



The Holy See

MEETING WITH THE PARISH PRIESTS AND THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Hall of Blessings
Thursday, 7 February 2008*

Here it follows the interview of the Holy Father and a summary of the questions put to him by 10 diocesan clerics:

Giuseppe Corona, deacon:

Holy Father, I would first like to express my gratitude and that of my brother deacons for this ministry which the Council of the Church so providentially restored. The diaconate is a ministry that enables us to express our vocation fully. We are involved in a great variety of tasks that we carry out in very different contexts: the family, work, the parish, society, even missions in Africa and Latin America, contexts that you mentioned at the Audience you granted us in honour of the 25th anniversary of the Roman diaconate. We have increased in number: we are now 108. We would be glad, Your Holiness, if you would suggest a pastoral initiative that could become the sign of a more incisive presence of the permanent diaconate in the city of Rome, similar to that in the first centuries of the Roman Church....

Pope Benedict XVI: I am grateful for this testimony from one of Rome's more than 100 deacons. I would also like to express my joy and gratitude to the Council for restoring this important ministry in the universal Church. I must say that when I became Archbishop of Munich I did not find more than perhaps three or four deacons. I have strongly encouraged this ministry because it seems to me that it enhances the riches of the Church's sacramental ministry. At the same time, it can also serve as a link between the secular world, the professional world and the world of the priestly ministry, since many deacons continue to carry out their professions and keep their posts - both

important and also simple positions -, while on Saturdays and Sundays they work in church. Thus, they witness in the contemporary world as well as in the world of work to the presence of the faith, the sacramental ministry and the diaconal dimension of the Sacrament of Orders. I consider this very important: the visibility of the diaconal dimension.

Every priest, of course, also continues to be a deacon and must always be aware of this dimension, for the Lord himself became our minister, our deacon. Recall the act of the washing of the feet, where it is explicitly shown that the Teacher, the Lord, acts as a deacon and wants those who follow him to be deacons and carry out this ministry for humanity, to the point that they even help us to wash the dirty feet of the people entrusted to our care. This dimension seems to me to be of paramount importance.

On this occasion a small experience noted by Paul VI springs to mind - although it may not be quite relevant to our subject. Every day of the Council the Gospel was enthroned. The Pontiff once told the masters of ceremonies that he himself would like to be the one who enthroned the Gospel. They said: No, this is a task for deacons and not for the Pope, the Supreme Pontiff, or the Bishops. He noted in his diary: But I am also a deacon, I am still a deacon, and I too would like to exercise my diaconal ministry by enthroning the Word of God. Thus, this concerns us all. Priests remain deacons and deacons clarify this diaconal dimension of our ministry in the Church and in the world. The liturgical enthronement of the Word of God every day during the Council was always an act of great importance: it told us who was the true Lord of that Assembly, it told us that the Word of God is on the throne and that we exercise the ministry to listen to and interpret this Word in order to offer it to others. To enthrone the Word of God, the living Word or Christ, in the world underlies the meaning of all we do. May it truly be he who governs our personal life and our life in the parishes.

You then asked me a question which, I have to say, somewhat exceeds my capacity: what should be the proper tasks of deacons in Rome? I am aware that the Cardinal Vicar is far better acquainted than I am with the real situation of the city and of the diocesan community of Rome. I think that one characteristic of the diaconal ministry is precisely the multiplicity of its applications. A few years ago, in the [International Theological Commission](#), we studied the diaconate at length in the Church's history and present. We discovered precisely this: there is no single profile. What must be done varies according to a person's formation and situation. Applications and implementation can vary widely but are naturally always in communion with the Bishop and parish. In these different situations, different possibilities are revealed which depend on the professional training these deacons may have possibly received: they may be employed in the cultural sector, so important in our day, or they may have a voice and important place in the educational sector. This year we are thinking precisely of the problem of education as central to our future, to the future of all humanity.

There is no doubt that in Rome the sector of charity was the original sector, because presbyteral

titles and deaconries were centres of Christian charity. This context was fundamental in the city of Rome from the outset. In my Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* I showed that not only are preaching and the liturgy essential to the Church and the Church's ministry, but that they also exist for the poor, for the needy, for the service of *caritas* in its multiple dimensions. I therefore hope that despite the differing situations, charity will continue in every age and every diocese to be a fundamental as well as a key dimension for the commitment of deacons, although not the only one. We see this in the primitive Church where the seven deacons were elected precisely to enable the Apostles to devote themselves to prayer, the liturgy and preaching. Even if Stephen later found he was required to preach to Hellenists and to Greek-speaking Jews, the field of preaching was in this way extended. He was conditioned, we can say, by the cultural situations in which he had a voice in order to make the Word of God present in this field in such a way as also to extend as far as possible the universality of Christian witness. Thus, he opened the door to St Paul, who was a witness to his stoning and subsequently, in a certain sense, his successor in the universalization of the Word of God. Perhaps the Cardinal Vicar would like to add a word here: I am not as closely in touch with the current situations as he is.

