to orientate yourselves to Jesus Christ! Strengthen each other in faith! Spread the Gospel message among your friends, at school, at work! Just as Christ loves the Church (cf. Eph 5:25), let us too love the Church. Yes, identify with the Church, because Christ identified with the Church, Christ identifies with us! Draw from the life and truth that Christ gives us in the Church! We all want to bring this treasure of God's love to people in our country. Let us set out, following his Word (cf. Lk 5:5), thereby responding to God's coming down to us.

In a certain sense the 98th Katholikentag is a prelude to the Year of Faith that we shall shortly begin, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the opening of the [Second Vatican Council](#). May these days thus become a celebration of faith and be a help in rediscovering the Church's faith in all its beauty and freshness, in once again making it our own, ever more deeply, and also proclaiming it in new times. With this hope, I put the success of the Katholikentag in God's hands, and I warmly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 14 May 2012

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI