



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT

TO SANTA MARIA DI LEUCA AND BRINDISI (APULIA - ITALY)

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Apollinaris Wharf, Port of Brindisi

Sunday, 15 June 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On the Lord's Day, in the middle of my Visit to Brindisi, we are celebrating the mystery which is the source and summit of the Church's whole life. We are celebrating Christ in the Eucharist, the greatest gift that flowed from his divine and human Heart, the Bread of Life, broken and shared to enable us to become one with him and with one another. I greet with affection all of you who have gathered at the port, this deeply symbolic place which calls to mind the missionary journeys of Peter and Paul. I rejoice to see the many young people who enlivened last night's vigil in preparation for the Eucharistic celebration. And I also greet you, who are taking part in spirit by means of radio and television. I address a special greeting to Archbishop Rocco Talucci, the Pastor of this beloved Church, and thank him for his words at the beginning of Holy Mass. I also greet the other Bishops of Apulia who have desired to be here with us with sentiments of fraternal communion. The presence of Metropolitan Gennadios gives me special pleasure and I offer him my cordial greeting, which I extend to all the Orthodox brethren and those of the other Denominations, from this Church of Brindisi which, because of her ecumenical vocation, invites us to pray and to work for the full unity of all Christians. With gratitude I greet the Civil and Military Authorities who are taking part in this liturgy, and wish them every good for their service. My affectionate thoughts then go to the priests and deacons, to the women and men religious and to all the faithful. I address a special greeting to the sick in hospital and to the prisoners in jail, to whom I assure my remembrance in prayer. Grace and peace on the part of the Lord to everyone and to the entire city of Brindisi!

The biblical texts we have heard on this 11th Sunday of Ordinary Time help us to understand the

reality of the Church: the First Reading (cf. Ex 19: 2-6a) recalled the Covenant made on Mount Sinai, during the Exodus from Egypt; the Gospel (cf. Mt 9: 36-10: 8) consisted of the account of the call and mission of the Twelve Apostles. We find the "constitution" of the Church presented here: how can we fail to perceive the implicit invitation addressed to every Community to renew its own vocation and missionary drive? In the First Reading the sacred author tells of God's Covenant with Moses and with Israel on Sinai. This is one of the great milestones in salvation history, one of those moments that transcend history itself in which the boundary between the Old and New Testaments disappears and the eternal plan of the God of the Covenant is manifest: the plan for the salvation of all men and women through the sanctification of a people to which God proposes to become "my own possession among all peoples" (Ex 19: 5). In this perspective, the people is called to become a "holy nation", not only in the moral sense, but first and above all in its own ontological reality, in its being as a people. Already in the Old Testament, how the identity of this people is to be understood is gradually made clear in the course of the salvific events; then it was fully revealed with the coming of Jesus Christ. Today's Gospel presents us with a decisive moment for this revelation. In fact, when Jesus called the Twelve he desired to refer symbolically to the 12 tribes of Israel, going back to the 12 sons of Jacob. Thus, by placing the Twelve at the centre of his new community, he makes it understood that he came to bring the heavenly Father's design to completion, even if the new face of the Church was to appear only at Pentecost when the Twelve, "filled with the Holy Spirit" proclaimed the Gospel, and spoke in all the languages (Acts 2: 3-4). It was then that the universal Church was to be made manifest, gathered in a single Body of which the Risen Christ is Head yet, at the same time, sent by him to all the nations, even to the very ends of the earth (cf. Mt 28: 19).

Jesus' style is unmistakeable: it is the characteristic style of God who likes to do great things in a poor and humble manner. The solemnity of the accounts of the Covenant in the Book of Exodus leaves room in the Gospels for humble and discreet gestures which nevertheless contain an enormous potential for renewal. It is the logic of the Kingdom of God, not by chance represented by the tiny seed that becomes a great tree (cf. Mt 13: 31-32). The Covenant of Sinai was accompanied by cosmic signs that terrified the Israelites; the beginnings of the Church in Galilee, on the contrary, were exempt from such manifestations and reflect the docility and compassion of Christ's Heart although they foretold another battle, another upheaval, inspired by the forces of evil. Christ gave to the Twelve, we heard, "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity" (Mt 10: 1). The Twelve must cooperate with Jesus in establishing the Kingdom of God, that is, his beneficial, life-giving lordship, and life in abundance for the whole of humanity. The Church in essence, like Christ and together with him, is called and sent out to establish the Kingdom of life and to drive out the dominion of death so that the life of God may triumph in the world; so that God who is Love may triumph. Christ's work is always silent, it is not spectacular; the great tree of true life grows even in the humility of being Church, of living the Gospel every day. Precisely with these humble beginnings the Lord encourages us so that in the humility of the Church today too, in the poverty of our Christian lives, we may see his presence and thus have the courage to go to meet him and make his love, this force of peace and of true

life, present on our earth. So this was God's plan: to spread over humanity and throughout the cosmos his love that generates life. It was not a spectacular process; it was a humble process, yet it brought with it the true power of the future and of history.

Thus it is a plan that the Lord desires to implement with respect for our freedom, for love, by its nature, cannot be imposed. The Church in Christ then is the place in which to accept and mediate God's love. In this perspective it is clear that the Church's *holiness* and *missionary character* are two sides of the same coin: only because she is holy, that is, filled with divine love, can the Church carry out her mission, and it is precisely in terms of this task that God chose her and sanctified her as his property. Our first duty, therefore, precisely in order to heal this world, is to be holy, configured to God; in this way we emanate a healing and transforming power that also acts on others, on history. Your Ecclesial Community, dear brothers and sisters, involved as it is in the Diocesan Synod in this period, is measuring itself at this moment against the double term, "holiness-mission" - holiness is always a force that transforms others. In this regard, it is useful to reflect that the Twelve Apostles were not perfect men, chosen for their moral and religious irreproachability. They were indeed believers, full of enthusiasm and zeal but at the same time marked by their human limitations, which were sometimes even serious. Therefore Jesus did not call them because they were already holy, complete, perfect, but so that they might become so, so that they might thereby also transform history, as it is for us, as it is for all Christians. In the Second Reading we heard the Apostle Paul's synthesis: "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rm 5: 8). The Church is the community of sinners who believe in God's love, letting themselves be transformed by him and thus become holy, sanctifying the world.

In the light of God's providential words, today I have the joy of strengthening your Church on her way. It is a way of holiness and mission on which your Archbishop has invited you to reflect in his recent Pastoral Letter; it is a way he has thoroughly examined in the course of his Pastoral Visit and which he now intends to promote through the Diocesan Synod. Today's Gospel suggests to us the style of the mission, in other words the interior attitude that is expressed in life lived. It can only be Jesus' style: that of "compassion". The Evangelist highlights this by focusing attention on Christ looking at the crowd. He wrote: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9: 36). And after the call of the Twelve, this attitude is once again apparent in the order he gives them to go "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10: 6). Christ's love for his people, especially the lowly and the poor, can be felt in these words. Christian compassion has nothing to do with pietism or the culture of dependency. Rather, it is synonymous with solidarity and sharing and is enlivened by hope. Were not Jesus' words to the Apostles born from hope: "Preach as you go, saying, "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"" (Mt 10: 7)? This is hope founded on Christ's coming and ultimately coincides with his Person and his mystery of salvation - where Christ is, there is the Kingdom of God, there is the newness of the world - as the theme of the Fourth Ecclesial Convention of Italy celebrated in Verona clearly recalled: the Risen Christ is the "hope of the world".

Enlivened by the hope in which you have been saved, may you too, brothers and sisters of this ancient Church of Brindisi, be signs and instruments of the compassion and mercy of Christ. To the Archbishop and priests I fervently repeat the words of the divine Teacher: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without pay, give without pay" (Mt 10: 8). This mandate is once again addressed in the first place to you today. The Spirit who acted in Christ and in the Twelve, is the same as the One who works in you and enables you to perform among your people, in this territory, signs of the Kingdom of love, justice and peace that is coming, indeed, that is already in the world. Yet, through the grace of Baptism and Confirmation, all the members of the People of God participate in Jesus' mission if in different ways. I am thinking of consecrated people who profess the vows of poverty, virginity and obedience; I am thinking of Christian married couples and of you, lay faithful committed to the Ecclesial Community and to society, both personally and as a group. Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus' desire to increase the number of workers in the Lord's harvest (cf. Mt 9: 38) is addressed to you all. This desire, which is asking to be made a prayer, reminds us in the first place of seminarians and of the new Seminary in this Archdiocese; it makes us realize that in a broad sense the Church is one great "seminary", beginning with the family and extending to the parish communities, the associations and movements of apostolic commitment. We are all, with the variety of our charisms and ministries, called to work in the Lord's vineyard.

Dear brothers and sisters of Brindisi, continue in this spirit on the way on which you have set out. May your Patrons, St Leucius and St Oronzo, both of whom arrived from the East in the second century to water this land with the living water of the Word of God, watch over you. May the relics of St Theodore of Amasea, venerated in the Cathedral of Brindisi, remind you that giving one's life for Christ is the most effective preaching. May St Lawrence, a son of this City who, in Francis of Assisi's footsteps, became an apostle of peace in a Europe torn apart by wars and disputes, obtain for you the gift of authentic brotherhood. I entrust you all to the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Hope and Star of Evangelization. May the Blessed Virgin help you to remain in the love of Christ, so that you may bear abundant fruit for the glory of God the Father and the salvation of the world. Amen.

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