



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF PORTUGAL
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT**

Consistory Hall

Saturday, 10 November 2007

*Cardinal Patriarch,
Beloved Portuguese Bishops,*

It is a great joy for me to receive you today in the House of Peter, who by the grace of God are solid pillars of that bridge which you are called to be and to create between humanity and its supreme destiny, the Most Holy Trinity. Eight years after your last *ad limina* visit, you find Peter has a different face but not the heart nor the arms that welcome you and confirm you in the power of God that sustains us and makes us brothers in Christ the Lord: "*May grace and peace be multiplied to you*" (1 Pt 1: 2). I greet you all with these words of welcome, thanking the President of the Episcopal Conference, Archbishop Jorge Ortiga, for the picture presented of the life and situation of your Dioceses and for the devout sentiments expressed to me in the name of all and which I reciprocate with warm affection and the assurance of my prayers for you and those entrusted to your pastoral solicitude.

Beloved Bishops of Portugal, you have passed through the Holy Door of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 at the head of the pilgrimage of your diocesan faithful, inviting them to enter and to remain in Christ as the House of their most profound and authentic desires, or rather, the House of God, and to take stock of how far such desires have already become reality or to what point everyone's life and being incarnates the Word of God, following the example of St Paul who said: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2: 20). A concrete sign of this incarnation is the pouring out of Christ's life which flows forth from me into the lives of others. This is because, "I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own.... We become 'one body', completely joined in a single existence" (Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 14). This "body" of Christ that embraces the humanity of all

times and places is the Church. St Ambrose saw its prefiguration in that "holy ground" indicated by God to Moses: "Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex 3: 5); and there, later, he was ordered: "But you, stand here by me" (Dt 5: 31). The Holy Bishop of Milan makes this command a reality for the faithful in these terms: "You remain with me (with God) if you remain in the Church.... Therefore, remain in the Church; remain where I appeared to you; there I am with you. Where the Church is, there you find the strongest support for your mind; where I appeared to you in the burning bush, there is the foundation of your soul." "In fact, I appear to you in the Church, like in the past in the burning bush. You are the bush, I am the fire; fire in the bush, I am in your flesh. This is why I am the fire; to enlighten you, to destroy your thorns, your sins, and to show you my kindness" (cf. *Epistulae Extra Collectionem: Ep. 14, 41-42*). These words clearly convey the way of life and the appeal left by God to the pilgrims of the Great Jubilee.

In this moment, I wish to give thanks to Christ the Lord together with you for the great mercy he has for his pilgrim Church in Portugal in the days of the Holy Year and in the following years permeated by this same Jubilee spirit, which allowed you to see, without fear, the limits and failings that have left you without bread and ready to begin the return journey to the Father's House, where there is plentiful bread. In fact, one feels the same Jubilee climate lasting in numerous initiatives that you began in these recent years: the general census of the Sunday obligation; taking up the synodal journey begun or still to begin; the convocation in various Dioceses of the Eucharistic *statio* or of the general mission according to new and ancient methods; the establishment of the national meeting of movements and new ecclesial communities and of the family congress; the will to serve humanity expressed by the Church and the State in a new Agreement; the proclamation of exemplary holiness in the persons of the new Blessed.... In this long pilgrimage, the most frequent observation on the lips of Christians has been the lack of participation in the life of the community, and the proposal to find new forms of integration in the community. The password has been, and is, to build roads of communion. It is necessary to change the organizational style of the Portuguese Ecclesial Community and the mentality of its members so as to have a Church in harmony with the Second Vatican Council, in which the function of the clergy and the laity is well-defined, taking into account the fact that we are all one by Baptism and integrated into the family of the sons of God, and we are all co-responsible for the growth of the Church.

This ecclesiology of communion is a path opened by the Council to which the Portuguese Church has particularly felt called in the wake of the Great Jubilee. It is, my beloved Brothers, the sure route to follow, without losing sight of possible pitfalls, such as horizontalism at its source, democratic attribution of sacramental ministries, the balance between the Orders conferred and future service, the debate concerning which members of the community are first (a futile debate since the Lord Jesus has already decided it is the last). With this I do not mean to say that one must not discuss the correct ordering in the Church and on the attribution of responsibility: there will always be imbalances that demand correction. Similar questions cannot, however, distract us

from the true mission of the Church: she must not speak primarily of herself, but of God. The essential elements of the Christian concept of "communion" are found in the text of the First Letter of St John: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1: 3). This is the high point, the start of communion: in the union of God with man, who is Christ in person; the encounter with Christ creates communion with him and, in him, with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Thus, we see, as I wrote in my first Encyclical, that: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person [Jesus Christ], which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 1). The person's and the human community's evangelization depends absolutely on the existence or lack thereof of the encounter with Jesus Christ.

We know that the first encounter can cover a plurality of forms, as the lives of numerous Saints show (presenting them is part of evangelization, which must be accompanied by models of thought and conduct), but the person's Christian initiation normally passes through the Church: the divine economy of salvation asks it of the Church. The growing sea of non-practicing Christians in your Dioceses perhaps merits examining: "the effectiveness of current approaches to Christian initiation, so that the faithful can be helped both to mature through the formation received in our communities and to give their lives an authentically Eucharistic direction, so that they can offer a reason for the hope within them in a way suited to our times" (Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 18).

Beloved Bishops of Portugal, four weeks ago you were gathered in the Shrine of Fatima with the Cardinal Secretary of State, who I sent there as my Special Envoy for the closing celebrations for the 90th anniversary of the Apparitions of Our Lady. I am pleased to think of Fatima as a school of faith with the Virgin Mary as the teacher; there she established her "chair" to teach the young visionaries, and then the multitudes, the eternal truths and the art of praying, believing and loving. With the humble attitude of students who need to learn the lesson, entrust daily to the illustrious Teacher and the Mother of the whole Christ each one of you and your priests, your direct collaborators in the guidance of the flock, the consecrated men and women who anticipate Heaven on earth, and the faithful who model the earth on the image of Heaven. Imploring upon all, through the intercession of *Nossa Senhora de Fátima*, the light and power of the Spirit, I impart my Apostolic Blessing.