



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO CARPINETO ROMANO

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Monti Lepini Square
Sunday, 5 September 2010*

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May I first of all express my joy at being here with you at Carpineto Romano, treading in the footsteps of my beloved Predecessors [Paul VI](#) and [John Paul II](#)! The circumstance that has brought me here is also a joyful one: the bicentenary of the birth in this beautiful town of [Pope Leo XIII](#), Vincenzo Gioacchino Pecci, on 2 March 1810. I thank you all for your welcome! In particular, I greet with gratitude Bishop Lorenzo Loppa of Anagni-Alatri, and the Mayor of Carpineto, who have welcomed me at the beginning of the celebration, as well as the other Authorities present. I address a special thought to the young people, especially those who have made the diocesan pilgrimage. Unfortunately, my Visit is very short and it is entirely concentrated in this Eucharistic celebration; but here we find everything: the Word and the Bread of Life that nourishes faith, hope and charity; and we renew the bond of communion that makes us the one Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have listened to the Word of God and it comes naturally to welcome it, on this occasion, thinking again of Pope Leo XIII and of the legacy he has bequeathed to us. The main theme that emerges from the biblical Readings is that of the primacy of God and of Christ. In the Gospel passage from St Luke, Jesus himself frankly states the three conditions necessary for being his disciples: to love him more than anyone else and more than life itself; to carry one's cross and to

walk after him; to renounce all one's possessions. Jesus sees a great crowd following him with his disciples and wants to make it quite clear to all that following him is demanding and cannot depend on enthusiasm or opportunism. It must be a carefully considered decision taken after asking oneself, in all conscience: who is Jesus for me? Is he truly "Lord", does he take first place, like the sun around which all the planets rotate? And the First Reading from the Book of Wisdom indirectly suggests to us the reason for this absolute primacy of Jesus Christ: in him we find the answers to the questions of human beings in every epoch who seek the truth about God and about themselves. God is out of our reach and his plans are unknown to us. Yet he has chosen to reveal himself, in creation and especially in the history of salvation, while in Christ he fully manifested himself and his will. Although it remains true that "No one has ever seen God" (Jn 1: 18), we now know his "name" and his "face" and even his will, because Jesus, who is the Wisdom of God made man, has revealed them to us. "Thus", writes the sacred author of the First Reading, "men were taught what pleases you, and were saved by wisdom" (Wis 9: 18).

This fundamental reminder of the Word of God makes us think of two aspects of the life and ministry of your venerable Fellow Citizen whom we are commemorating today, the Supreme Pontiff Leo XIII. First of all it should be emphasized that he was a man of great faith and profound devotion. This still continues to be the basis of everything for every Christian, including the Pope. Without prayer, that is, without inner union with God, we can do nothing, as Jesus clearly tells his disciples at the Last Supper (cf. Jn 15: 5). Pope Pecci's deep religious feeling shone out through his words and actions and was also reflected in his Magisterium: among his numerous [Encyclicals](#) and [Apostolic Letters](#), like the theme running through a series of books, there are those of a properly spiritual character which aim above all at increasing Marian devotion, especially through the Holy Rosary. It is a true and proper "catechesis", which marks the 25 years of his Pontificate from beginning to end. Yet we also find Documents on Christ the Redeemer, on the Holy Spirit, on the consecration to the Sacred Heart, on the devotion to St Joseph, on St Francis of Assisi. Leo XIII had special ties with the Franciscan Family as he belonged to the Third Order. I like to consider all these different elements as facets of a single reality: love of God and of Christ, to which absolutely nothing must be preferred. And Vincenzo Gioacchino Pecci assimilated this, his first and principal quality, here in his native town from his parents and from his parish.

However there is also a second aspect which once again derives from the primacy of God and of Christ. It is found in the public action of every Pastor of the Church in particular of every Supreme Pontiff with the characteristics proper to the personality of each one. I would say that the very concept of "Christian wisdom", which emerged earlier in the First Reading and in the Gospel, offers us the synthesis of this structure according to Leo XIII it is not by chance that it is also the *incipit* of one of his Encyclicals. Every Pastor is called to pass on to the People of God "wisdom" not abstract truths; in other words a message that combines faith and life, truth and practical reality. Pope Leo XIII, with the help of the Holy Spirit was able to do this in one of the most difficult periods of history for the Church by, staying faithful to tradition and, at the same time, measuring up to the great open questions. And he succeeded precisely on the basis of "Christian wisdom",

founded on the Sacred Scriptures, on the immense theological and spiritual patrimony of the Catholic Church and also on the sound and crystal clear philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas, whom he esteemed highly and promoted throughout the Church.

At this point after considering the basis, in other words the faith and spiritual life and hence the general framework of Leo XIII's Message, I shall refer to his social Magisterium. The Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* brought it undying fame but it was enriched by many other interventions that constitute an organic body, the first nucleus of the Church's social doctrine. Let us start with St Paul's Letter to Philemon. Which the Liturgy felicitously makes us read this very day. It is the shortest text of all the Pauline Letters. During a period in prison the Apostle transmitted the faith to Onesimus, a slave originally from Colossae, after he had escaped from his master Philemon, a rich inhabitant of that city, and had become Christian together with his relatives, thanks to Paul's preaching. The Apostle now writes to Philemon asking him to receive Onesimus no longer as a slave but as a brother in Christ. The new Christian brotherhood overcame the separation between slaves and free men, and grafted on to history a principle of the promotion of the individual that was to lead to the abolition of slavery and also to surmounting other barriers that still exist today. Pope Leo XIII dedicated to the theme of slavery his Encyclical *Catholicae Ecclesiae*, of 1890.

This particular experience of St Paul with Onesimus can give rise to a broad reflection on the incentive to human promotion contributed by Christianity in the process of civilization and also on the method and style of this contribution, that are in conformity with the Gospel images of "seed" and "leaven": within historical reality Christians, acting as individual citizens or in an association, constitute a beneficial and peaceful force for profound change, encouraging the development of the potentials inherent in reality itself. It is this form of presence and action in the world that is proposed by Church's social doctrine, which always focuses on the development of consciences as a condition for effective and lasting transformations.

We must now ask ourselves: what was the context into which, 200 years ago, was born the man who 68 years later was to become Pope Leo XIII? Europe was then weathering the great Napoleonic storm that followed the French Revolution. The Church and many expressions of Christian culture were radically disputed (think only of examples such as, calculating the years no longer from Christ's birth but from the beginning of the new revolutionary era, or of removing the names of Saints from the calendar, from streets, from villages...). Rural populations were not of course favourable to these overwhelming changes and remained firm to religious traditions. Daily life was hard and difficult: the conditions of health and of nourishment left much to be desired. In the meantime industry was developing and with it the workers' movement, more and more politically organized. The Magisterium of the Church, at its highest level, was driven and aided by local thoughts and experiences to compile an overall interpretation in view, of the new society and of its common good. Thus when Leo XIII was elected Pope in 1878 he felt called to bring this interpretation to completion in the light of his extensive knowledge of international breadth, but also of many projects put into practice "on the spot" by Christian communities and men and

women of the Church.

Indeed, dozens and dozens of Saints and Blesseds, from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th, sought and tested, with the creativity of charity, many ways to put the Gospel message into practice in the new social situations. There is no doubt that such initiatives, with the sacrifices and reflection of these men and women, prepared the ground for *Rerum Novarum* and for Pope Pecci's other social Documents. Since the time when he was Apostolic Nuncio in Belgium, he had realized that the social question could be positively and effectively confronted with dialogue and mediation. In a time of harsh anti-clericalism and passionate demonstrations against the Pope, Leo XIII knew how to guide and support Catholics on the path to a constructive participation, rich in content, firm on principles and capable of openness. Subsequent to *Rerum Novarum*, in Italy and in other countries an authentic explosion of initiatives arose: associations, rural and artisan country banks, newspapers... a vast "movement" of which the Servant of God Giuseppe Toniolo was an enlightened animator. A very elderly Pope but, wise and far-sighted, Leo XIII was able to usher into the 20th century a rejuvenated Church with the right approach to facing the new challenges. He was a Pope still politically and physically a "prisoner" in the Vatican, but in reality, with his Magisterium, he represented a Church which could face without complexes the important questions of the contemporary age.

Dear friends of Carpineto Romano, we do not have time to examine these subjects in depth. The Eucharist which we are celebrating, the Sacrament of Love, recalls to us the essential: charity, the love of Christ that renews men and women and the world. This is the essential and we see it clearly, we almost perceive it in the words of St Paul in his Letter to Philemon. In that short note, in fact, can be felt all the gentleness at the same time as the revolutionary force of the Gospel; one feels the discreet and at the same time irresistible style of charity, which, as I wrote in my social Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, it is "the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity" (n. 1). With joy and affection I therefore leave you the old and ever new commandment: love one another as Christ has loved us, and with this love may you be the salt and light of the world. Thus you will be faithful to the legacy of your great and venerable Fellow Citizen, Pope Leo XIII; and so may it be throughout the Church! Amen.

© Copyright 2010 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana