



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO

MEETING WITH THE PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS AND YOUTH

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

New Church of San Pio of Pietrelcina

Sunday, 21 June 2009

Dear Priests,

Dear Men and Women Religious,

Dear Young People,

My pilgrimage to San Giovanni Rotondo ends with our Meeting. I am grateful to the Archbishop of Lecce, Archbishop Domenico Umberto D'Ambrosio, Apostolic Administrator of this Diocese, and to Fra Mauro Jöhri, Minister General of the Friars Minor Capuchin, for their cordial welcome on your behalf. My greeting is now addressed to you, dear priests, engaged in serving the People of God every day as wise guides and diligent workers in the Lord's vineyard. I also greet with affection the beloved consecrated people, called to bear a witness of total dedication to Christ through the faithful practice of the Evangelical Counsels. A special thought for you, dear Capuchin Friars, who lovingly care for this oasis of spirituality and evangelical solidarity, welcoming pilgrims and devotees recalled by the vivid memory of your holy confrère, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina. I warmly thank you for this precious service that you offer to the Church and souls who rediscover here the beauty of faith and the warmth of divine tenderness. I greet you, dear young people to whom the Pope looks confidently as the future of the Church and of society. Here, in San Giovanni Rotondo, everything speaks of the holiness of a humble friar and zealous priest who also invites us this evening to open our hearts to the mercy of God; he is urging us to be holy, that is, to be sincere and true friends of Jesus. Thank you too for the words of your young representatives.

Dear priests, the day before yesterday, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart and a day of priestly holiness, we inaugurated the Year for Priests, during which we shall commemorate with

veneration and affection the 150th anniversary of the death of St John Mary Vianney, the Holy Curé d'Ars. In the [Letter I wrote for the occasion](#), I wanted to stress how important the holiness of priests is for the Church's life and mission. Like the Curé d'Ars, [Padre Pio](#) also reminds us of the dignity and responsibility of the priestly ministry. Who was not struck by the fervour with which he relived Christ's Passion in every Eucharistic celebration? In him, as in the Curé d'Ars, a total willingness to accept the faithful, especially sinners, flowed from love for the Eucharist.

Furthermore, if in a turbulent and difficult epoch St John Mary Vianney sought in every possible way to enable his parishioners to rediscover the meaning and beauty of sacramental repentance, the holy Friar of the Gargano was consumed until the end of his life by his longing to care for souls and to convert sinners. How many people changed their way of living thanks to his patient priestly ministry; what long hours he spent in the confessional! Like the Curé d'Ars, it was his ministry as confessor itself that constituted this holy Capuchin's distinctive feature and his greatest claim to glory. Consequently how can we fail to understand the importance of taking part devoutly in the Eucharistic celebration and of receiving the sacrament of Confession frequently? The sacrament of Penance in particular should be increasingly appreciated and priests must never resign themselves to seeing their confessionals deserted, or limit themselves to noting loss of interest in the faithful for this extraordinary source of serenity and peace.

Then there is another important lesson we can learn from [Padre Pio's life](#): the value of and need for prayer. He would answer those who asked him to express an opinion of himself: "*I am only a poor friar who prays*". And effectively he prayed always and everywhere with humility, trust and perseverance. Here then is a key point, not only for the spirituality of the priest but also for that of every Christian, and especially for you, dear men and women religious, chosen to follow Christ more closely through the practice of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. One may sometimes be overcome by a certain discouragement at the weakening or even abandonment of faith which is recorded in our secularized societies. It is certainly necessary to find new channels for communicating the Gospel truth to the men and women of our time, but if the essential content of the Christian proclamation is always to remain the same, we must turn to its original source, to Jesus Christ who is "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13: 8). The human and spiritual life of [Padre Pio](#) teaches us that only a soul closely united with the Crucified One succeeds in communicating the joy and riches of the Gospel even to those who are remote.

Love for Christ is inevitably linked to love for Christ's Church, guided and enlivened by the power of the Holy Spirit, in which each one of us has a role and mission to carry out. Dear priests, dear men and women religious, the tasks entrusted to you and the charisms which you interpret may differ but may the spirit in which you carry them out always be the same so that your presence and action among the Christian people become an eloquent witness of God's primacy in your lives. Was it not perhaps precisely this that everyone perceived in [St Pius of Pietrelcina](#)?

May I now be permitted to address a special word to the young people whom I see here in such large numbers and so enthusiastic. Dear friends, thank you for your warm welcome and for the

fervent sentiments which your representative has expressed. I noted that the pastoral plan of your diocese for the three-year period 2007-2010 pays great attention to the mission to young people and families, and I am certain that this approach of listening, confrontation, dialogue and verification to which you are committed will lead to an ever greater care of families and regular listening to the real expectations of the new generations. I have in mind the problems that confront you, dear young men and women, and that risk stifling the enthusiasm characteristic of your youth. Among these, in particular, I mention the phenomenon of unemployment that is dramatically affecting many young men and women in Southern Italy. Do not lose heart! Be "young people with great hearts", as you have often heard repeated to you this year since the Diocesan Youth Mission, animated and guided by the Regional Seminary of Molfetta last September. The Church does not abandon you. Do not abandon the Church! Your contribution is necessary for building living Christian communities and societies that are more just and open to hope. And if you want to have "great hearts", learn at the school of Jesus. Just the other day we contemplated his great Heart overflowing with love for humanity. He will never abandon you or betray your trust, he will never lead you on the wrong paths. Like Padre Pio, may you too be faithful friends of the Lord Jesus, keeping up a daily relationship with him through prayer and listening to his Word, with an assiduous practice of the Sacraments and cordial membership in his family which is the Church.

This must be the basis of the programme of life of each one of you, dear young people, as well as you, dear priests and you, dear men and women religious. I assure each and every one of you of my prayers, as I implore the motherly protection of St Mary of Grace, who watches over you from her Shrine in whose crypt Padre Pio's remains repose. I warmly thank you once again for your welcome and I bless you all, together with your families, your communities your parishes and your entire diocese.

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