



The Holy See

*MEETING OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
WITH THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESES
OF BELLUNO-FELTRE AND TREVISO*

*Church of St Justin Martyr, Auronzo di Cadore
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Your Holiness, I am Fr Claudio. The question I wanted to ask you is about the formation of conscience, especially in young people, because today it seems more and more difficult to form a consistent conscience, an upright conscience. Good and evil are often confused with having good and bad feelings, the more emotive aspect. So I would like to hear your advice. Thank you.

Benedict XVI: Your Excellency, dear Brothers, I would like first of all to express my joy and gratitude for this beautiful meeting. I thank the two Pastors, Bishop Andrich and Bishop Mazzocato, for their invitation. I offer my heartfelt thanks to all of you who have come here in such large numbers during the holiday season. To see a church full of priests is encouraging because it shows us that there are priests. The Church is alive, despite the increasing problems in our day and especially in the Western hemisphere. The Church is still alive and has priests who truly desire to proclaim the Kingdom of God; she is growing and standing up to these complications that we perceive in our cultural situation today. Now, to a certain extent, this first question reflects a problem of Western culture, since in the last two centuries the concept of "conscience" has undergone a profound transformation. Today, the idea prevails that only what is quantifiable can be rational, which stems from reason. Other things, such as the subjects of religion and morals, should not enter into common reason because they cannot be proven or, rather, put to the "acid test", so to speak. In this situation, where morals and religion are as it were almost expelled from reason, the subject is the only ultimate criterion of morality and also of religion, the subjective conscience which knows no other authority. In the end, the subject alone decides, with his feelings and experience, on the possible criteria he has discovered. Yet, in this way the subject becomes an isolated reality and, as you said, the parameters change from one day to the next. In the Christian tradition, "conscience", "*con-scientia*", means "with knowledge": that is, ourselves, our

being is open and can listen to the voice of being itself, the voice of God. Thus, the voice of the great values is engraved in our being and the greatness of the human being is precisely that he is not closed in on himself, he is not reduced to the material, something quantifiable, but possesses an inner openness to the essentials and has the possibility of listening. In the depths of our being, not only can we listen to the needs of the moment, to material needs, but we can also hear the voice of the Creator himself and thus discern what is good and what is bad. Of course, this capacity for listening must be taught and encouraged. The commitment to the preaching that we do in church consists of precisely this: developing this very lofty capacity with which God has endowed human beings for listening to the voice of truth and also the voice of values. I would say, therefore, that a first step would be to make people aware that our very nature carries in itself a moral message, a divine message that must be deciphered. We can become increasingly better acquainted with it and listen to it if our inner hearing is open and developed. The actual question now is how to carry out in practice this education in listening, how to make human beings capable of it despite all the forms of modern deafness, how to ensure that this listening, the *Ephphatha* of Baptism, the opening of the inner senses, truly takes place. In taking stock of the current situation, I would propose the combination of a secular approach and a religious approach, the approach of faith. Today, we all see that man can destroy the foundations of his existence, his earth, hence, that we can no longer simply do what we like or what seems useful and promising at the time with this earth of ours, with the reality entrusted to us. On the contrary, we must respect the inner laws of creation, of this earth, we must learn these laws and obey these laws if we wish to survive. Consequently, this obedience to the voice of the earth, of being, is more important for our future happiness than the voices of the moment, the desires of the moment. In short, this is a first criterion to learn: that being itself, our earth, speaks to us and we must listen if we want to survive and to decipher this message of the earth. And if we must be obedient to the voice of the earth, this is even truer for the voice of human life. Not only must we care for the earth, we must respect the other, others: both the other as an individual person, as my neighbour, and others as communities who live in the world and have to live together. And we see that it is only with full respect for this creature of God, this image of God which man is, and with respect for our coexistence on this earth, that we can develop. And here we reach the point when we need the great moral experiences of humanity. These experiences are born from the encounter with the other, with the community. We need the experience that human freedom is always a shared freedom and can only function if we share our freedom with respect for the values that are common to us all. It seems to me that with these steps it will be possible to make people see the need to obey the voice of being, to respect the dignity of the other, to accept the need to live our respective freedom together as *one* freedom, and through all this to recognize the intrinsic value that can make a dignified communion of life possible among human beings. Thus, as has been said, we come to the great experiences of humanity in which the voice of being is expressed. We especially come to the experiences of this great historical pilgrimage of the People of God that began with Abraham. In him, not only do we find the fundamental human experiences but also, we can hear through these experiences the voice of the Creator himself, who loves us and has spoken to us. Here, in this context, respecting the human experiences that point out the way to us

today and in the future, I believe that the Ten Commandments always have a priority value in which we see the important signposts on our way. The Ten Commandments reinterpreted, relived in the light of Christ, in the light of the life of the Church and of her experiences, point to certain fundamental and essential values. Together, the Fourth and Sixth Commandments suggest the importance of our body, of respecting the laws of the body and of sexuality and love, the value of faithful love, of the family; the Fifth Commandment points to the value of life and also the value of community life; the Seventh Commandment regards the value of sharing the earth's goods and of a fair distribution of these goods and of the stewardship of God's creation; the Eighth Commandment points to the great value of truth. If, therefore, in the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Commandments we have love of neighbour, in the Seventh we have the truth. None of this works without communion with God, without respect for God and God's presence in the world. In any case, a world without God becomes an arbitrary and egoistic world. There is light and hope only if God appears. Our life has a meaning which we must not produce ourselves but which precedes us and guides us. In this sense, therefore, I would say that together, we should take the obvious routes which today even the lay conscience can easily discern. We should therefore seek to guide people to the deepest voices, to the true voice of the conscience that is communicated through the great tradition of prayer, of the moral life of the Church. Thus, in a process of patient education, I think we can all learn to live and to find true life.

I am Fr Mauro. Your Holiness, in exercising our pastoral ministry we are increasingly burdened by many duties. Our tasks in the management and administration of parishes, pastoral organization and assistance to people in difficulty are piling up. I ask you, what are the priorities we should aim for in our ministry as priests and parish priests to avoid fragmentation on the one hand and on the other, dispersion? Thank you.

Benedict XVI: That is a very realistic question, is it not? I am also somewhat familiar with this problem, with all the daily procedures, with all the necessary audiences, with all that there is to do. Yet, it is necessary to determine the right priorities and not to forget the essential: the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. On hearing your question, I remembered the Gospel of two weeks ago on the mission of the 70 disciples. For this first important mission which Jesus had them undertake, the Lord gave them three orders which on the whole I think express the great priorities in the work of a disciple of Christ, a priest, in our day too. The three imperatives are: to pray, to provide care, to preach. I think we should find the balance between these three basic imperatives and keep them ever present as the heart of our work. Prayer: which is to say, without a personal relationship with God nothing else can function, for we cannot truly bring God, the divine reality or true human life to people unless we ourselves live them in a deep, true relationship of friendship with God in Jesus Christ. Hence, the daily celebration of the Holy Eucharist is a fundamental encounter where the Lord speaks to me and I speak to the Lord who gives himself through my hands. Without the prayer of the Hours, in which we join in the great prayer of the entire People of God beginning with the Psalms of the ancient people who are renewed in the faith of the Church, and without personal prayer, we cannot be good priests for we would lose the essence of our ministry. The first

imperative is to be a man of God, in the sense of a man in friendship with Christ and with his Saints. Then comes the second command. Jesus said: tend the sick, seek those who have strayed, those who are in need. This is the Church's love for the marginalized and the suffering. Rich people can also be inwardly marginalized and suffering. "To take care of" refers to all human needs, which are always profoundly oriented to God. Thus, as has been said, it is necessary for us to know our sheep, to be on good terms with the people entrusted to us, to have human contact and not to lose our humanity, because God was made man and consequently strengthened all dimensions of our being as humans. However, as I said, the human and the divine always go hand in hand. To my mind, the sacramental ministry is also part of this "tending" in its multiple forms. The ministry of Reconciliation is an act of extraordinary caring which the person needs in order to be perfectly healthy. Thus, this sacramental care begins with Baptism, which is the fundamental renewal of our life, and extends to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. Of course, all the other sacraments and also the Eucharist involve great care for souls. We have to care for people but above all - this is our mandate - for their souls. We must think of the many illnesses and moral and spiritual needs that exist today and that we must face, guiding people to the encounter with Christ in the sacrament, helping them to discover prayer and meditation, being silently recollected in church with this presence of God. And then, preaching. What do we preach? We proclaim the Kingdom of God. But the Kingdom of God is not a distant utopia in a better world which may be achieved in 50 years' time, or who knows when. The Kingdom of God is God himself, God close to us who became very close in Christ. This is the Kingdom of God: God himself is near to us and we must draw close to this God who is close for he was made man, remains man and is always with us in his Word, in the Most Holy Eucharist and in all believers. Therefore, proclaiming the Kingdom of God means speaking of God today, making present God's words, the Gospel which is God's presence and, of course, making present the God who made himself present in the Holy Eucharist. By interweaving these three priorities and, naturally, taking into account all the human aspects, including our own limitations that we must recognize, we can properly fulfil our priesthood. This humility that recognizes the limitations of our own strength is important as well. All that we cannot do, the Lord must do. And there is also the ability to delegate and to collaborate. All this must always go with the fundamental imperatives of praying, tending and preaching.

My name is Fr Daniele. Your Holiness, the Veneto is an area with a steady influx of immigrants where a sizable number of non-Christians are present. This situation confronts our dioceses with a new, internal task of evangelization. Moreover, this represents a certain difficulty since we have to reconcile the needs of Gospel proclamation with those of a respectful dialogue with other religions. What pastoral instructions can you suggest? Thank you.

Benedict XVI: You are naturally in close touch with this situation. And in this regard, I may be unable to give you much practical advice, but I can say that in all the *ad limina* visits, whether the Bishops come from Asia, Africa, Latin America or every part of Italy, I am always confronted with such situations. A uniform world no longer exists. All the other continents, the other religions, the

other ways of living human life are present especially in the West. We are living a permanent encounter where we resemble the ancient Church because she experienced the same situation. Christians formed a tiny minority, a mustard seed that began to sprout, surrounded by very different religions and ways of life. We must learn once again, therefore, all that the first generations of Christians experienced. In his First Letter, St Peter said: "Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (3: 15). Thus, he formulated for the ordinary person of that time, for the ordinary Christian, the need to combine proclamation and dialogue. He did not say formally: "Proclaim the Gospel to everyone". He said: "You must be able, ready, to account for the hope that is in you". I think that this is the necessary synthesis between dialogue and proclamation. The first point is that the reason for our hope must be ever present within us. We must be people who live faith and think faith, people with an inner knowledge of it. So it is that faith becomes reason within us, it becomes reasonable. Meditation on the Gospel and in this case, proclamation, the homily and catechesis to enable people to ponder faith, already constitute fundamental elements in this web of dialogue and proclamation. We ourselves must think faith, live faith and, as priests, find different ways to make faith present so that our Christian Catholics can find the conviction, readiness and ability to account for their faith. This proclamation which transmits the faith to today's conscience must have many forms. The homily and catechesis are indisputably two of its principal forms, but there are also many ways of meeting, such as seminars on faith, lay movements, etc., where people talk about faith and learn the faith. All this makes us capable, first of all, of truly living as the neighbours of non-Christians - here, mainly Orthodox Christians, Protestants and also exponents of other religions, Muslims and others.

The first aspect is to live beside them, recognizing with them their neighbour, our neighbour; thus, living love of neighbour on the front line as an expression of our faith. I think that this is already a very powerful witness and also a form of proclamation: truly living love of neighbour with these others, recognizing the latter, recognizing them as our neighbour so that they can see: this "love of neighbour" is for me. If this happens, we will be able to more easily present the source of our behaviour, in other words, that love of neighbour is an expression of our faith. Thus, our dialogue cannot move on suddenly to the great mysteries of faith, although Muslims have a certain knowledge of Christ that denies his divinity but at least recognizes him as a great Prophet. They love Our Lady. These are consequently elements that we have in common, even in faith, and are starting points for dialogue. A perception of fundamental understanding on the values we should live is practical, feasible and above all necessary. Here too, we have a treasure in common because Muslims come from the religion of Abraham, reinterpreted and relived in ways to be studied and to which we should finally respond. Yet, the great substantial experience of the Ten Commandments is present and this seems to me a point that requires further investigation. Moving on to the great mysteries seems to me to be moving to a level that is far from easy and impossible to attain at large meetings. Perhaps the seed should enter hearts, so that here and there the response of faith in a more specific dialogue may mature. But what we can and must do is to seek a consensus on the fundamental values expressed in the Ten Commandments, summed up in love of neighbour and love of God, and which can thus be interpreted in the various

life contexts. We are at least on a common journey towards the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who is ultimately the God with the human face, the God present in Jesus Christ. But if the latter step is to be made in intimate, personal encounters or small groups, the journey towards this God, from which derives these values that make life in common possible, I think this is feasible also at larger meetings. As a result, in my opinion a humble, patient form of proclamation should be undertaken here, which awaits but already realizes our life in accordance with knowledge enlightened by God.

I am Fr Samuele. We have accepted your invitation to pray, care for people and preach. We are taking you seriously by caring for you yourself; so, to express our affection, we have brought you several bottles of wholesome wine from our region, which we will make sure that you receive through our Bishop. So now for my question. We are seeing an enormous increase in situations of divorced people who remarry, live together and ask priests to help them with their spiritual life. These people often come to us with a heartfelt plea for access to the sacraments. These realities need to be faced and the sufferings they cause must be shared. Holy Father, may I ask you what are the human, spiritual and pastoral approaches with which one can combine compassion and truth? Thank you.

Benedict XVI: Yes, this is indeed a painful problem and there is certainly no simple solution to resolve it. This problem makes us all suffer because we all have people close to us who are in this situation. We know it causes them sorrow and pain because they long to be in full communion with the Church. The previous bond of matrimony reduces their participation in the life of the Church. What can be done? I would say: as far as possible, we would naturally put prevention first. Hence, preparation for marriage becomes ever more fundamental and necessary. Canon Law presupposes that man as such, even without much education, intends to contract a marriage in harmony with human nature, as mentioned in the first chapters of Genesis. He is a human being, his nature is human and consequently he knows what marriage is. He intends to behave as human nature dictates to him. Canon Law starts from this presupposition. It is something compulsory: man is man, nature is what it is and tells him this. Today, however, this axiom, which holds that man prompted by his nature will make one faithful marriage, has been transformed into a somewhat different axiom. "*Volunt contrahere matrimonium sicut ceteri homines*". It is no longer nature alone that speaks, but the "*ceteri homines*": what everyone does. And what everyone does today is not simply to enter into natural marriage, in accordance with the Creator, in accordance with creation. What the "*ceteri homines*" do is to marry with the idea that one day their marriage might fail and that they will then be able to move on to another one, to a third or even a fourth marriage. This model of what "everyone does" thus becomes one that is contrary to what nature says. In this way, it becomes normal to marry, divorce and remarry, and no one thinks this is something contrary to human nature, or in any case those who do are few and far between. Therefore, to help people achieve a real marriage, not only in the sense of the Church but also of the Creator, we must revive their capacity for listening to nature. Let us return to the first query, the first question: rediscovering within what everyone does, what nature itself tells us, which is so

