



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
AT THE BEGINNING OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR
OF THE PONTIFICAL ROMAN UNIVERSITIES***

*St Peter's Basilica
Monday, 23 October 2006*

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to meet you at the end of Holy Mass and to thus offer you my wishes for the new Academic Year.

In the first place I greet Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, who has presided at the Eucharistic Concelebration, and I cordially thank him for the words he addressed to me in your name. I greet the Secretary and other collaborators of the Dicastery for Catholic Education, renewing to all the expression of my gratitude for the precious service rendered to the Church in such an important area as the formation of the young generations.

I extend my greeting to the Rectors, Professors and students of each Pontifical University and Athenaeum present here and to all those who are ideally joining us in prayer.

As every year, also this evening is the appointment with the Roman ecclesiastic academic community made up of about 15,000 people and characterized by the most varied origins. From the Church in every part of the world, in particular from newly established Dioceses and from missionary territories, seminarians and deacons come to Rome to attend the Pontifical Academies, also priests, deacons, Religious and not a few lay people to complete their licence and doctoral studies or to enrol in other specializations and updating courses.

Here they find professors and formation staff that in their turn are of various nationalities and from different cultures. Such variety, however, does not result in dispersion because, as expressed also in the highest form of today's liturgical celebration, all the Athenaeums, Faculties and Colleges tend to a greater unity, obeying a common criteria of formation, principally that of fidelity to the Magisterium.

Therefore, at the beginning of a new year, we give praise to the Lord for this singular community of professors and students, who manifest in an eloquent way the Catholic Church's universality and unity. It is a community that is all the more beautiful because it primarily addresses youth, giving them the opportunity to enter into contact with institutions of high theological and cultural value, and offering them at the same time the possibility of enriching ecclesial and pastoral experiences.

I would like to stress also on this occasion, as I have had the opportunity to do at various meetings with priests and seminarians, the primary importance of the spiritual life and the necessity to foster, along with cultural growth, a balanced human maturity and a profound ascetic and religious formation.

Whoever wants to be a friend of Jesus and become his authentic disciple - be it seminarian, priest, Religious or lay person - must cultivate an intimate friendship with him in meditation and prayer. The deepening of Christian truths and the study of theology and other religious disciplines presupposes an education to silence and contemplation, because one must become capable of listening to God speaking in the heart.

Thought must always be purified to be able to enter the dimension where God pronounces his creative and redemptive Word; his Word "comes out of silence", to use the beautiful expression of St Ignatius of Antioch (*Letter To the Magnesians*, VIII, 2). Only if it is born from the silence of contemplation can our words have some value and usefulness, and not resemble the inflated discourses of the world that seek the consensus of public opinion.

The student who studies in an ecclesiastical institute must therefore be disposed to obedience to the truth and so cultivate a special ascesis of thought and word. This ascesis is based on loving familiarity with the Word of God and, I would say even more so, on that "silence" from which the Word originates in the dialogue of love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. Also, we have access to such a dialogue through the holy humanity of Christ.

Therefore, dear friends, as the disciples of the Lord did, ask him: Master, "teach us to pray" (Lk 11: 1), and also: teach us to think, to write and to speak, because they are strictly connected.

These are the suggestions that I address to each one of you, dear brothers and sisters, at the beginning of the new Academic Year. I willingly accompany you, assuring you of a particular remembrance in prayer, so that the Holy Spirit illumine your hearts and lead you to a clear

knowledge of Christ, able to transform your existence, because he alone has the words of everlasting life (cf. Jn 6: 68).

Your future apostolate will be rich and fruitful in the measure in which you prepare yourselves in these years, studying seriously. Above all, nourish your personal friendship with the Lord, tending to holiness and having as the sole goal of your existence the realization of the Kingdom of God.

I entrust these, my wishes, to the maternal intercession of Mary Most Holy, Seat of Wisdom. May she accompany you throughout this new year of study and grant your longings and hopes.

With affection I impart to each one of you and to your study circles, as also to your dear ones, a special Apostolic Blessing.

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