Cardinal Camillo Ruini: *Holy Father, I can only confirm, as you said, that also in Rome, deacons work in many concrete milieus but mainly in the parishes, where they are concerned with charitable pastoral care but are also involved, for example, in the pastoral care of the family. Since almost all deacons are married, they prepare couples for marriage, keep in touch with these young couples and so forth. They also make a significant contribution to pastoral care in the health sector, as well as helping in the Vicariate - some of them work in the Vicariate - and, as you heard earlier, in the missions. Some deacons are missionaries. I believe, of course, that their presence in parishes is more numerical by far, but other areas are also opening up, and it is for this very reason that we already have more than 100 permanent deacons.*

Fr Graziano Bonfitto: *Holy Father, I come from San Marco in Lamis, a village in the Province of Foggia. I am a Religious of Don Orione and have been a priest for a year and a half. I am currently parochial vicar in Ognisanti.... My priestly apostolate takes place among young people in particular. It is precisely on their behalf that I wish to thank you today. My holy Founder, St Luigi Orione, said that young people are the sunshine or the storm of the future. I believe that at this moment in history young people are as much the sunshine as the storm, and not of tomorrow but of today, of this moment. Today, we young people feel a more pressing need than ever for certainties. We long for sincerity, freedom, justice and peace. We want beside us people who walk with us, who listen to us, just like Jesus with the disciples of Emmaus. Youth long for people who can point out the way to freedom, responsibility, love and truth. In other words, today's young people have an unquenchable thirst for Christ. It is the thirst of joyful witnesses who have encountered Jesus and have staked their whole life on him. Young people want a Church that is ever alert, ever closer to their needs. They want her to be present in the decisions of life, even if they feel a lingering sense of detachment from the Church herself.... Holy Father, - may I call you "father"? - how difficult it is to live in God, with God and for God. Young people feel threatened on*

many sides.... So what should be done? How should one act? Is it effectively worthwhile continuing to stake one's life on Christ? Are life, the family, love, joy, justice, respect for the opinions of others, freedom, prayer and charity still values we should defend? Is the blessed life based on the Beatitudes a life suited to human beings, to the young person of the third millennium?... Thank you.

Pope Benedict XVI: Thank you for this beautiful witness of a young priest who works with young people, who accompanies them, as you said, and helps them walk with Christ, with Jesus. What can be said? We all know how difficult it is for a young person today to live as a Christian. The cultural and media context offers very different paths than the one that leads to Christ. It even seems to make it impossible to see Christ as the centre of life and to live life as Jesus showed us. However, it also seems to me that many are becoming more and more aware of the inadequacy of all that is offered, of this way of life that in the end leaves one empty.

In this regard I think that the readings of today's liturgy, that of Deuteronomy (30: 15-20) and the Gospel passage from Luke (9: 22-25), correspond substantially with what we must say to young people and over and over again to ourselves. As you said, sincerity is fundamental. Young people must feel that we are not saying words we ourselves have not lived, but that we speak because we have found and seek to find anew every day the truth, as a truth for my own life. Only if we have set out in this direction, if we ourselves seek to interiorize this life and to make our lives resemble that of the Lord can our words be credible and have a visible and convincing logic. I repeat: today this is the great fundamental rule, not only for Lent but for the whole of Christian life: choose life. You have before you death and life: choose life. And I think that the answer is natural. There are only a few who in their innermost selves harbour a desire for destruction, for death, for desiring to no longer live because everything has gone wrong for them. Unfortunately, however, this phenomenon is growing. With all the contradictions and false promises, life in the end appears contradictory, no longer as a gift but a condemnation, so there are some who choose death rather than life. But usually, the human being responds: Yes, I choose life.

Yet the question as to how to find life, what to choose, how to choose life remains. And we know what is usually offered: to visit a discothèque, to take as much as possible, to see freedom as doing everything one likes, everything that springs to mind at any given moment. We know instead - and can prove it - that this road is a road of falsehood, for in the end it does not lead to finding life but indeed to the abyss of nothingness. Choose life. The same reading says: God is your life, you have chosen life and have made your choice: God. This seems to me to be fundamental. Only in this way is our horizon sufficiently broad and only in this way are we at the source of life, which is stronger than death, stronger than all death threats. Thus, the fundamental choice is the one pointed out here: choose God. It is essential to understand that those who travel on the road without God find themselves ultimately in darkness, even if there can be moments where they seem to have found life.

Then, a further step is how to find God, how to choose God. Here we come to the Gospel: God is not an unknown Person, a hypothesis perhaps of the very beginning of the cosmos. God is flesh and blood. He is one of us. We know him by his Face, by his Name. He is Jesus Christ who speaks to us in the Gospel. He is both man and God. And being God, he chose man to enable us to choose God. Thus, we must enter into the knowledge of Jesus and then friendship with him in order to walk with him.

I think that this is the fundamental point of our pastoral care for young people, for everyone but especially for the young: to draw attention to the choice of God who is life, to the fact that God exists - and he exists very concretely - and also to teach friendship with Jesus Christ.

There is also a third step. This friendship with Jesus is not a friendship with an unreal person, with someone who belongs to the past or who is distant from human beings, seated at God's right hand. Jesus is present in his Body, which is still a body of flesh and blood: he is the Church, the communion of the Church. We must build and make more accessible communities that reflect, that are the mirror of the great community of the vital Church. She is a whole complex of things: the vital experience of the community with all its human weaknesses but nonetheless real, with a clear path and a solid sacramental life where we can touch even what may seem so remote to us: the Lord's presence. In this way we can also learn the commandments - to return to Deuteronomy, my starting point. For the reading says: choosing God means choosing according to his words, living according to the Word. For a moment this appears almost positivistic: they are imperatives. But the first thing is the gift, it is his friendship. Then we can understand that the road signs are explanations of the reality of our friendship.

This, we can say, is a general vision in which contact with Sacred Scripture and the Church's daily life originates. It is then translated step by step into real encounters with young people: to guide them to dialogue with Jesus in prayer, in reading Sacred Scripture - especially in groups but also on their own - and in sacramental life. All these steps serve to make these experiences present in professional life, even if the context is often marked by the total absence of God and the apparent impossibility of seeing him present. However, it is precisely then, through our lives and our experience of God, that we must also seek to make Christ's presence enter this world far-removed from God.

There is a thirst for God. A short time ago I received the *ad limina* visit from some Bishops from a country where more than 50 percent of the people declare themselves to be atheists or agnostics. But they said to me: in fact, all are thirsting for God. This hidden thirst exists. Therefore, let us begin first with the young people available. Let us form communities in which the Church is reflected, let us learn friendship with Jesus. In this way, full of this joy and this experience, we can still make God present today in this world of ours.

Fr Pietro Riggi, a Salesian from Don Bosco Boys' Town: *Holy Father, I work in an after-school*

prayer and recreation centre and in a centre for minors at risk. My question is: on 25 March 2007, you spoke extemporaneously complaining how seldom the "last things" are mentioned today. In fact, in the catechisms of the Italian Bishops' Conference used for teaching our faith to children for confession, Communion and confirmation, it seems to me that certain truths of the faith have been omitted. Hell is never mentioned, nor Purgatory, Heaven only once, sin only once and then only original sin. In lacking these essential parts of our belief does it not seem to you that the whole system of logic which leads one to see Christ's Redemption has crumbled? By the absence of any mention of sin, by not speaking of Hell, even Christ's Redemption seems diminished. Do you not think that this has encouraged a loss of the sense of sin, hence, of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and even of the saving, sacramental figure of the priest himself, who has the power to absolve and celebrate in Christ's name? Today, unfortunately, when the Gospel speaks of Hell we priests circumvent even the Gospel. Hell is not mentioned. Or we are unable to talk about Heaven. We cannot speak of eternal life. We risk giving faith a purely horizontal dimension or one where the horizontal is too detached from the vertical. And this unfortunately occurs in catechesis for children, quite apart from the initiatives of parish priests; it lacks a basic structure. If I am not mistaken, this year is also the 25th anniversary of the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. To mark this occasion, would it be possible to consider solemnly renewing this consecration for the whole world?...

Pope Benedict XVI: You correctly spoke of the fundamental themes of the faith which unfortunately rarely appear in our preaching. In the Encyclical [*Spe Salvi*](#) I wanted to speak precisely about the Last Judgement, judgement in general, and in this context also about Purgatory, Hell and Heaven. I think we have all been struck by the Marxist objection that Christians have only spoken of the afterlife and have ignored the earth. Thus, we demonstrate that we are truly committed to our earth and are not people who talk about distant realities, who do not help the earth. Now, although it is right to show that Christians work for the earth - and we are all called to work to make this earth really a city for God and of God - we must not forget the other dimension. Unless we take it into account, we cannot work well for the earth: to show this was one of my fundamental purposes in writing the [*Encyclical*](#). When one does not know the judgement of God one does not know the possibility of Hell, of the radical and definitive failure of life, one does not know the possibility of and need for purification. Man then fails to work well for the earth because he ultimately loses his criteria, he no longer knows himself - through not knowing God - and destroys the earth. All the great ideologies have promised: we will take things in hand, we will no longer neglect the earth, we will create a new, just, correct and brotherly world. But they destroyed the world instead. We see it with Nazism, we also see it with Communism which promised to build the world as it was supposed to be and instead destroyed it.

In the *ad limina* visits of Bishops from former Communist countries, I always see anew that in those lands, not only the planet and ecology, but above all and more seriously, souls have been destroyed. Rediscovering the truly human conscience illuminated by God's presence is our first task for the re-edification of the earth. This is the common experience of those countries. The re-

edification of the earth, while respecting this planet's cry of suffering, can only be achieved by rediscovering God in the soul with the eyes open to God.

You are therefore right: we must speak of all this precisely because of our responsibility to the earth, to the people who are alive today. We must also speak of sin itself as the possibility of destroying ourselves, hence, also other parts of the world. In the [Encyclical](#) I tried to show that it is God's Last Judgement that guarantees justice. We all want a just world. Yet we cannot atone for all the destruction of the past, all the people unjustly tortured and killed. God alone can create justice, which must be justice for all, even for the dead, and as the great Marxist Adorno said, only the resurrection of the body, which he claimed as unreal, would be able to create justice. We believe in this resurrection of the body in which not all will be equal. Today people have become used to thinking: what is sin? God is great, he knows us, so sin does not count; in the end God will be kind to us all. It is a beautiful hope. But both justice and true guilt exist. Those who have destroyed man and the earth cannot suddenly sit down at God's table together with their victims. God creates justice. We must keep this in mind. Therefore, I felt it was important to write this text also about Purgatory, which for me is an obvious truth, so evident and also so necessary and comforting that it could not be absent. I tried to say: perhaps those who have destroyed themselves in this way, who are for ever unredeemable, who no longer possess any elements on which God's love can rest, who no longer have a minimal capacity for loving, may not be so numerous. This would be Hell. On the other hand, those who are so pure that they can enter immediately into God's communion are undoubtedly few - or at any rate not many. A great many of us hope that there is something in us that can be saved, that there may be in us a final desire to serve God and serve human beings, to live in accordance with God. Yet there are so very many wounds, there is so much filth. We need to be prepared, to be purified. This is our hope: even with so much dirt in our souls, in the end the Lord will give us the possibility, he will wash us at last with his goodness that comes from his Cross. In this way he makes us capable of being for him in eternity. And thus Heaven is hope, it is justice brought about at last. He also gives us criteria by which to live, so that this time may be in some way paradise, a first gleam of paradise. Where people live according to these criteria a hint of paradise appears in the world and is visible. It also seems to me to be a demonstration of the truth of faith, of the need to follow the road of the Commandments, of which we must speak further. These really are road signs on our way and show us how to live well, how to choose life. Therefore, we must also speak of sin and of the sacrament of forgiveness and reconciliation. A sincere person knows that he is guilty, that he must start again, that he must be purified. And this is the marvellous reality which the Lord offers us: there is a chance of renewal, of being new. The Lord starts with us again and in this way we can also start again with the others in our life.

This aspect of renewal, of the restitution of our being after so many errors, so many sins, is the great promise, the great gift the Church offers but which psychotherapy, for example, cannot offer. Today, in the face of so many destroyed or seriously injured psyches, psychotherapy is so widespread and also necessary. Yet the possibilities of psychotherapy are very limited: it can only

make some sort of effort to restore balance to an unbalanced soul but cannot provide true renewal, the overcoming of these serious diseases of the soul. It is therefore always temporary and never definitive. The Sacrament of Penance gives us the opportunity to be renewed through and through with God's power - *ego te absolvo* -, which is possible because Christ took these sins, this guilt, upon himself. I think there is a great need of this especially today. We can be healed. Souls that are wounded and ill, as everyone knows by experience, not only need advice but true renewal, which can only come from God's power, from the power of Crucified Love. I feel this is the important connection of the mysteries which in the end truly affect our lives. We must recover them ourselves and so bring them once again within our people's reach.

Fr Massimo Tellan, parish priest of Sant'Enrico: *I have been a priest for 15 years and parish priest of Casal Monastero, northern sector, for six years. I believe we all realize that we are living more and more deeply immersed in a world that is culturally inflated by words that are also often devoid of meaning. These words bewilder the human heart to the point that they deafen it to the words of truth. Thus, the Eternal Word who became flesh and took a face in Jesus of Nazareth becomes elusive for many, and especially for the young generations who are inconsistent and distant. There is no doubt that the Word becomes entangled in the plethora of ambiguous and transient images that bombard us daily. Therefore, in teaching the faith, what room should be given to this combination of words to listen to and images to contemplate? What has happened to the art of recounting the faith and introducing people to the mystery, as was done in the past with the *biblia pauperum*? In our contemporary society of the image, how can we recover the unbridled force of perception that accompanies the mystery of the Incarnation and the encounter with Jesus as it did for John and Andrew on the banks of the Jordan, invited to go and see where the Teacher dwelled? In other words: how is it possible to teach the search for and contemplation of that true beauty which, as Dostoevsky wrote, will save the world? Thank you, Your Holiness for your attention....*

Pope Benedict XVI: Thank you for this most beautiful gift [presented by the priest to the Pope]. I am grateful that we do not have only words but also images. We see that today too, new images are born from Christian meditation: Christian culture and iconography are reborn. Yes, we are living amid an inflation of words and images. Thus, it is difficult to make room for the word and the image. It seems to me that in the very situation of our world with which we are all familiar and which is also our suffering, the suffering of each individual, the Lenten Season acquires new meaning. Of course, physical fasting - for a certain period considered no longer fashionable - today appears to all as necessary. It is not difficult to understand that we should fast. Moreover, we find ourselves at times facing certain exaggerated forms that are due to a mistaken ideal of beauty. But physical fasting is important in every case because we are body and soul. The discipline of the body, material discipline too, is important for the spiritual life, which is always a life incarnate in a person who is both body and soul.

This is one dimension. Today, other dimensions develop and are manifest. In my opinion, the

Season of Lent could also be the time for a fast of words and images. We need a little silence, we need room where we are not constantly bombarded by images. In this regard, making the meaning of the 40 days of external and internal discipline accessible and comprehensible today is very important, to help us understand that one dimension of our Lent, of this physical and spiritual discipline, is creating spaces of silence even without images in order to reopen our hearts to the true image and the true word. I think it is promising that we are also today witnessing a rebirth of Christian art, both of meditative music - such as that born in Taizé, for example - and also, reconnecting with the art of the icon, of a Christian art that endures, let us say, in the great norms of the iconological art of the past but that also extends to today's experience and vision. Wherever there is true and profound meditation on the Word, wherever we truly enter into contemplation of this visibility, this tangibility of God in the world, new images are also born, new possibilities of making the events of salvation visible. The result of the Incarnation event is precisely this. The Old Testament forbade all images and was bound to forbid them in a world peopled by divinities. It lived precisely in the great emptiness which was also represented by the interior of the temple where, in contrast with other temples, there was no image but only the empty throne of the Word, the mysterious presence of the invisible God, preserved by our images.

But then the new step is that this mysterious God liberates us from the inflation of images and from an age filled with images of divinities and gives us the freedom of vision of the essential. God appears with a face, a body, a human history, which is at the same time divine. It is a history that continues in the history of saints, martyrs, saints of charity, of the word, who are always an explanation, a continuation of his divine and human life in the Body of Christ and give us the fundamental images in which - over and above superficial images that conceal reality - we can open our gaze to Truth itself. In this regard I find the iconoclastic period of the post-conciliar years excessive; yet it had a meaning of its own since it may have been necessary to be freed from the superficiality of too many images.

Let us now return to knowledge of the God who was made man. As the Letter to the Ephesians tells us, he is the true image. And in this true image - as well as the appearances that hide the truth - we see Truth itself: "Whoever sees me, sees the Father". In this sense I would say that with great respect and reverence we can rediscover a Christian art and also the essential and important representations of the mystery of God in the Church's iconographic tradition. And thus, we will rediscover the true image concealed beneath appearances. This really is an important duty of Christian education: liberation of the Word from behind words, which always requires new areas of silence, meditation, depth, abstinence and discipline, and likewise education in the true image, that is, in the rediscovery of the great icons created in Christian history: with humility one is freed from superficial images. This type of iconoclasm is always necessary in order to rediscover the image, in other words, the fundamental images which express God's presence in the flesh.