different from what this modern custom dictates. Indeed, it invites us to marry for life, with lifelong fidelity including the suffering that comes from growing together in love. Thus, these preparatory courses for marriage must be a rectification of the voice of nature, of the Creator, within us, a rediscovery, beyond what all the "*ceteri homines*" do, of what our own being intimately tells us. In this situation, therefore, distinguishing between what everyone else does and what our being tells us, these preparatory courses for marriage must be a journey of rediscovery. They must help us learn anew what our being tells us. They must help couples reach the true decision of marriage in accordance with the Creator and the Redeemer. Hence, these preparatory courses are of great importance in order to "learn oneself", to learn the true intention for marriage. But preparation is not enough; the great crises come later. Consequently, ongoing guidance, at least in the first 10 years, is of the utmost importance. In the parish, therefore, it is not only necessary to provide preparatory courses but also communion in the journey that follows, guidance and mutual help. May priests, but not on their own, and families, which have already undergone such experiences and are familiar with such suffering and temptations, be available in moments of crisis. The presence of a network of families that help one another is important and different movements can make a considerable contribution. The first part of my answer provides for prevention, not only in the sense of preparation but also of guidance and for the presence of a network of families to assist in this contemporary situation where everything goes against faithfulness for life. It is necessary to help people find this faithfulness and learn it, even in the midst of suffering. However, in the case of failure, in other words, when the spouses are incapable of adhering to their original intention, there is always the question of whether it was a real decision in the sense of the sacrament. As a result, one possibility is the process for the declaration of nullity. If their marriage were authentic, which would prevent them from remarrying, the Church's permanent presence would help these people to bear the additional suffering. In the first case, we have the suffering that goes with overcoming this crisis and learning a hard-fought for and mature fidelity. In the second case, we have the suffering of being in a new bond which is not sacramental, hence, does not permit full communion in the sacraments of the Church. Here it would be necessary to teach and to learn how to live with this suffering. We return to this point, to the first question of the other diocese. In our generation, in our culture, we have to rediscover the value of suffering in general, and we have to learn that suffering can be a very positive reality which helps us to mature, to become more ourselves, and to be closer to the Lord who suffered for us and suffers with us. Even in the latter situation, therefore, the presence of the priest, families, movements, personal and communitarian communion in these situations, the helpful love of one's neighbour, a very specific love, is of the greatest importance. And I think that only this love, felt by the Church and expressed in the solidarity of many, can help these people recognize that they are loved by Christ and are members of the Church despite their difficult situation. Thus, it can help them to live the faith.

My name is Fr Saverio, so of course my question concerns the missions. This year is the 50th anniversary of the Encyclical *Fidei Donum*. Many priests in our Diocese, myself included, have accepted the Pope's invitation; they, we, have lived and are living the experience of the mission *ad*

gentes. There can be no doubt that this is an extraordinary experience which in my modest opinion could be shared by a great number of priests with a view to exchanges between Sister Churches. Since the instruction in the Encyclical is still timely today, given the dwindling number of priests in our countries, how and with what attitude should it be accepted and lived both by the priests who are sent out and by the whole diocese? Thank you.

Pope Benedict XVI: Thank you. I would first like to thank all these *fidei donum* priests and the dioceses. As I have already mentioned, I have received a great number of *ad limina* visits from Bishops of Asia, Africa and Latin America and they all tell me: "We are badly in need of *fidei donum* priests and we are deeply grateful for the work they do. They make present, often in extremely difficult situations, the catholicity of the Church and they make visible the great universal communion which we form, as well as the love for our distant neighbour who becomes close in the situation of the *fidei donum* priest". In the past 50 years I have almost tangibly felt and seen this great gift, truly given, in my conversations with priests who say to us: "Do not think that we Africans are now quite self-sufficient; we are still in need of the visibility of the great communion of the universal Church". I would say that we all need to be visible as Catholics and we need to love the neighbour who comes from afar and thus finds his neighbour. Today, the situation has changed in the sense that we in Europe also receive priests from Africa, Latin America and even from other parts of Europe. This enables us to perceive the beauty of this exchange of gifts, this gift of one to the other, because we all need one another: it is precisely in this way that the Body of Christ grows. To sum up, I would like to say that this gift was and is a great gift, perceived in the Church as such: in so many situations that I cannot describe here, which involve social problems, problems of development, problems of the proclamation of the faith, problems of loneliness, the need for the presence of others, these priests are a gift in which the dioceses and particular Churches recognize the presence of Christ who gives himself for us. At the same time, they recognize that Eucharistic Communion is not only a supernatural communion but becomes concrete communion in this gift of self of diocesan priests who make themselves available to other dioceses, and that the network of particular Churches thus truly becomes a network of love. Thanks to all those who have made this gift. I can only encourage Bishops and priests to continue making this gift. I know that today, with the shortage of vocations, it is becoming more and more difficult in Europe to make this gift; but we already have the experience that other continents in turn, such as especially India and Africa, also give us priests. Reciprocity continues to be of paramount importance. Precisely the experience that we are the Church sent out into the world which everyone knows and loves, is very necessary and also constitutes the power of proclamation. Thus, people can see that the mustard seed bears fruit and ceaselessly, time and again, becomes a great tree in which the birds of the air find repose. Thank you and be strong.

Fr Alberto: Holy Father, young people are our future and our hope: but they sometimes see life as a difficulty rather than an opportunity; not as a gift for themselves and for others but as something to be consumed on the spot; not as a future to be built but as aimless wandering. The contemporary mindset demands that young people be happy and perfect all of the time. The result

is that every tiny failure and the least difficulty are no longer seen as causes for growth but as a defeat. All this often leads to irreversible acts such as suicide, which wound the hearts of those who love them and of society as a whole. What can you tell us educators who feel all too often that our hands are tied and that we have no answers? Thank you.

