



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO NAPLES

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Piazza del Plebiscito, Naples
Sunday, 21 October 2007

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Authorities,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I accepted with great joy the invitation to visit the Christian community that lives in this historical city of Naples. I first offer Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, your Archbishop, a fraternal embrace and my special thanks for his words on your behalf at the beginning of this solemn Eucharistic Celebration. I sent him to your Community knowing of his apostolic zeal and I am happy to see that you appreciate him for his gifts of mind and heart. I greet with affection the Auxiliary Bishops and diocesan priests, as well as the men and women religious and other consecrated persons, the catechists and the lay people, especially the youth actively involved in various pastoral, apostolic and social initiatives. I greet the distinguished civil and military Authorities who honour us with their presence, starting with the Prime Minister, the Mayor of Naples and the Presidents of the Province and Region. To you all, gathered in this Square in front of the monumental Basilica dedicated to St Francis of Paola, the fifth centenary of whose death is being celebrated this year, I address my cordial thoughts, which I willingly extend to all those who have joined us via radio and television, especially the cloistered communities, the elderly, those in the hospital or prison and those whom I will be unable to meet in this short Visit to Naples. In a word, I greet the entire family of believers and all citizens of Naples: I am among you, dear friends, to break with you the Word and the Bread of Life, and the bad weather does not discourage us because Naples is always beautiful!

In meditating on the biblical Readings for this Sunday and thinking of the situation of Naples, I was struck by the fact that today the main theme of the Word of God is prayer; indeed, we "ought always to pray and not lose heart", as the Gospel says (cf. Lk 18: 1). At first sight, this might seem a message not particularly relevant, unrealistic, not very incisive with regard to a social reality with so many problems such as yours. But, if we think about it, we understand that this Word contains a message that certainly goes against the tide and yet is destined to illuminate in depth the conscience of this Church and city of yours. I would sum it up like this: the power that changes the world and transforms it into the Kingdom of God, in silence and without fanfare, is faith - and prayer is the expression of faith. When faith is filled with love for God, recognized as a good and just Father, prayer becomes persevering, insistent, it becomes a groan of the spirit, a cry of the soul that penetrates God's Heart. Thus, prayer becomes the greatest transforming power in the world. In the face of a difficult and complex social reality, as yours certainly is, it is essential to strengthen hope which is based on faith and expressed in unflagging prayer. It is prayer that keeps the torch of faith alight. Jesus asks, as we heard at the end of the Gospel: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk 18: 8). It is a question that makes us think. What will be our answer to this disturbing question? Today, let us repeat together with humble courage: Lord, in coming among us at this Sunday celebration you find us gathered together with the lamp of faith lit. We believe and trust in you! Increase our faith!

The biblical Readings we have heard present several models to inspire us in our profession of faith, which is also always a profession of hope because faith and hope open the earth to divine power, to the power for good. They are the figures of the widow, whom we encounter in the Gospel parable, and of Moses, of whom the Book of Exodus speaks. The widow of the Gospel (cf. Lk 18: 1-8) makes us think of the "little", the lowliest, but also of so many simple, upright people who suffer because of abuse, who feel powerless in the face of the perduring social malaise and are tempted to despair. To them Jesus repeats: look at this poor widow, with what tenacity does she insist and in the end succeeds in being heard by a dishonest judge! How could you imagine that your Heavenly Father, who is good and faithful and powerful, who desires only his children's good, would not do justice to you in his own time? Faith assures us that God hears our prayers and grants them at the appropriate moment, although our daily experience seems to deny this certainty. In fact, in the face of certain events in the news or of life's numerous daily hardships which the press does not even mention, the supplication of the ancient Prophet: "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you, "Violence!" and you will not save?" (Heb 1: 2) wells up in the heart spontaneously. There is one answer to this heartfelt invocation: God cannot change things without our conversion, and our true conversion begins with the "cry" of the soul imploring forgiveness and salvation. Christian prayer is not, therefore, an expression of fatalism or inertia; on the contrary, it is the opposite of evasion from reality, from consoling intimism. It is the force of hope, the maximum expression of faith in the power of God who is Love and does not abandon us. The prayer Jesus taught us which culminated in Gethsemane has the character of "competitiveness", that is, of a struggle because we line up with determination at the Lord's side to fight injustice and conquer evil with good; it is the weapon of the lowly and the poor

in spirit, who reject every type of violence. Indeed, they respond to it with evangelical non-violence, thereby testifying that the truth of Love is stronger than hatred and death.

This also emerges in the First Reading, the famous account of the battle between the Israelites and Amalek's men (cf. Ex 17: 8-13a). It was precisely prayer, addressed with faith to the true God, that determined the fate of that harsh conflict. While Joshua and his men were tackling their adversaries on the battlefield, Moses was standing on the hilltop, his hands uplifted in the position of a person praying. These raised hands of the great leader guaranteed Israel's victory. God was with his people; he wanted them to win but made Moses' uplifted hands the condition for his intervention.

It seems incredible, but that is how it is: God needs the raised hands of his servant! Moses' raised arms are reminiscent of the arms of Jesus on the Cross: the outspread, nailed arms with which the Redeemer won the crucial battle against the infernal enemy. His fight, his arms raised to the Father and wide open for the world, ask for other arms, other hearts that continue to offer themselves with his same love until the end of the world. I am addressing you in particular, dear Pastors of the Church in Naples, making my own the words that St Paul address to Timothy and that we heard in the Second Reading: remain firm in what you have learned and have believed. Preach the word, persevere on every occasion, in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching (cf. II Tim 3: 14, 16; 4: 2). And like Moses on the mountain, persevere in prayer for and with the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care, so that every day they may be able to face together the good fight of the Gospel.

And now, inwardly enlightened by the Word of God, let us return to look at the reality of your city, where there is no lack of healthy energy, good people, cultured and with a keen sense of family. For many, however, life is far from simple. There are so many situations of poverty, housing shortages, unemployment or under-employment, the lack of any future prospects. Then there is the sad phenomenon of violence. It is not only a question of the deplorable crimes of the Camorra but also of the fact that violence unfortunately tends to breed a widespread mentality, creeping into the recesses of social life in the historical districts of the centre and in the new and anonymous suburbs, with the risk of attracting especially young people who grow up in contexts where unlawfulness, the "black economy" and the culture of "fending for oneself" thrive. How important it is, therefore, to redouble our efforts for a serious strategy of prevention that focuses on school, work and helping youth to manage their leisure time - an intervention which involves everyone in the fight against every form of violence, which begins with the formation of consciences and the transformation of everyday mindsets, attitudes and behaviour. I address this invitation to every man and woman of good will while the meeting for peace by religious leaders is being held here in Naples on the theme: *"For a world without violence - Religions and cultures in dialogue"*.

Dear brothers and sisters, beloved [Pope John Paul II visited Naples for the first time in 1979](#): it was, like today, on Sunday, 21 October! He came a second time in [November 1990](#): a Visit that encouraged the rebirth of hope. The Church's mission is always nourished by the faith and hope of

the Christian people. This is also what your Archbishop is doing. He recently wrote a Pastoral Letter with the significant title: "*Blood and hope*". Yes, true hope is only born from the Blood of Christ and blood poured out for him. There is blood which is the sign of death, but there is also blood that expresses love and life. The Blood of Jesus and the blood of the Martyrs, like that of your own beloved Patron St Januarius, is a source of new life. I would like to conclude by making my own a saying from your Archbishop's Pastoral Letter that sounds like this: "The seed of hope may be the tiniest but can give life to a flourishing tree and bear abundant fruit". This seed exists and is active in Naples, despite the problems and difficulties. Let us pray to the Lord that he will cause an authentic faith and firm hope to grow in the Christian community that can effectively oppose discouragement and violence. Naples certainly needs appropriate political interventions, but first it needs a profound spiritual renewal; it needs believers who put their full trust back in God and with his help work hard to spread Gospel values in society. Let us ask Mary's help with this, as well as that of your holy Protectors, especially St Januarius. Amen!

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