This is a fundamental dimension of education in the faith, in true humanism, which we seek in this season in Rome. We have returned to rediscovering the icon with its very strict rules without the

beauty of the Renaissance. Thus, we too can once again resume our journey of the humble rediscovery of the great images, towards an ever new liberation from too many words, too many images, in order to rediscover the essential images we need. God himself has shown us his image and we can rediscover this image by means of a profound meditation on the Word that will regenerate the images.

Therefore, let us pray to the Lord to help us on this journey of true education, of re-education in the faith, which is never only listening but also seeing.

Fr Paul Chungat, parochial vicar of San Giuseppe Cottolengo: *My name is Fr Chungat, I am Indian. I am temporarily parochial vicar of San Giuseppe, Valle Aurelia. I would like to thank you for the opportunity you have given me to serve for three years in the Diocese of Rome. It has been a great help to me for my studies, as I believe it is for all student priests who stay on in Rome. The time has now come for me to return to my diocese in India, where Catholics account for only one percent, whereas 99 percent are non-Christians. What has given me much food for thought in the past few days is the situation of missionary evangelization in my Homeland. In the recent [Note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#) there are several words that are not easy to understand in the context of interreligious dialogue. For example, in n. 10, "fullness of salvation", and in the Introduction, "the need for formal incorporation in the Church". These are concepts that it will be difficult to make people understand when I take these things back to India, where I will have to talk to my Hindu friends and to the faithful of other religions. My question is: should "fullness of salvation" be understood in a qualitative or a quantitative sense? In a quantitative sense, it is somewhat difficult. The [Second Vatican Council](#) tells us that it is also possible to find a ray of light in other faiths. In a qualitative sense, in addition to the historicity and fullness of the faith, what other things show the oneness of our faith in the context of interreligious dialogue?*

Pope Benedict XVI: Thank you for your presentation. You know well that the breadth of your questions would require a semester of theology! I shall try to be brief. You know theology, there are great teachers and many books. First of all, thank you for your testimony, for you say you are glad to be able to work in Rome although you are Indian. I find this a marvellous phenomenon of catholicity. Today, not only do missionaries from the West go to other continents, but there is an exchange of gifts: Indians, Africans and South Americans work with us and our people go to the other continents. There is giving and receiving on all sides; precisely this accounts for the vitality of catholicity, where we are all indebted to the gifts of the Lord and are then able to give them to one another. It is in this reciprocity of gifts, of giving and of receiving, that the Catholic Church lives. You can learn from these Western environments and experiences and we in turn can learn. I see that this religious spirit which exists in Asia, as in Africa, surprises Europeans whose faith is all too often somewhat cool. This vivacity, at least of the religious spirit that exists on these continents, is consequently a great gift to all of us, especially to us Bishops of the Western world and in particular of those countries where the phenomenon of immigration is more pronounced, from the Philippines, from India, etc. Our cold Catholicism is revived by this fervour that comes from you.

Hence, catholicity is a great gift.

Let us come to the questions you have put to me. I do not have here before me the exact words of the [Document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#) to which you referred, but in any case I would like to say two things. On the one hand, dialogue, mutual knowledge, mutual respect and the effort for all possible forms of collaboration for the great purposes of humanity or for important needs in order to overcome fanaticism and create a spirit of peace and love are absolutely necessary. This is also in the spirit of the Gospel, whose meaning is precisely that the spirit of love which we learned from Jesus, the peace of Jesus which he gave to us through the Cross, may become universally present in the world. In this sense dialogue must be true dialogue with respect for others and with the acceptance of their otherness; yet it must also be evangelical, in the sense that its fundamental purpose is to help people live in love and ensure that this love is extended in every part of the world.

But this most necessary dimension of dialogue, that is, respect for the other, tolerance, cooperation, does not exclude the other dimension: the fact that the Gospel is a great gift, the gift of great love, of great truth, which we cannot only keep to ourselves alone. We must offer it to others, realizing that God gives them the necessary freedom and light to find the truth. This is the truth. And so I too am taking this road. Mission is not imposition but offering God's gift, allowing his goodness to enlighten people so that the gift of actual friendship with the God with a human face may be extended. We therefore want and must always witness to this faith and love that are inherent in our faith. Had we left others on their own and kept the faith we have just for ourselves, we would have neglected a true human and divine duty. We would also be unfaithful to ourselves were we not to offer this faith to the world, even while always respecting the freedom of others. The presence of faith in the world is a positive element, even if it does not convert anyone; it is a reference point.

Exponents of non-Christian religions have said to me: the presence of Christianity is a reference point for us that helps us, even if we do not convert. Let us think of the great figure of Mahatma Gandhi: although he remained firmly bound to his own religion, the Sermon on the Mount was a fundamental reference point for him which shaped his whole life. Thus, the leaven of faith, even if it did not convert him to Christianity, entered his life. It seems to me that this leaven of Christian love which flows from the Gospel - in addition to missionary work that seeks to enlarge the spaces of faith - is a service we render to humanity.