Benedict XVI: I think you have just given us a precise description of a life in which God does not figure. At first sight, it seems as if we do not need God or indeed, that without God we would be freer and the world would be grander. But after a certain time, we see in our young people what happens when God disappears. As Nietzsche said: "The great light has been extinguished, the sun has been put out". Life is then a chance event. It becomes a thing that I must seek to do the best I can with and use life as though it were a thing that serves my own immediate, tangible and achievable happiness. But the big problem is that were God not to exist and were he not also the Creator of my life, life would actually be a mere cog in evolution, nothing more; it would have no meaning in itself. Instead, I must seek to give meaning to this component of being. Currently, I see in Germany, but also in the United States, a somewhat fierce debate raging between so-called "creationism" and evolutionism, presented as though they were mutually exclusive alternatives: those who believe in the Creator would not be able to conceive of evolution, and those who instead support evolution would have to exclude God. This antithesis is absurd because, on the one hand, there are so many scientific proofs in favour of evolution which appears to be a reality we can see and which enriches our knowledge of life and being as such. But on the other, the doctrine of evolution does not answer every query, especially the great philosophical question: where does everything come from? And how did everything start which ultimately led to man? I believe this is of the utmost importance. This is what I wanted to say in my lecture at Regensburg: that reason should be more open, that it should indeed perceive these facts but also realize that they are not enough to explain all of reality. They are insufficient. Our reason is broader and can also see that our reason is not basically something irrational, a product of irrationality, but that reason, creative reason, precedes everything and we are truly the reflection of creative reason. We were thought of and desired; thus, there is an idea that preceded me, a feeling that preceded me, that I must discover, that I must follow, because it will at last give meaning to my life. This seems to me to be the first point: to discover that my being is truly reasonable, it was thought of, it has meaning. And my important mission is to discover this meaning, to live it and thereby contribute a new element to the great cosmic harmony conceived of by the Creator. If this is true, then difficulties also become moments of growth, of the process and progress of my very being, which has meaning from conception until the very last moment of life. We can get to know this reality of meaning that precedes all of us, we can also rediscover the meaning of pain and suffering; there is of course one form of suffering that we must avoid and must distance from the world: all the pointless suffering caused by dictatorships and erroneous systems, by hatred and by violence. However, in suffering there is also a profound meaning, and only if we can give meaning to pain and suffering can our life mature. I would say, above all, that there can be no love without suffering, because love always implies renouncement of myself, letting myself go and accepting the other in his otherness; it implies a gift of myself and therefore, emerging from myself. All this is

pain and suffering, but precisely in this suffering caused by the losing of myself for the sake of the other, for the loved one and hence, for God, I become great and my life finds love, and in love finds its meaning. The inseparability of love and suffering, of love and God, are elements that must enter into the modern conscience to help us live. In this regard, I would say that it is important to help the young discover God, to help them discover the true love that precisely in renunciation becomes great and so also enables them to discover the inner benefit of suffering, which makes me freer and greater. Of course, to help young people find these elements, companionship and guidance are always essential, whether through the parish, Catholic Action or a Movement. It is only in the company of others that we can also reveal this great dimension of our being to the new generations.

I am Fr Francesco. Holy Father, one sentence you wrote in your book made a deep impression on me: "[But] what did Jesus actually bring if not world peace, universal prosperity and a better world? What has he brought? The answer is very simple: "God. He has brought God" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, English edition, p. 44); I find the clarity and truth of this citation disarming. This is my question: there is talk about the new evangelization, the new proclamation of the Gospel - this was also the main theme of the Synod of our Diocese, Belluno-Feltre - but what should we do so that this God, the one treasure brought by Jesus and who all too often appears hazy to many, shines forth anew in our homes and becomes the water that quenches even the thirst of the many who seem no longer to be thirsting? Thank you.

Benedict XVI: Thank you. Yours is a fundamental question. The fundamental question of our pastoral work is how to bring God to the world, to our contemporaries. Of course, bringing God is a multi-dimensional task: already in Jesus' preaching, in his life and his death we see how this One develops in so many dimensions. I think that we should always be mindful of two things: on the one hand, the Christian proclamation. Christianity is not a highly complicated collection of so many dogmas that it is impossible for anyone to know them all; it is not something exclusively for academicians who can study these things, but it is something simple: God exists and God is close in Jesus Christ. Thus, to sum up, Jesus Christ himself said that the Kingdom of God had arrived. Basically, what we preach is one, simple thing. All the dimensions subsequently revealed are dimensions of this one thing and all people do not have to know everything but must certainly enter into the depths and into the essential. In this way, the different dimensions also unfold with ever increasing joy. But in practice what should be done? I think, speaking of pastoral work today, that we have already touched on the essential points. But to continue in this direction, bringing God implies above all, on the one hand, love, and on the other, hope and faith. Thus, the dimension of life lived, bearing the best witness for Christ, the best proclamation, is always the life of true Christians. If we see that families nourished by faith live in joy, that they also experience suffering in profound and fundamental joy, that they help others, loving God and their neighbour, in my opinion this is the most beautiful proclamation today. For me too, the most comforting proclamation is always that of seeing Catholic families or personalities who are penetrated by faith: the presence of God truly shines out in them and they bring the "living water" that you

