



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
OF THE "ALCIDE DE GASPERI" FOUNDATION***

*Hall of Popes
Saturday, 20 June 2009*

Dear Friends of the Council of the Alcide De Gasperi Foundation,

I deeply appreciate your visit and greet you all with affection. In particular, I greet Mrs Maria Romana, daughter of Alcide De Gasperi, and Hon. Giulio Andreotti who was his close collaborator for many years. I willingly take the opportunity that your presence affords me to recall this great figure who, in historical periods of profound social change in Italy and in Europe, beset with problems, was able to work effectively for the common good. Formed at the school of the Gospel, De Gasperi was able to express the faith he professed in consistent, concrete actions. Indeed, spirituality and politics were two dimensions that co-existed within him and characterized his social and spiritual commitment. He guided the reconstruction of Italy that was emerging from Fascism and from the Second World War with prudent foresight and courageously plotted the path to the future; he defended freedom and democracy in the country. He relaunched Italy's image on the international scene and promoted economic recovery, opening himself to collaboration with all people of good will.

Spirituality and politics were so well integrated in him that if one wishes to understand this esteemed government leader properly one should not limit oneself to taking stock of the political results he achieved, but rather must also note his fine religious sensibility and firm faith which never ceased to motivate his thought and action. In 1981, 100 years after his birth, my Venerable Predecessor [John Paul II](#) paid homage to him saying that "in him, faith was the centre of inspiration, the cohesive force, the criterion of values, and a reason for choice" (cf. *Address to Leaders of the Christian Democrat Parties of Europe, Latin America and Africa for the centenary of the birth of De Gasperi*, 2 April 1981; *L'Osservatore Romano English edition*, 21 April 1981, p. 9).

The roots of this sound evangelical testimony are to be sought in the human and spiritual formation he received in his region, the Trentino, in a family where love for Christ was the daily bread and reference for every decision. He was just over 20 when in 1902, taking part in the first Catholic Congress of the Trentino, he sketched the guidelines of the apostolic action that was to form the entire programme of his life: "It is not enough to preserve Christianity in itself", he said, "it is right to fight with the whole great Catholic army to regain for the faith the fields it has lost" (cf. A. De Gasperi, *I cattolici trentini sotto l'Austria*, Ed. di storia e letteratura, Rome 1964, p. 24). Won by Christ, he was to be faithful to this attitude until he died, even at the cost of great personal sacrifice. "I am not a bigot", he wrote to his future wife, Francesca, "and perhaps not even as religious as I ought to be; but the personality of the living Christ attracts me; it subjugates me, it uplifts me like a child. Come, I want you to be with me and to follow me in the same attraction, as if towards an abyss of light" (A. De Gasperi, *Cara Francesca, Lettere*, edited by M.R. De Gasperi, Morcelliana, Brescia 1999, pp. 40-41).

We should not, therefore, be surprised to learn that in his day, overloaded as he was with institutional commitments, he always made ample room for prayer and for his relationship with God, when possible beginning every day by attending Holy Mass. Indeed, the summit of his spirituality corresponded with some of his most chaotic and eventful moments. When, for example, he experienced imprisonment, he wanted to have the Bible with him as his principal book and he subsequently retained the habit of noting Bible references on bits of paper as constant nourishment for his spirit. Towards the end of his government career after a harsh parliamentary confrontation he answered a colleague who had asked him what the secret of his political action was: "what do you expect? It is the Lord!".

Dear friends, I should like to reflect longer on this figure who honoured the Church and Italy but I limit myself to highlighting the recognition of his moral rectitude, based on indisputable fidelity to the human and Christian values, as well as the serene moral conscience that guided him in political decisions. "In the democratic system", he said in one of his discourses, "a political administrative mandate is conferred with a specific responsibility... but there is a parallel moral responsibility before one's own conscience, and in order to make a decision, one's conscience must always be illuminated by the Church's doctrine and teaching" (cf. A. De Gasperi, *Discorsi politici 1923-1954*, Cinque Lune, Rome 1990, p. 243). Of course, some moments were fraught with difficulty and perhaps also misunderstanding on the part of the ecclesiastical world, but De Gasperi was unwavering in his adherence to the Church that was, as he testified in a discourse in Naples in June 1954, "full and sincere... also in the moral and social directives contained in the Papal Documents that have almost daily nourished and shaped our vocation to public life".

On that same occasion he noted that "to operate in the social and political field neither faith nor virtue suffices; it is right to create and to foster an instrument suited to the times... that has a programme and method of its own, an autonomous responsibility, a technique and a democratic management". Docile and obedient to the Church, he was therefore autonomous and responsible

in his political decisions; he did not use the Church for political ends nor did he descend to making compromises with his upright conscience. At the end of his days he could say: "I have done all that was in my power, my conscience is at peace". He died comforted by the support of his relatives and friends, on 19 August 1954, after murmuring Jesus' name three times. Dear friends, while we pray for the soul of this statesman of international fame who served the Church, Italy and Europe with his political ability, let us ask the Lord to obtain that remembrance of his experience of government and his Christian witness may be an encouragement and an incentive to those who today are in charge of the future of Italy and of other peoples and, especially, to those inspired by the Gospel. With this wish, I thank you again for your visit and bless you all with affection.

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