Let us think of St Paul. I recently examined his missionary motivation. I also spoke of it to the Curia at our end-of-the-year Meeting. Paul was moved by the Lord's word in his eschatological discourse. Before any other event, before the return of the Son of Man, the Gospel must be preached to all peoples. A condition for the world to attain perfection, for it to be open to Heaven, is that the Gospel be proclaimed to all. He devoted all his missionary zeal to ensuring that the Gospel reached everyone, possibly already in his generation, in response to the Lord's command

"so that it may be announced to all the peoples". His desire was not so much to baptize all peoples as rather that the Gospel, hence, the fulfilment of history as such, be present in the world. I think that by looking at history's progress it is possible today to understand better that this presence of the Word of God, this proclamation which, like leaven, reaches everyone, is necessary in order that the world truly achieve its goal. In this sense, we indeed desire the conversion of all but allow the Lord to be the one who acts. What is important is that those who wish to convert have the possibility to do so and that the Lord's light appears over the world as a reference point for everyone and a light that helps, without which the world cannot find itself. I do not know whether I have explained myself properly: not only do dialogue and mission not exclude each other, but they also help each other.

Fr Alberto Orlando, parochial vicar of Santa Maria Madre della Provvidenza: *I would like to describe to you a difficulty seen at Loreto with the young people last year. We had a very lovely day but among the many beautiful things we noticed a certain distance between you and the young people. The afternoon came. We did not manage to find a good place, nor could we see or hear. Then when evening came and you departed we were left at the mercy of television, which in a certain sense exploited us. Young people need warmth. For example, one girl said to me: "The Pope usually calls us "dear young people", whereas today he called us "young friends". And she was very pleased about this. How can one fail to highlight this detail, this closeness? The television link-up with Loreto was also very cold, very distant; we even experienced some difficulties during prayer time because it was linked to the lights that remained switched off until very late, or at least until the television broadcast was over. The second thing, however, that created certain problems for us was the liturgy of the following day: somewhat heavy, especially with regard to the singing and music. At the time of the Alleluia, to give you an example, one girl remarked that despite the heat, the hymns and music lasted a very long time, almost as if no one cared about the discomfort of all those so tightly packed together in the crowd. And these were young people who go to Mass every Sunday. These are my two questions: How can there be this distance between you and them? And next, how is it possible to reconcile the treasure of the liturgy in all its solemnity with the feeling, affection and emotionality that stir young people and which they so deeply need? I would also like some advice: how can we find the proper balance between solemnity and emotionality?...*

Pope Benedict XVI: The first point I have been asked about has to do with the organizational situation: I found it as it was so I do not even know whether it would have been possible to organize it any differently. Considering the thousands of people present, I believe it must have been impossible for every one to be equally close. Indeed, this is why we followed a route with the car, in order to get a little closer to the individual people. Nevertheless, we will remember this and see whether in the future, at other meetings with thousands and thousands of people, it will be at all possible to do something different. Yet, what I feel is important is the growth of a feeling of inner closeness which finds the bridge that unites us even if we are physically distant.

On the other hand, an important problem is created by liturgies with mass participation. I recall that in 1960, during the great International Eucharistic Congress in Munich, an effort was made to give new features to Eucharistic Congresses, which until then had consisted only in acts of adoration. It was desired to make the celebration of the Eucharist the centre of the Congress, as an act of presence of the mystery celebrated. But the question immediately arose as to how this would be possible. Worship, it was said, can also be done at a distance; but celebration requires a set community that can interact with the mystery, hence, a community that must gather round the celebration of the mystery. Many were against the celebration of the Eucharist in public with 100,000 people. They said it was impossible precisely because of the actual structure of the Eucharist, which requires the community for communion. Moreover, those who opposed this solution were important and highly respected figures. It was then that Prof. Jungmann, a great liturgist and one of the important architects of the liturgical reform, created the concept of *statio orbis*. In other words, he returned to the *statio Romae*, where during the [Season of Lent](#) the faithful gather in one place, the *statio*: thus, they are in *statio* like soldiers for Christ and then move forward together to the Eucharist. If this, he said, was the *statio* of the city of Rome, where the city of Rome gathers, then this is the *statio orbis*. And from that time on we had Eucharistic celebrations with mass participation. For my part, I have to say, it remains a problem because concrete communion in the celebration is fundamental, and I do not consider that the definitive answer has really been found. I also raised this question during the last Synod but it was not answered. I also had another question asked regarding the concelebration of Mass: why, for example, if 1,000 priests concelebrate, do we not yet know whether this structure was desired by the Lord? But questions arise in every case. And so you were confronted by difficulties in participating in a mass celebration in which it is impossible for all to be equally involved. This requires that a certain style be chosen in order to preserve the dignity that is always a prerequisite of the Eucharist. Thus, the community is not uniform and the experience of participation in the event differs; for some it is certainly inadequate. It did not depend on me but rather on the organizers.

One must reflect carefully, therefore, on what should be done in such situations, on how to respond to the challenges of the situation.

If I am not mistaken, there was an orchestra of handicapped people performing the music and perhaps the idea had been to make people understand that the handicapped can participate in the sacred celebration and that they themselves should not be excluded but rather have a lead role. And thus everyone, by loving them, did not feel excluded but on the contrary involved. I think this is a very respectable thought and I share it. Of course, the fundamental problem still remains. But it seems to me that here too, knowing what the Eucharist is, even if there is no possibility for an external activity as would be desirable in order to feel that one shares in it, one still enters into it with the heart, as the ancient imperative in the Church says, created perhaps for those very people at the back of the basilica: "Lift up your hearts! Let us now all emerge from ourselves, so that we are all with the Lord and are all together". As I said, I do not deny the problem; but if we truly obey these words, "Lift up our hearts", even in difficult and at times questionable situations,

we can all find true and active participation.

Mons. Renzo Martinelli, Delegate of the Pontifical Academy of Mary Immaculate: *Holy Father, ... returning to the problem of the educational emergency, this is my question: you recently said to the Bishops of Slovenia, "If, for example, man conceives of himself, in accordance with a trend that is widespread today, in an individualistic manner, how can the effort to build a just and supportive community be justified?". I entered the seminary at the age of 11 and was educated more or less with a mentality in which there was my "I", and next to my "I" was another "I", a little more moralistic to be conformed to Christ, and in the end my freedom was as it were managed as that of a slave, as slavery, as you say in your book Jesus of Nazareth when you comment on the elder brother of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. And all this creates separation. How, on the other hand, should we propose to young people what you have always insisted upon: that once the Christian's self is invested in Christ it is no longer his. The Christian's identity, you said very profoundly in [Verona](#), is no longer the "I", since the subject is one with Christ. How can we propose this conversion, Your Holiness, this Christian originality of being communion which effectively proposes the newness of the Christian experience?*

Pope Benedict XVI: This is the great question that every priest responsible for others asks himself every day. For himself too, of course. It is true that in the 20th century there was a tendency for individualistic devotion, especially for the purpose of saving one's own soul and creating calculable merits that on some lists could even be indicated with numbers. And there is no doubt that the entire movement of the [Second Vatican Council](#) desired to overcome this individualism.

I do not wish here to judge these past generations, who still in their own way sought, through this way, to serve others. Yet in this context was the danger of desiring primarily to save one's own soul. This was followed by making piety extrinsic, so that in the end, it found faith a burden rather than a liberation. Moreover, it was certainly a fundamental desire of the new pastoral approach determined by the Second Vatican Council to leave this excessively narrow vision of Christianity in order to discover that I save my soul only by giving it, as the Lord told us today in the Gospel: it is only by freeing myself from myself, by coming out of myself, as God did in the Son who came out of God himself to save us. And we enter this movement of the Son, we seek to emerge from ourselves because we know where to go. And we do not fall into the void but leave ourselves, abandoning ourselves in the Lord, emerging, putting ourselves at his disposal, as he desires and not as we think.

This is true Christian obedience, which is freedom: not as I want, with my own plan of life for myself, but in putting myself at his disposal so that he will make use of me. And in placing myself in his hands I am free. But it is a great leap that is never made once and for all. Here I am thinking of St Augustine, who so often told us this. Initially, after his conversion, Augustine believed he had reached the summit and that he would live in the paradise of the newness of being Christian. He then discovered that life's gruelling journey continued, although from that moment it was always in

God's light, and that it was necessary to renew this leap out of oneself every day, necessary to give this "I" so that it might die and be renewed in the great "I" of Christ, which is in a certainly very true way the common "I" of us all, it is our "we".

Yet I would say that it is precisely in the celebration of the Eucharist - this great and profound encounter with the Lord in which I let myself fall into his hands - that we ourselves must take this great step. The better we learn it the better we can express it to others and make it comprehensible and accessible to them. It is only by walking with the Lord, by abandoning myself to his openness in the communion of the Church and not by living for myself - either for a happy earthly life or even only for personal bliss - but by making myself an instrument of his peace that I live well and learn this courage in the face of today's ever new and serious, sometimes almost impossible, challenges.

I leave myself because you desire it and I am sure that in this way I shall make good progress. We can only pray to the Lord to help us make this journey daily, thereby to help guide others, to motivate them so that they may be liberated and redeemed.

Fr Paolo Tammi, parish priest of San Pio X, religion teacher: *I would like to offer you only one of many "thank yous" for the effort and passion with which you wrote your book on Jesus of Nazareth, a text that, as you yourself said, is in no way an exercise of the Magisterium but solely an expression of your personal search for God's Face.... I ask you: how can a priest's life stir up ever greater passion for the essential, which is the Bridegroom Jesus? And further: how can one tell if a priest is in love with Jesus? I know, Your Holiness, that you have already answered this several times, but it is certain that your answer will help us to correct ourselves and restore our hope. I ask you to answer it again, here with your priests.*

Pope Benedict XVI: How can I correct parish priests who work so well! We can only help one another. Thus, you are familiar with this secular context with its distance from the faith that is not only intellectual but especially emotional. And according to the circumstances, we must seek the way to build bridges. I think situations are difficult, but you are right. We must always think: what is the essential, even if later the point on which one can graft the *kerygma*, the context, the way of behaving, may well be different. But the question must always be: what is the essential? What must be discovered? What do I want to give? And here I continue to repeat: the essential is God. If we do not speak of God, if God is not discovered, we always remain with secondary things. Thus, it would seem to me to be fundamental that at least the question, "does God exist?" be asked. And "how can I live without God?", "is God truly an important reality for me?".

I continue to be impressed that the First Vatican Council wished to establish this dialogue, to understand God with reason - even though in the historical situation in which we are living we need God to help us and purify our reason. It seems to me that an effort is already being made to respond to this challenge of the secular environment with God as the fundamental question, and then with Jesus Christ, as God's response. I would say that there are, of course, the *preambula*

fidei, which are perhaps the first step to opening the heart and mind to God: the natural virtues. I recently received the visit of a Head of State who said to me: I am not religious, the foundation of my life is Aristotelian ethics. This is already something very good and we are already with St Thomas, on our way towards Thomas' synthesis. This can therefore be a link: learning and explaining the importance for human coexistence of this rational ethic which is then inwardly opened - if consequently lived - to God's question, to responsibility before God.

Thus, it seems to me that on the one hand we must have clearly in mind what the essential is that we want and must transmit to others, and what are the *preambula* in situations in which we can take the first steps. Of course, a certain preliminary ethical education is a basic step even today. This is also what ancient Christianity did. Cyprian, for example, tells us that first his life was totally dissolute; then, living in the catechumenal community, he learned a fundamental ethic and thus, the way to God unfolded before him. And at the Easter Vigil St Ambrose said: so far we have spoken of morals, now we come to the mysteries. They had made the journey of the *preambula fidei* with a fundamental ethical education that created the readiness to understand God's mystery. Therefore, I would say that perhaps we should bring about an interaction between ethical education - so important today -, on the one hand, even with its pragmatic evidence, and at the same time, not omit the question of God. And in this interpenetration of two routes I think that perhaps we may succeed a little in opening ourselves to the God who alone can give light.

Fr Daniele Salera, parochial vicar at Santa Maria Madre del Redentore in Tor Bella Monaca, religion teacher: *Your Holiness, I have been a priest for six years and am parochial vicar at Tor Bella Monaca where I teach religion. In reading your Letter on the urgent task of education, I noted certain aspects I find significant.... I perceive real missionary concern in many of the people with whom I work at Tor Bella Monaca. On different but converging paths we are battling against the crisis of hope that is always lurking round the corner when one is dealing daily with boys and girls who seem dead inside, who have no desires for the future or are so deeply engrossed in evil that they do not manage to see the good desired for them or the opportunities of freedom and redemption which nonetheless exist on their path. In the face of this human emergency, there is no room for division.... I thus observe that it is true: so many educators are giving up ethics in the name of an emotionality that provides no certainty and creates dependence. Others are afraid to defend the rules of civil coexistence because they think they do not give the reason for the needs, difficulties and identities of young people. To use a slogan, I would say that at an educational level we live in a culture of the "always yes" and "never no". Yet it is the "no", said with loving passion for the human being and his future, that often defines the boundary between good and evil; a boundary that in the age of evolution is fundamental for building sound personal identities.... I ask myself why we, the Church, who have written, thought and experienced so much concerning education, such as formation in the right use of freedom, do not succeed in passing on this educational goal? Why do we appear on the whole to be so little liberated and liberating?*

Pope Benedict XVI: Thank you for this mirror of your experiences in a school today, with young

people of today, and also for your probing questions for us. At this time, I can only confirm that it seems to me to be very important that the Church is also present in schools, because an education that is not at the same time also an education with God and with God's presence, an education that does not transmit the important ethical values that appeared in Christ's light, is not an education.

Professional training without the training of the heart never suffices. And the heart cannot be formed without at least the challenge of God's presence. We know that many young people live in milieus, in situations that make the light and Word of God inaccessible to them; they are in living conditions that constitute true slavery; and this is not only external, since it gives rise to an intellectual slavery that truly clouds the heart and the mind. Let us seek with all the possibilities available to the Church to also offer them the possibility of a way out. But in any case, let us ensure that the Word of God is present in this variegated school context - where one goes from believers to people in the saddest of situations. We said exactly this of St Paul, who desired to take the Gospel to everyone. This imperative of the Lord - the Gospel must be proclaimed to all - is not a diachronic imperative, it is not a continental imperative to whose proclamation prominence is given; rather, it is an inner imperative, in the sense that it penetrates various nuances and dimensions of society in order to make at least a ray of Gospel light more accessible, to ensure that the Gospel is truly proclaimed to all.

In my opinion, this is also an aspect of contemporary cultural formation: knowing what is the Christian faith which shaped this continent and is a light for all continents. The ways in which it is possible to make this light most present and accessible differ, and I know I have no recipe for it; but the need to embark on this beautiful and difficult adventure is really an element of the imperative of the Gospel itself. Let us pray that the Lord will increasingly help us to respond to this imperative to bring knowledge of him, knowledge of his Face, to our society in all its dimensions.

Fr Umberto Fanfarillo, parish priest of Santa Dorotea in Trastevere: *Holy Father, I am a Conventual Franciscan and parish priest of Santa Dorotea in Trastevere. Together with the Christian community in the parish, I am eager to point out a conspicuous if not deeply-rooted presence of other religious contexts. We encounter them daily with reciprocal esteem, knowledge and respectful coexistence. I can list in this substantial positiveness of intentions the commitment of the Accademia dei Lincei, of the John Cabot American University, with more than 800 students from about 60 countries and with religious backgrounds that range from Catholic to Lutheran and from Jewish to Muslim. It is precisely these young people who, on the death of John Paul II, gathered in prayer in our Church.... In the parish territory, the Peter Pan House takes in sick children with tumours and is connected with the Bambino Gesù Hospital. Here too, the interreligious aspect achieves very exalted moments of charity and religious attention to our sick and needy brethren. We find a similar situation and respectful encounters among the different religions contained in Regina Coeli Prison, again in the parish territory. Holy Father, we are all seeking new and more balanced attitudes of knowledge and respect. We have always appreciated your talks, filled with respect and dialogue, in the quest for the truth. Please help us once again*

with your words!

Pope Benedict XVI: Thank you for your testimony of a truly multidimensional and multicultural parish. It seems to me that you have somewhat concretized what was discussed earlier with our Indian brother: the whole picture that consists of dialogue, respectful coexistence, respect for one another, acceptance of one another as they are in their otherness, in their communion.

And at the same time, the presence of Christianity, of the Christian faith as a reference point to which all can turn their gaze, as a leaven which, while respecting freedom, is nevertheless a light for all. Moreover, it unites us precisely through respect for our differences. Let us hope that the Lord will always help us in this regard to accept the other in his otherness, to respect him and to make Christ present in the act of love, which is the true expression of his presence and words. And may he thus help us to be truly ministers of Christ and of his salvation for the world. Thank you.