mentioned. The fundamental proclamation is, therefore, precisely that of the actual life of Christians. Of course, there is also the proclamation of the Word. We must spare no effort to ensure that the Word is listened to and known. Today, there are numerous schools of the Word and of the conversation with God in Sacred Scripture, a conversation which necessarily also becomes prayer, because the purely theoretical study of Sacred Scripture is a form of listening that is merely intellectual and would not be a real or satisfactory encounter with the Word of God. If it is true that in Scripture and in the Word of God it is the Living Lord God who speaks to us, who elicits our response and our prayers, then schools of Scripture must also be schools of prayer, of dialogue with God, of drawing intimately close to God: consequently, the whole proclamation. Then, of course, I would say the sacraments. All the Saints also always come with God. It is important - Sacred Scripture tell us from the very outset - that God never comes by himself but comes accompanied and surrounded by the Angels and Saints. In the great stained glass window in St Peter's which portrays the Holy Spirit, what I like so much is the fact that God is surrounded by a throng of Angels and living beings who are an expression, an emanation, so to speak, of God's love. And with God, with Christ, with the man who is God and with God who is man, Our Lady arrives. This is very important. God, the Lord, has a Mother and in his Mother we truly recognize God's motherly goodness. Our Lady, Mother of God, is the Help of Christians, she is our permanent comfort, our great help. I see this too in the dialogue with the Bishops of the world, of Africa and lately also of Latin America; I see that love for Our Lady is the driving force of catholicity. In Our Lady we recognize all God's tenderness, so, fostering and living out Our Lady's, Mary's, joyful love is a very great gift of catholicity. Then there are the Saints. Every place has its own Saint. This is good because in this way we see the range of colours of God's one light and of his love which comes close to us. It means discovering the Saints in their beauty, in their drawing close to me in the Word, so that in a specific Saint I may find expressed precisely for me the inexhaustible Word of God, and then all the aspects of parochial life, even the human ones. We must not always be in the clouds, in the loftiest clouds of Mystery. We must have our feet firmly planted on the ground and together live the joy of being a great family: the great little family of the parish; the great family of the diocese, the great family of the universal Church. In Rome I can see all this, I can see how people from every part of the world who do not know one another are actually acquainted because they all belong to the family of God. They are close to one another because they all possess the love of the Lord, the love of Our Lady, the love of the Saints, Apostolic Succession and the Successor of Peter and the Bishops. I would say that this joy of catholicity with its many different hues is also the joy of beauty. We have here the beauty of a beautiful organ; the beauty of a very beautiful church, the beauty that has developed in the Church. I think this is a marvellous testimony of God's presence and of the truth of God. Truth is expressed in beauty, and we must be grateful for this beauty and seek to do our utmost to ensure that it is ever present, that it develops and continues to grow. In this way, I believe that God will be very concretely in our midst.

I am Fr Lorenzo, a parish priest. Holy Father, the faithful expect only one thing from priests: that they be experts in encouraging the encounter of human beings with God. These are not my own

words but something Your Holiness said in an Address to the clergy. My spiritual director at the seminary, in those trying sessions of spiritual direction, said to me: "Lorenzino, humanly we've made it, but...", and when he said "but", what he meant was that I preferred playing football to Eucharistic Adoration. And he meant that this did my vocation no good and that it was not right to dispute lessons of morals and law, because the teachers knew more about them than I did. And with that "but", who knows what else he meant. I now think of him in Heaven, and in any case I say some requiems for him. In spite of everything, I have been a priest for 34 years and I am happy about that, too. I have worked no miracles nor have I known any disasters or perhaps I did not recognize them. I feel that "humanly we've made it" is a great compliment. However, does not bringing man close to God and God to man pass above all through what we call humanity, which is indispensable even for us priests?

Benedict XVI: Thank you. I would simply say "yes" to what you said at the end. Catholicism, somewhat simplistically, has always been considered the religion of the great "*et et*": not of great forms of exclusivism but of synthesis. The exact meaning of "Catholic" is "synthesis". I would therefore be against having to choose between either playing football or studying Sacred Scripture or Canon Law. Let us do both these things. It is great to do sports. I am not a great sportsman, yet I used to like going to the mountains when I was younger; now I only go on some very easy excursions, but I always find it very beautiful to walk here in this wonderful earth that the Lord has given to us. Therefore, we cannot always live in exalted meditation; perhaps a Saint on the last step of his earthly pilgrimage could reach this point, but we normally live with our feet on the ground and our eyes turned to Heaven. Both these things are given to us by the Lord and therefore loving human things, loving the beauties of this earth, is not only very human but also very Christian and truly Catholic. I would say - and it seems to me that I have already mentioned this earlier - that this aspect is also part of a good and truly Catholic pastoral care: living in the "*et et*"; living the humanity and humanism of the human being, all the gifts which the Lord has lavished upon us and which we have developed; and at the same time, not forgetting God, because ultimately, the great light comes from God and then it is only from him that comes the light which gives joy to all these aspects of the things that exist. Therefore, I would simply like to commit myself to the great Catholic synthesis, to this "*et et*"; to be truly human. And each person, in accordance with his or her own gifts and charism, should not only love the earth and the beautiful things the Lord has given us, but also be grateful because God's light shines on earth and bathes everything in splendour and beauty. In this regard, let us live catholicity joyfully. This would be my answer. (Applause)

I am Fr Arnaldo. Holy Father, pastoral and ministerial requirements in addition to the reduced number of priests impel our Bishops to review the distribution of clergy, resulting in an accumulation of tasks for one priest as well as responsibility for more than one parish. This closely affects many communities of the baptized and requires that we priests - priests and lay people - live and exercise the pastoral ministry together. How is it possible to live this change in pastoral organization, giving priority to the spirituality of the Good Shepherd? Thank you, Your Holiness.

