



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr CHARLES GHISLAIN
AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM TO THE HOLY SEE**

Saturday, 24 April 2010

Mr Ambassador,

I am glad to welcome you on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Belgium to the Holy See. I thank you for your words. To reciprocate I should be grateful if you would kindly express to His Majesty Albert II, King of the Belgians, whom I was recently able to greet in person, my cordial wishes for himself and for the happiness and success of the Belgian people. Through you, I likewise greet the Government and all the authorities of the Kingdom.

At the beginning of the year your country experienced two grievous tragedies, in Liège and in Buizingen. I would like to renew to the bereaved families and to the victims the assurance of my spiritual closeness. These catastrophes bring home to us the frailty of human existence and the need, to protect it, for an authentic social coherence which does not weaken the legitimate diversity of opinions. It rests on the conviction that human life and dignity are a precious good that it is necessary to defend and promote with determination, relying on natural law. For a long time the Church has been fully part of the history and social fabric of your nation. She desires to continue to be a factor of harmonious coexistence among all. For this reason, she makes a very active contribution, especially through her numerous educational institutions, her social works and the charitable commitment of very many of her faithful. The Church is therefore glad to place herself at the service of all the members of Belgian society.

Nonetheless, it would seem useful to stress that as an institution, she possesses a right to express herself publicly. She shares this right with all individuals and all institutions, in order to contribute her advice on questions of common interest. The Church respects the freedom of all to think differently from her; she would also like her right of expression to be respected. The Church is a

depository of a teaching, of a religious message which she has received from Jesus Christ. It can be summed up in these words of Holy Scripture: "God is love" (1 Jn 4: 16), and shines his light on the meaning of the human being's personal, family and social life. Since the common good is the Church's objective, she claims nothing more than the freedom to present this message, without imposing it on anyone and with respect for freedom of conscience.

It was by imbibing this ecclesial teaching in a radical way that Joseph de Veuster became the person we now call "St Damien". This man's exceptional destiny demonstrates the point to which the Gospel inspires an ethics that is friendly to the person, especially if he or she is in need or rejected.

For the Belgian people the canonization of this priest and the fame he enjoys universally is a legitimate cause for pride. This engaging figure is not the product of a solitary journey. It is good to remember the religious roots that nourished his education and his formation, as well as the teachers who awoke within him this admirable generosity. It was to lead him to share the marginalized life of the lepers, even to the point of exposing himself to the disease from which they suffered. In the light of this testimony, it is possible to all for understand that the Gospel is a force which there is no reason to fear. I am convinced that the Christian soil of your land is still rich, in spite of the social developments. It can generously nourish the commitment of a growing number of volunteers who, inspired by the Gospel principles of brotherhood and solidarity, accompany people who are experiencing difficulties and for this reason need help.

Your country, which already hosts the Community institutions, saw its European vocation once again reaffirmed in the choice of one of your compatriots as the first President of the European Council. As can be seen, these successive decisions are not only linked to the geographical location of your country and its multilingualism. A member of the original nucleus of founder countries, your nation had to engage in, and distinguish itself in, the search for a consensus in very complex situations. This quality should be encouraged at a time when the internal challenges of the country must be faced, for the good of all. I wish to emphasize today that if it is to bear fruit in the long term, the art of consensus must not be reduced to a purely dialectic skill; rather it must seek the true and the good. For "without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation, especially in a globalized society at difficult times like the present" (*Caritas in Veritate*, n. 5).

I would like to take this opportunity to offer a warm greeting to the Bishops of Belgium, whom I shall shortly have the pleasure of welcoming during their visit *ad limina Apostolorum*. My thoughts turn in particular to Archbishop Léonard who, with enthusiasm and generosity has recently begun his new mission as Archbishop of Malines-Brussels. I would also like to greet the priests of your country and the deacons, as well as all the faithful who form the Belgian Catholic community. I ask them to witness to their faith boldly. In their engagements in the city may they fully bring to bear their right to propose values that respect human nature and correspond to the deepest and most

authentic spiritual aspirations of the person.

At the time when you are officially inaugurating your duties at the Holy See, I offer you my best wishes for the success of your mission. You may rest assured, Mr Ambassador, that you will always find with my collaborators cordial attention and understanding. As I invoke the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of St Damien, I pray the Lord to pour out an abundance of Blessings upon you, upon your family and upon your collaborators, as well as on the Belgian people and its leaders.

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