



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 17 October 2007

Saint Eusebius of Vercelli

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This morning I invite you to reflect on St Eusebius of Vercelli, the first Bishop of Northern Italy of whom we have reliable information. Born in Sardinia at the beginning of the fourth century, he moved to Rome with his family at a tender age. Later, he was instituted lector: he thus came to belong to the clergy of the city at a time when the Church was seriously troubled by the Arian heresy. The high esteem that developed around Eusebius explains his election in 345 A.D. to the Episcopal See of Vercelli. The new Bishop immediately began an intense process of evangelization in a region that was still largely pagan, especially in rural areas. Inspired by St Athanasius - who had written the *Life of St Anthony*, the father of monasticism in the East - he founded a priestly community in Vercelli that resembled a monastic community. This coenobium impressed upon the clergy of Northern Italy a significant hallmark of apostolic holiness and inspired important episcopal figures such as Limenius and Honoratus, successors of Eusebius in Vercelli, Gaudentius in Novara, Exuperantius in Tortona, Eustasius in Aosta, Eulogius in Ivrea and Maximus in Turin, all venerated by the Church as saints.

With his sound formation in the Nicene faith, Eusebius did his utmost to defend the full divinity of Jesus Christ, defined by the Nicene *Creed* as "of one being with the Father". To this end, he allied himself with the great Fathers of the fourth century - especially St Athanasius, the standard bearer of Nicene orthodoxy - against the philo-Arian policies of the Emperor. For the Emperor, the simpler Arian faith appeared politically more useful as the ideology of the Empire. For him it was not truth

that counted but rather political opportunism: he wanted to exploit religion as the bond of unity for the Empire. But these great Fathers resisted him, defending the truth against political expediency. Eusebius was consequently condemned to exile, as were so many other Bishops of the East and West: such as Athanasius himself, Hilary of Poitiers - of whom we spoke last time - and Hosius of Cordoba. In Scythopolis, Palestine, to which he was exiled between 355 and 360, Eusebius wrote a marvellous account of his life. Here too, he founded a monastic community with a small group of disciples. It was also from here that he attended to his correspondence with his faithful in Piedmont, as can be seen in the second of the three *Letters* of Eusebius recognized as authentic. Later, after 360, Eusebius was exiled to Cappadocia and the Thebaid, where he suffered serious physical ill-treatment. After his death in 361, Constantius II was succeeded by the Emperor Julian, known as "the Apostate", who was not interested in making Christianity the religion of the Empire but merely wished to restore paganism. He rescinded the banishment of these Bishops and thereby also enabled Eusebius to be reinstated in his See. In 362 he was invited by Anastasius to take part in the Council of Alexandria, which decided to pardon the Arian Bishops as long as they returned to the secular state. Eusebius was able to exercise his episcopal ministry for another 10 years, until he died, creating an exemplary relationship with his city which did not fail to inspire the pastoral service of other Bishops of Northern Italy, whom we shall reflect upon in future Catecheses, such as St Ambrose of Milan and St Maximus of Turin.

The Bishop of Vercelli's relationship with his city is illustrated in particular by two testimonies in his correspondence. The first is found in the *Letter* cited above, which Eusebius wrote from his exile in Scythopolis "to the beloved brothers and priests missed so much, as well as to the holy people with a firm faith of Vercelli, Novara, Ivrea and Tortona" (*Second Letter*, CCL 9, p. 104). These first words, which demonstrate the deep emotion of the good Pastor when he thought of his flock, are amply confirmed at the end of the *Letter* in his very warm fatherly greetings to each and every one of his children in Vercelli, with expressions overflowing with affection and love. One should note first of all the explicit relationship that bound the Bishop to the *sanctae plebes*, not only of *Vercellae/Vercelli* - the first and subsequently for some years the only Diocese in the Piedmont - but also of *Novaria/Novara*, *Eporedial/Ivrea* and *Dertona/Tortona*, that is, of the Christian communities in the same Diocese which had become quite numerous and acquired a certain consistency and autonomy. Another interesting element is provided by the farewell with which the *Letter* concludes. Eusebius asked his sons and daughters to give his greeting "also to those who are outside the Church, yet deign to nourish feelings of love for us: *etiam hos, qui foris sunt et nos dignantur diligere*". This is an obvious proof that the Bishop's relationship with his city was not limited to the Christian population but also extended to those who - outside the Church - recognized in some way his spiritual authority and loved this exemplary man.

The second testimony of the Bishop's special relationship with his city comes from the *Letter* St Ambrose of Milan wrote to the Vercellians in about 394, more than 20 years after Eusebius' death (*Ep. extra collectionem* 14: *Maur.* 63). The Church of Vercelli was going through a difficult period: she was divided and lacked a Bishop. Ambrose frankly declared that he hesitated to recognize

these Vercellians as descending from "the lineage of the holy fathers who approved of Eusebius as soon as they saw him, without ever having known him previously and even forgetting their own fellow citizens". In the same *Letter*, the Bishop of Milan attested to his esteem for Eusebius in the clearest possible way: "Such a great man", he wrote in peremptory tones, "well deserves to be elected by the whole of the Church". Ambrose's admiration for Eusebius was based above all on the fact that the Bishop of Vercelli governed his Diocese with the witness of his life: "With the austerity of fasting he governed his Church". Indeed, Ambrose was also fascinated, as he himself admits, by the monastic ideal of the contemplation of God which, in the footsteps of the Prophet Elijah, Eusebius had pursued. First of all, Ambrose commented, the Bishop of Vercelli gathered his clergy in *vita communis* and educated its members in "the observance of the monastic rule, although they lived in the midst of the city". The Bishop and his clergy were to share the problems of their fellow citizens and did so credibly, precisely by cultivating at the same time a different citizenship, that of Heaven (cf. Heb 13: 14). And thus, they really built true citizenship and true solidarity among all the citizens of Vercelli.

While Eusebius was adopting the cause of the *sancta plebs* of Vercelli, he lived a monk's life in the heart of the city, opening the city to God. This trait, though, in no way diminished his exemplary pastoral dynamism. It seems among other things that he set up parishes in Vercelli for an orderly and stable ecclesial service and promoted Marian shrines for the conversion of the pagan populations in the countryside. This "monastic feature", however, conferred a special dimension on the Bishop's relationship with his hometown. Just like the Apostles, for whom Jesus prayed at his Last Supper, the Pastors and faithful of the Church "are of the world" (Jn 17: 11), but not "in the world". Therefore, Pastors, Eusebius said, must urge the faithful not to consider the cities of the world as their permanent dwelling place but to seek the future city, the definitive heavenly Jerusalem. This "eschatological reserve" enables Pastors and faithful to preserve the proper scale of values without ever submitting to the fashions of the moment and the unjust claims of the current political power. The authentic scale of values - Eusebius' whole life seems to say - does not come from emperors of the past or of today but from Jesus Christ, the perfect Man, equal to the Father in divinity, yet a man like us. In referring to this scale of values, Eusebius never tired of "warmly recommending" his faithful "to jealously guard the faith, to preserve harmony, to be assiduous in prayer" (*Second Letter, op. cit.*).

Dear friends, I too warmly recommend these perennial values to you as I greet and bless you, using the very words with which the holy Bishop Eusebius concluded his *Second Letter*: "I address you all, my holy brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, faithful of both sexes and of every age group, so that you may... bring our greeting also to those who are outside the Church, yet deign to nourish sentiments of love for us" (*ibid.*).

Today, the World Day for the Elimination of Poverty is being celebrated, recognized by the United Nations with the title of the *World Day for the Eradication of Poverty*. How many people still live in conditions of extreme poverty! The disparity between rich and poor has become increasingly obvious and disturbing, even in the more prosperous nations. This distressing situation must be recognized by humanity, because the conditions in which a large number of people live are such as to offend the dignity of the human being and consequently to jeopardize the authentic and harmonious progress of the world community. I therefore recommend that efforts be redoubled to uproot the causes of poverty and the tragic consequences that derive from them.

To special groups

I warmly greet the Immaculate Heart Sisters from Nigeria who celebrate the 70th anniversary of their foundation. I likewise greet the members of the national pilgrimage of Tanzania. My welcome also goes to the Lutheran pilgrims from Norway and to the members of Serra International. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, including those from England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Japan, the Philippines and the United States, I invoke God's abundant Blessings.

Lastly, I turn my thoughts to the *sick, newly-weds* and *young people*, especially the children from the Diocese of Faenza-Modigliana who have received Confirmation and the pupils of the Sacred Heart Foundation in Cesena. Dear friends, the month of October invites us to renew our active cooperation in the Church's mission. Therefore, place at the service of the Gospel, you *young people*, the fresh energies of youth, you *sick people*, the power of prayer and suffering, and you *newly-weds*, the potential of married life, in order to give practical support to the missionaries who bear the Christian message on the front lines of evangelization.

CONSISTORY ANNOUNCEMENT

I now have the joy of announcing that this 24 November, eve of the Solemnity of Christ the King, I will hold a Consistory at which, departing by one from the number established by Pope Paul VI, confirmed by my venerable Predecessor John Paul II in the Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis* (cf. n. 33), I will name 18 Cardinals. Here are their names.

1. **Archbishop Leonardo Sandri**, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches;
2. **Archbishop John Patrick Foley**, Pro-Grand Master of the Knights of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem;
3. **Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo**, President of the Pontifical Commission and of the Governorate of Vatican City State;

4. **Archbishop Paul Joseph Cordes**, President of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum";
5. **Archbishop Angelo Comastri**, Archpriest of the Vatican Basilica, Vicar General for Vatican City State and President of the Fabric of St Peter;
6. **Archbishop Stanisław Rylko**, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity;
7. **Archbishop Raffaele Farina, S.D.B.**, Archivist and Librarian of Holy Roman Church;
8. **Archbishop Agustín Garcia-Gasco Vicente** of Valencia, Spain;
9. **Archbishop Sean Baptist Brady** of Armagh, Ireland;
10. **Archbishop Lluís Martínez Sistach** of Barcelona, Spain;
11. **Archbishop André Vingt-Trois** of Paris, France;
12. **Archbishop Angelo Bagnasco** of Genoa, Italy;
13. **Archbishop Théodore-Adrien Sarr** of Dakar, Senegal;
14. **Archbishop Oswald Gracias** of Bombay, India;
15. **Archbishop Francisco Robles Ortega** of Monterrey, Mexico;
16. **Archbishop Daniel N. DiNardo** of Galveston-Houston, U.S.A.;
17. **Archbishop Odilo Pedro Scherer** of São Paulo, Brazil;
18. **Archbishop John Njue** of Nairobi, Kenya.

I also wish to raise to the dignity of Cardinal three venerable Prelates and two well-deserving ecclesiastics, particularly praiseworthy for their commitment to the service of the Church:

1. **H.B. Emmanuel III Delly**, Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans;
2. **Archbishop Giovanni Coppa**, Apostolic Nuncio;
3. **Archbishop emeritus Estanislao Esteban Karlic** of Paraná, Argentina;
4. **Fr Urbano Navarrete, S.J.**, former Rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University; and
5. **Fr Umberto Betti, O.F.M.**, former Rector of the Pontifical Lateran University.

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Among the latter I had also wanted to raise to the dignity of Cardinal the elderly **Bishop Ignacy Jez** of Koszalin-Kołobrzeg, Poland, who died suddenly yesterday. Let us offer our prayers of suffrage for him.

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The new Cardinals come from various parts of the world. This group clearly reflects the universality of the Church with the multiplicity of her ministries: besides Prelates praiseworthy for the service they have rendered to the Holy See, there are Pastors who expend their energy in direct contact with the faithful.

There would have been other people, very dear to me, who because of their dedication to serving the Church would certainly deserve to be raised to the dignity of Cardinal. I hope to have the opportunity in the future to testify to my esteem and affection to them and the Countries to which they belong.

Let us entrust the newly elected to the protection of Mary Most Holy, asking her to help them in their respective offices so that they may be able to witness with courage in every circumstance to their love for Christ and the Church.

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