Benedict XVI: Yes, let us return to this question of pastoral priorities and how to be a parish priest today. A little while ago, a French Bishop who was a Religious and so had never been a parish priest, said to me: "Your Holiness, I would like you to explain to me what a parish priest is. In France we have these large pastoral units covering five, six or seven parishes and the parish priest becomes a coordinator of bodies, of different initiatives". But it seemed to him, since he was so busy coordinating the different bodies he was obliged to deal with, that he no longer had the possibility of a personal encounter with his sheep. Since he was a Bishop, hence, the Pastor of a large parish, he wondered if this system were right or whether we ought to rediscover a possibility for the parish priest to be truly a parish priest, hence, pastor of his flock. I could not, of course, come up with the recipe for an instant solution to the situation in France, but the problem in general is: to ensure that, despite the new situations and new forms of responsibility, the parish priest does not forfeit his closeness to the people, his truly being in person the shepherd of this flock entrusted to him by the Lord. Situations are not the same: I am thinking of the Bishops in their dioceses with widely differing situations; they must see clearly how to ensure that the parish priest continues to be a pastor and does not become a holy bureaucrat. In any case, I think that a first opportunity in which we can be present for the people entrusted to us is precisely the sacramental life. In the Eucharist we are together and can and must meet one another; the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is a very personal encounter; Baptism is a personal encounter and not only the moment of the conferral of the Sacrament. I would say that all these sacraments have a context of their own: baptizing entails offering the young family a little catechesis, speaking to them so that Baptism may also become a personal encounter and an opportunity for a very concrete catechesis. Preparation for First Communion, Confirmation and Marriage is likewise always an opportunity for the parish priest, the priest, to meet people personally; he is the preacher and administrator of the sacraments in a way that always involves the human dimension. A sacrament is never merely a ritual act, but the ritual and sacramental act strengthens the human context in which the priest or parish priest acts. Furthermore, I think it very important to find the right ways to delegate. It is not right that the parish priest should only coordinate other bodies. Rather, he should delegate in various ways, and obviously at Synods - and here in this Diocese you have had the Synod - a way is found to free the parish priest sufficiently. This should be done in such a way that on the one hand he retains responsibility for the totality of pastoral units entrusted to him. He should not be reduced to being mainly and above all a coordinating bureaucrat. On the contrary, he should be the one who holds the essential reins himself but can also rely on collaborators. I believe that this is one of the important and positive results of the Council: the co-responsibility of the entire parish, for the parish priest is no longer the only one to animate everything. Since we all form a parish together, we must all collaborate and help so that the parish priest is not left on his own, mainly as a coordinator, but truly discovers that he is a pastor who is backed up in these common tasks in which, together, the parish lives and is fulfilled. Thus, I would say that, on the one hand, this coordination and vital responsibility for the whole parish, and on the other, the sacramental life and preaching as a centre of parish life, could also today, in circumstances which are of course more difficult, make it possible to be a parish priest who may not know each person by name, as the Lord says of the Good Shepherd, but one

who really knows his sheep and is really their pastor who calls and guides them.

I am asking the last question and I am very tempted to keep quiet for it is a small question, Your Holiness, and after you have nine times found the way to speak to us of God and so exalt us, I feel that what I am about to ask you is trivial and poor, as it were; yet I shall do so! Just a word for those of my generation who trained during the years of the Council and set out with enthusiasm and perhaps also the ambition to change the world. We worked very hard and today we are in a somewhat tricky position because we are worn out, many of our dreams failed to come true and we feel somewhat lonely. The oldest say to us, "You see, we were right to have been more prudent"; and the younger ones sometimes taunt us for being "nostalgic for the Council". This is our question: Can we still bring a gift to our Church, especially with that attachment to people which we feel has marked us? Please help us to recover our hope and serenity.

Benedict XVI: Thank you. This is an important question with which I am well acquainted. I also lived at the time of the Council. I was in St Peter's Basilica with great enthusiasm and saw new doors opening. It really seemed to be the new Pentecost in which the Church could once again convince humanity, after the world had distanced itself from the Church in the 18th and 19th centuries; it seemed that the Church and the world were meeting again and that a Christian world and a Church of the world, truly open to the world, were being born anew. We had so many hopes but in fact things turned out to be more difficult. However, the great legacy of the Council which opened up a new road endures; it is still a *magna carta* of the Church's journey, very essential and fundamental. Why did this happen? Perhaps I would like to begin with a historical observation. A post-conciliar period is almost always very difficult. The important Council of Nicea - which for us really is the foundation of our faith, in fact, we confess the faith formulated at Nicea - did not lead to a situation of reconciliation and unity as Constantine, who organized this great Council, had hoped. It was followed instead by a truly chaotic situation of in-fighting. In his book on the Holy Spirit, St Basil compares the situation of the Church subsequent to the Council of Nicea to a naval battle at night in which no one recognizes the other but everyone fights everyone else. It really was a situation of total chaos: thus, St Basil painted in strong colours the drama of the post-conciliar period, the aftermath of Nicea. Fifty years later, for the First Council of Constantinople, the Emperor invited St Gregory of Nazianzus to take part in the Council. St Gregory answered: "No. I will not come because I know these things, I know that all Councils produce nothing but confusion and fighting so I shall not be coming". And he did not go. Thus, in retrospect, today is not as great a surprise as it would have been at the outset for us all to digest the Council, its important message. To integrate it in the Church's life, to accept it so that it may become the life of the Church, to assimilate it in the various milieus of the Church, means suffering. And it is only in suffering that growth is achieved. Growing always brings suffering because it means emerging from one stage and moving on to the next; and we must note that in the concrete post-conciliar period there are two great historical caesurae. In the post-conciliar period, we had the pause in 1968, the beginning or "explosion" - I would dare to call it - of the great cultural crisis of the West. The post-war generation had come to an end. This was the generation that, after all the

