



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MÜNCHEN, ALTÖTTING AND REGENSBURG
(SEPTEMBER 9-14, 2006)

CELEBRATION OF VESPERS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

*Cathedral of Munich
Sunday, 10 September 2006*

*Dear First Communicants!
Dear Parents and Teachers!
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

The reading we have just heard is from the final book of the New Testament, the *Book of Revelation*. The seer is helped to lift his eyes upward, towards heaven, and forward, towards the future. But in doing so, he speaks to us about earth, about the present, about our lives. In the course of our lives, all of us are on a journey, we are traveling towards the future. Naturally, we want to find the right road: to find true life, and not a dead end or a desert. We don't want to end up saying: I took the wrong road, my life is a failure, it went wrong. We want to find joy in life; we want, in the words of Jesus, "to have life in abundance".

But let us listen to the seer of the *Book of Revelation*. What has he said to us in this passage which was read to us a moment ago? He is talking about a reconciled world. A world in which people "of every nation, race, people and tongue" (7:9) have come together in joy. And so we ask: "How can this happen? What road do we take to get there?" Well, first and most important: these people are living with God; God himself has "sheltered them in his tent" (cf. 7:15), as the reading says. So we ask ourselves again: "What do we mean by 'God's tent'? Where is it found? How do we get there?" The seer might be alluding to the first chapter of the *Gospel according to John*,

where we read: "The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us" (1:14). God is not far from us, he is not somewhere out in the universe, somewhere that none of us can go. He has pitched his tent among us: in Jesus he became one of us, flesh and blood just like us. This is his "tent". And in the Ascension, he did not go somewhere far away from us. His tent, he himself in his Body, remains among us and is one of us. We can call him by name and speak at ease with him. He listens to us and, if we are attentive, we can also hear him speaking back.

Let me repeat: In Jesus, it is God who "camps" in our midst. But let me also repeat: Where exactly does this happen? Our reading gives us two answers to this question. It says that the men and women at peace "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). To us this sounds very strange. In his cryptic language, the seer is speaking about Baptism. His words about "the blood of the Lamb" allude to Jesus' love, which he continued to show even up to his violent death. This love, both divine and human, is the bath into which he plunges us at Baptism - the bath with which he washes us, cleansing us so that we can be fit for God and capable of living in his company. The act of Baptism, however, is just a beginning. By walking with Jesus, in faith and in our life in union with him, his love touches us, purifies us and enlightens us. We heard that, in the bath of love, our clothing becomes white. For the ancient world, white was the colour of light. The white robes mean that in faith we become light, we set aside darkness, falsehood and every sort of evil, and we become people of light, fit for God. The baptismal gown, like the First Communion robes that you are wearing, is meant to remind us of this, and to tell us: by living as one with Jesus and the community of believers, the Church, you have become a person of light, a person of truth and goodness - a person radiant with goodness, the goodness of God himself.

The second answer to the question: "Where do we find Jesus?" is also given by the seer in cryptic language. He tells us that the Lamb leads the great multitude of people from every culture and nation to the sources of living water. Without water, there is no life. People who lived near the desert knew this well, and so springs of water became for them the symbol *par excellence* of life. The Lamb, Jesus, leads men and women to the sources of life. Among these sources are the Sacred Scriptures, in which God speaks to us and tells us the how to live in the right way. But there is more to these sources: in truth the authentic source is Jesus himself, in whom God gives us his very self. He does this above all in Holy Communion. There we can, as it were, drink directly from the source of life: he comes to us and makes each of us one with him. We can see how true this is: through the Eucharist, the sacrament of communion, a community is formed which spills over all borders and embraces all languages - we see it here: there are present Bishops of every language and from throughout the world – through communion the universal Church takes shape, in which God speaks to us and lives among us. This is how we should receive Holy Communion: seeing it as an encounter with Jesus, an encounter with God himself, who leads us to the sources of true life.

Dear parents! I ask you to help your children to grow in faith, I ask you to accompany them on their

journey towards First Communion, a journey which continues beyond that day, and to keep accompanying them as they make their way to Jesus and with Jesus. Please, go with your children to Church and take part in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration! You will see that this is not time lost; rather, it is the very thing that can keep your family truly united and centred. Sunday becomes more beautiful, the whole week becomes more beautiful, when you go to Sunday Mass together. And please, pray together at home too: at meals and before going to bed. Prayer does not only bring us nearer to God but also nearer to one another. It is a powerful source of peace and joy. Family life becomes more joyful and expansive whenever God is there and his closeness is experienced in prayer.

Dear catechists and teachers! I urge you to keep alive in the schools the search for God, for that God who in Jesus Christ has made himself visible to us. I know that in our pluralistic world it is no easy thing in schools to bring up the subject of faith. But it is hardly enough for our children and young people to learn technical knowledge and skills alone, and not the criteria that give knowledge and skill their direction and meaning. Encourage your students not only to raise questions about particular things - something good in itself - , but above all to ask about the why and the wherefore of life as a whole. Help them to realize that any answers that do not finally lead to God are insufficient.

Dear priests and all who assist in parishes! I urge you to do everything possible to make the parish an "spiritual community" for people - a great family where we also experience the even greater family of the universal Church, and learn through the liturgy, through catechesis and through all the events of parish life to walk together on the way of true life.

These three places of education - the family, the school and the parish - go together, and they help us to find the way that leads to the sources of life, and truly all of us, dear children, dear parents and dear teachers, want to have "life in abundance". Amen!

© Copyright 2006 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana