



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO PORTUGAL ON THE OCCASION OF THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE BEATIFICATION OF JACINTA AND FRANCISCO,
YOUNG SHEPHERDS OF FÁTIMA

**CELEBRATION OF VESPERS WITH PRIESTS,
RELIGIOUS, SEMINARIANS AND DEACONS**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Church of the Most Holy Trinity, Fátima
Wednesday, 12 May 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son born of woman, [...] so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4,5). The fullness of time came when the Eternal broke into time; by the grace of the Holy Spirit the Son of the Most High was conceived and became man in the womb of a woman, the Virgin Mary, type and lofty model of the believing Church. The Church does not cease to beget new sons in the Son, whom the Father willed to be the first-born of many brothers. Each one of us is called to be with Mary and like Mary, a humble and simple sign of the Church who offers herself constantly as a spouse into the hands of her Lord.

To all of you who have given your life to Christ I wish to express this evening the Church’s appreciation and recognition. Thank you for your witness, often silent and certainly not easy; thank you for your fidelity to the Gospel and to the Church. In Jesus, present in the Eucharist, I embrace my brothers in the priesthood and the deacons, the consecrated women and men, the seminarians and the members of the movements and new ecclesial communities present. May the Lord reward, as he alone can and does, all those who have made it possible for us to gather together before the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. I mention especially the Episcopal Commission for

Vocations and Ministries, with its President, Bishop António Santos, whom I thank for his greeting, full of collegial and fraternal affection, at the beginning of Vespers. In this “upper room” of faith which is Fatima, the Virgin Mother shows us the way to place our pure and holy offering into the hands of the Father.

Let me open my heart and tell you that the greatest concern of every Christian, especially of every consecrated person or minister of the altar, must be fidelity, loyalty to one’s own vocation, as a disciple who wishes to follow the Lord. Faithfulness over time is the name of love, of a consistent, true and profound love for Christ the Priest. “Since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalistic ethic and a shallow religiosity” (John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 31). In this Year for Priests which is drawing to its close, may grace in abundance come down upon you that you may live joyfully your consecration and bear witness to your priestly fidelity grounded in the fidelity of Christ. This evidently supposes true intimacy with Christ in prayer, since it is the powerful and intense experience of the Lord’s love that brings priests and consecrated persons to respond to his love in way that is exclusive and spousal.

This life of special consecration was born to keep the Gospel always before the People of God, as a reminder which manifests, certifies and proclaims to the whole Church the radical nature of the Gospel and the coming of the Kingdom. Dear consecrated men and women, by your dedication to prayer, asceticism and growth in the spiritual life, to apostolic action and mission, you are progressing towards the heavenly Jerusalem, you are a foretaste of the eschatological Church, solid in her possession and loving contemplation of God who is love. How much we need this witness today! Many of our brothers and sisters live as if there were nothing beyond this life, and without concern for their eternal salvation. Men and women are called to know and love God, and the Church has the mission to assist them in this calling. We know well that God is the master of his gifts and that conversion is a grace. But we are responsible for proclaiming the faith, the whole faith, with all its demands. Dear friends, let us imitate the Curé of Ars who prayed to the Lord in the following words: “Grant me the conversion of my parish, and I accept to suffer all that you wish for the rest of my life”. And he did everything to pull people away from their own lukewarm attitude in order to lead them back to love.

There exists a deep solidarity among all the members of the Body of Christ. It is not possible to love Christ without loving his brothers and sisters. For their salvation John Mary Vianney decided to become a priest: “to win souls for the good God”, as he said when, at eighteen years of age, he announced his vocation, just as Paul had said: “to win as many as I could” (1 Cor 9:19). The Vicar General had told him: “there is not much love of God in the parish; you will bring it there”. In his priestly passion, this holy parish priest was merciful like Jesus in meeting each sinner. He preferred to insist on the attractive aspect of virtue, on God’s mercy, in comparison to which our sins are like “grains of sand”. He pointed to the merciful love of God which had been offended. He

feared that priests would become “insensitive” and accustomed to the indifference of their faithful: “Woe to the Pastor – he would warn – who remains silent while God is offended and souls are lost”.

Dear brother priests, in this place, which Mary has made special, keep before your eyes her vocation as a faithful disciple of her Son Jesus from the moment of his conception to the Cross, and then beyond, along the path of the nascent Church, and consider the unheard-of grace of your priesthood. Fidelity to one’s vocation requires courage and trust, but the Lord also wishes that you join forces: that you be concerned for one another and support one another fraternally. Moments of common prayer and study, and sharing in the demands of the priestly life and work, are a necessary part of your life. It is a fine thing when you welcome one another into your homes with the peace of Christ in your hearts! It is important to assist one another with prayer, helpful advice and discernment! Be especially attentive to those situations where there is a certain weakening of priestly ideals or dedication to activities not fully consonant with what is proper for a minister of Jesus Christ. Then is the time to take a firm stand, with an attitude of warm fraternal love, as brother assisting his brother to “remain on his feet”.

The priesthood of Christ is eternal (cf. Heb 5:6), but the life of priests is limited. Christ has willed that others continue in time the priestly ministry that he instituted. Keep alive in your hearts, and in others around you, the desire to raise up – in cooperation with the grace of the Holy Spirit – new priestly vocations among the faithful. Trustful and persevering prayer, joyful love of one’s own vocation and commitment to the work of spiritual direction will allow you to discern the charism of vocation in those whom God calls.

Dear seminarians, who have taken the first step towards the priesthood and are preparing in the major seminary or in houses of formation, the Pope encourages you to be conscious of the great responsibility which you will have to assume. Carefully examine your intentions and your motivations. Devote yourselves with a steadfast heart and a generous spirit to your training. The Eucharist, which is the centre of Christian life and the school of humility and service, should be your first love. Adoration, piety and care for the Most Holy Sacrament during these years of preparation will lead you one day to celebrate the Sacrifice of the Altar in an edifying and devout manner.

Along this path of fidelity, beloved priests and deacons, consecrated men and women, seminarians and committed lay persons, may the Blessed Virgin Mary guide us. With her and like her, we are free so as to be saints; free so as to be poor, chaste and obedient; free for all because detached from all, free from self so that others may grow in Christ, the true Holy One of the Father and the Shepherd to whom priests, as his presence, lend their voice and their gestures; free to bring to today’s world Jesus who died and rose again, Jesus who remains with us until the end of time and who gives himself to all in the Most Holy Eucharist.