destruction and seeing the horrors of war and fighting and noting the tragedy of the great ideologies which truly led people to the brink of war, rediscovered the Christian roots of Europe. And we had begun to rebuild Europe with these lofty inspirations. However, once this generation had disappeared, all the failures, the shortcomings in this reconstruction and the widespread poverty in the world became visible. Thus, the crisis in Western culture, I would call it a cultural revolution that wanted radical change, burst out. It was saying: in 2,000 years of Christianity, we have not created a better world. We must start again from zero in an entirely new way. Marxism seems to be the scientific recipe for creating a new world at last. And in this - we said - serious clash between the new and healthy modernity desired by the Council and the crisis of modernity, everything becomes difficult, just as it was after the First Council of Nicea. Some were of the opinion that this cultural revolution was what the Council desired. They identified this new Marxist cultural revolution with the Council's intentions. This faction said: "This is the Council. Literally, the texts are still somewhat antiquated but this is the spirit behind the written words, this is the will of the Council, this is what we have to do". On the other hand, however, was a reaction that said: "This is the way to destroy the Church". This reaction - let us say - was utterly opposed to the Council, the anti-conciliar approach and - let us say - the timid, humble effort to achieve the true spirit of the Council. And as a proverb says: "If a tree falls it makes a great crash, but if a forest grows nothing can be heard for a silent process is happening". Thus, in the din of an anti-Council sentiment and erroneous progressivism, the journey of the Church silently gathered momentum, with great suffering and great losses, as she built up a new cultural process. Then came the second phase in 1989 - the collapse of the Communist regimes; but the response was not a return to the faith as one might have expected. It was not the rediscovery that the Church herself, with the authentic Council, had come up with the answer. The response instead was the total scepticism of so-called "post-modernity". It held that nothing is true, that everyone must live as best he can. Materialism gained ground, a pseudo-rationalist, blind scepticism that led to drugs and ended in all the problems we know. Once again, it closed the ways to faith because it was something so simple and so obvious. No, there was nothing true about it. The truth is intolerant, we cannot take this route. Here, in the contexts of these two cultural ruptures: the first, the cultural revolution of 1968 and the second, the collapse, we might call it, into nihilism after 1989, the Church humbly set out among the afflictions of the world and the glory of the Lord. On this path we must grow, patiently, and must now learn in a new way what it means to give up triumphalism. The Council had said that triumphalism should be given up - and was thinking of the baroque, of all these great cultures of the Church. People said: Let us begin in a new and modern way. But another triumphalism had developed, that of thought: we now do things, we have found our way, and on this path we will find the new world. Yet, the humility of the Cross, of the Crucified One, excludes this same triumphalism. We must renounce the triumphalism which holds that the great Church of the future is now truly being born. Christ's Church is always humble and in this very way is great and joyful. It seems to me very important that our eyes are now open and can see all that is positive which developed in the period subsequent to the Council: in the renewal of the liturgy, in the Synods, the Roman Synods, the universal Synods, the diocesan synods, the parish structures, in collaboration, in the new responsibility of lay people, in the great intercultural and

intercontinental co-responsibility, in a new experience of the Church's catholicity, of the unanimity that grows in humility and yet is the true hope of the world. Thus, I think we have to rediscover the Council's great legacy. It is not a spirit reconstructed from texts but consists of the great Council texts themselves, reinterpreted today with the experiences we have had which have borne fruit in so many movements and so many new religious communities. I went to Brazil knowing that the sects were spreading and that the Catholic Church there seemed somewhat fossilized; but once I arrived there, I saw that a new religious community is born in Brazil almost every day, a new movement is born. Not only are the sects growing, the Church is growing with new situations full of vitality, not in order to complete the statistics - this is a false hope, statistics are not our god - but these situations are growing in souls and create the joy of faith, the presence of the Gospel; consequently, they are also creating a true development of the world and of society. It seems to me, therefore, that we must combine the great humility of the Crucified One, of a Church which is always humble and always opposed by the great economic and military powers, etc., but with this humility we must also learn the true triumphalism of catholicity that develops in all the centuries. Today too, the presence of the Crucified and Risen One, who has preserved his wounds, is increasing. He is wounded but it is in this way that he renews the world and gives his breath which also renews the Church, despite all our poverty. And I would say that it is in this combination of the humility of the Cross and the joy of the Risen Lord, who in the Council gave us a great signpost for our journey, that we can go ahead joyously and full of hope.

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