



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO MADRID
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 26th WORLD YOUTH DAY
18-21 AUGUST 2011

EUCCHARIST WITH SEMINARIANS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Cathedral of Santa María la Real de la Almudena, Madrid
Saturday, 20 August 2011

[Video]

Your Eminence the Archbishop of Madrid,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Dear Priests and Religious,
Dear Rectors and Formators,
Dear Seminarians,
Dear Friends,

I am very pleased to celebrate Holy Mass with you who aspire to be Christ's priests for the service of the Church and of man, and I thank you for the kind words with which you welcomed me. Today, this holy cathedral church of Santa María La Real de la Almudena is like a great Upper Room, where the Lord greatly desires to celebrate the Passover with you who wish one day to preside in his name at the mysteries of salvation. Looking at you, I again see proof of how Christ continues to call young disciples and to make them his apostles, thus keeping alive the mission of the Church and the offer of the Gospel to the world. As seminarians you are on the path towards a sacred goal: to continue the mission which Christ received from the Father. Called by him, you have followed his voice and, attracted by his loving gaze, you now advance towards the sacred ministry. Fix your eyes upon him who through his incarnation is the supreme revelation of God to

the world and who through his resurrection faithfully fulfills his promise. Give thanks to him for this sign of favour in which he holds each one of you.

The first reading which we heard shows us Christ as the new and eternal priest who made of himself a perfect offering. The response to the psalm may be aptly applied to him since, at his coming into the world, he said to the Father, "Here I am to do your will" (cf. *Ps* 39:8). He tried to please him in all things: in his words and actions, along the way or welcoming sinners. His life was one of service and his longing was a constant prayer, placing himself in the name of all before the Father as the first-born son of many brothers and sisters. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews states that, by a single offering, he brought to perfection for all time those of us who are called to share his sonship (cf. *Heb* 10:14).

The Eucharist, whose institution is mentioned in the Gospel just proclaimed (cf. *Lk* 22:14-20), is the real expression of that unconditional offering of Jesus for all, even for those who betrayed him. It was the offering of his body and blood for the life of mankind and for the forgiveness of sins. His blood, a sign of life, was given to us by God as a covenant, so that we might apply the force of his life wherever death reigns due to our sins, and thus destroy it. Christ's body broken and his blood outpoured – the surrender of his freedom – became through these Eucharistic signs the new source of mankind's redeemed freedom. In Christ, we have the promise of definitive redemption and the certain hope of future blessings. Through Christ we know that we are not walking towards the abyss, the silence of nothingness or death, but are rather pilgrims on the way to a promised land, on the way to him who is our end and our beginning.

Dear friends, you are preparing yourselves to become apostles with Christ and like Christ, and to accompany your fellow men and women along their journey as companions and servants.

How should you behave during these years of preparation? First of all, they should be years of interior silence, of unceasing prayer, of constant study and of gradual insertion into the pastoral activity and structures of the Church. A Church which is community and institution, family and mission, the creation of Christ through his Holy Spirit, as well as the result of those of us who shape it through our holiness and our sins. God, who does not hesitate to make of the poor and of sinners his friends and instruments for the redemption of the human race, willed it so. The holiness of the Church is above all the objective holiness of the very person of Christ, of his Gospel and his sacraments, the holiness of that power from on high which enlivens and impels it. We have to be saints so as not to create a contradiction between the sign that we are and the reality that we wish to signify.

Meditate well upon this mystery of the Church, living the years of your formation in deep joy, humbly, clear-mindedly and with radical fidelity to the Gospel, in an affectionate relation to the time spent and the people among whom you live. No one chooses the place or the people to whom he is sent, and every time has its own challenges; but in every age God gives the right grace to face

and overcome those challenges with love and realism. That is why, no matter the circumstances in which he finds and however difficult they may be, the priest must grow in all kinds of good works, keeping alive within him the words spoken on his Ordination day, by which he was exhorted to model his life on the mystery of the Lord's cross.

To be modeled on Christ, dear seminarians, is to be identified ever more closely with him who, for our sake, became servant, priest and victim. To be modeled on him is in fact the task upon which the priest spends his entire life. We already know that it is beyond us and we will not fully succeed but, as St Paul says, we run towards the goal, hoping to reach it (cf. *Phil* 3:12-14).

That said, Christ the High Priest is also the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep, even giving his life for them (cf. *Jn* 10:11). In order to liken yourselves to the Lord in this as well, your heart must mature while in seminary, remaining completely open to the Master. This openness, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, inspires the decision to live in celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and, leaving aside the world's goods, live in austerity of life and sincere obedience, without pretence.

Ask him to let you imitate him in his perfect charity towards all, so that you do not shun the excluded and sinners, but help them convert and return to the right path. Ask him to teach you how to be close to the sick and the poor in simplicity and generosity. Face this challenge without anxiety or mediocrity, but rather as a beautiful way of living our human life in gratuitousness and service, as witnesses of God made man, messengers of the supreme dignity of the human person and therefore its unconditional defenders. Relying on his love, do not be intimidated by surroundings that would exclude God and in which power, wealth and pleasure are frequently the main criteria ruling people's lives. You may be shunned along with others who propose higher goals or who unmask the false gods before whom many now bow down. That will be the moment when a life deeply rooted in Christ will clearly be seen as something new and it will powerfully attract those who truly search for God, truth and justice.

Under the guidance of your formators, open your hearts to the light of the Lord, to see if this path which demands courage and authenticity is for you. Approach the priesthood only if you are firmly convinced that God is calling you to be his ministers, and if you are completely determined to exercise it in obedience to the Church's precepts.

With this confidence, learn from him who described himself as meek and humble of heart, leaving behind all earthly desire for his sake so that, rather than pursuing your own good, you build up your brothers and sisters by the way you live, as did the patron saint of the diocesan clergy of Spain, St John of Avila. Moved by his example, look above all to the Virgin Mary, Mother of Priests. She will know how to mould your hearts according to the model of Christ, her divine Son, and she will teach you how to treasure for ever all that he gained on Calvary for the salvation of the world. Amen.

Announcement of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With great joy, here in this Cathedral Church of Santa María La Real de la Almudena, I announce to the People of God that, having acceded to the desire expressed by Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela, Archbishop of Madrid and President of the Bishops' Conference of Spain, together with the members of the Spanish episcopate and other Archbishops and Bishops from throughout the world, as well as many of the lay faithful, I will shortly declare Saint John of Avila a Doctor of the universal Church.

In making this announcement here, I would hope that the word and the example of this outstanding pastor will enlighten all priests and those who look forward to the day of their priestly ordination.

I invite everyone to look to Saint John of Avila and I commend to his intercession the Bishops of Spain and those of the whole world, as well as all priests and seminarians. As they persevere in the same faith which he taught, may they model their hearts on that of Jesus Christ the good Shepherd, to whom be glory and honour for ever. Amen.

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