



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO LAMEZIA TERME AND SERRA SAN BRUNO

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Former-Sir Area, Industrial suburb of Lamezia Terme

Sunday, 9 October 2011

[Video]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is my great joy to be able to break with you the bread of the word of God and of the Eucharist. I am delighted to be here in Calabria and in this city, Lamezia Terme, for the first time. I offer my cordial greeting to all of you who have come here in such great numbers and I thank you for your warm welcome! I greet in particular Bishop Luigi Antonio Cantafora, your Pastor, and thank him for the courteous words of welcome he has addressed to me on behalf of all. I also greet the archbishops and bishops present, the priests, men and women religious, representatives of the ecclesial Associations and Movements. I address a respectful thought to the Mayor, Prof. Gianni Speranza, with gratitude for his courteous greeting, to the Government Representative and the civil and military Authorities, who have wished to honour this meeting with their presence. Special thanks are due to those who have generously collaborated in the realization of my Pastoral Visit.

This Sunday's liturgy presents a parable to us that speaks of a wedding banquet to which many were invited. The First Reading, from the Book of Isaiah, prepares the ground for this theme, for it speaks about the banquet of God. It is an image — the banquet — often used in the Scriptures to indicate the joy in communion and in the abundance of the Lord's gifts, and it gives some idea of the celebration of God with humanity as Isaiah describes: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of

wine... well refined" (Is 25:6). The Prophet adds that God's intention is to put an end to sadness and shame; he wants all people to live happily in love of him and in mutual communion. Therefore his plan is to eliminate death forever, to wipe away the tears from all faces, to take away once and for all the dishonourable condition of his people, as we heard (vv. 7-8). All this awakens deep gratitude and hope: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (v. 9).

In the Gospel Jesus speaks to us of the answer that is given to the invitation of God — represented by a king — to take part in this marriage feast (cf. Mt 22:1-14). Many guests were invited but something unexpected happens: they refuse to take part in the celebration, they have other things to do; indeed, some of them show contempt for the invitation. God is generous to us, he offers us his friendship, his gifts, his joy, but often we do not welcome his words, we show greater interest in other things and put our own material concerns, our own interests, first. The king's invitation even meets with hostile and aggressive reactions. Yet this does not impede his generosity. He is not discouraged and sends his servants out to invite many other people. The refusal of those invited first causes the invitation to be extended to everyone, even the poorest, the abandoned and disinherited. The servants gather together those they find and the wedding hall is filled: the king's goodness knows no bounds and all are given the possibility of answering his call. However, there was one condition in order to attend this wedding feast: that the wedding garment be worn. And, on entering the hall, the king notices that someone has not wished to wear it and for this reason bars him from the banquet.

I would like to reflect for a moment on this point with a question: why did this man accept the king's invitation, enter the banquet hall, find the door opened to him but not put on the wedding garment? What is this wedding garment? At the [Mass of the Lord's Supper, in Coena Domini](#), this year I mentioned a beautiful commentary on this parable by St Gregory the Great. He explains that the guest had accepted God's invitation to take part in his banquet, that in a certain way he had faith which opened the door of the banquet hall to him, but he lacked something essential: the wedding garment, which is charity or love. And St Gregory adds: "Therefore each one of you in the Church who has faith in God has already taken part in the wedding feast, but cannot claim to wear the wedding garment unless he jealously guards the grace of love" (*Homily 38, 9; PL 76, 1287*). And this garment is woven symbolically on two looms of wood, one above and one below: love of God and love of neighbour (cf. *ibid.*, 10: *PL 76, 1288*). We are all invited to be the Lord's guests, to enter his banquet with faith, but we must put on and take care of the wedding garment: charity, to live in the profound love of God and neighbour.

Dear brothers and sisters, I have come to share with you the joys and hopes, efforts and commitments, ideals and aspirations of this diocesan community. I know that you have prepared yourselves for this Visit with an intense spiritual journey, taking as your motto a verse from the Acts of the Apostles: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (3:6). I also know that in Lamezia Terme, as in all of Calabria, there is no lack of difficulties, problems and anxieties. If we

look at this beautiful region, we recognize in it a land that is seismic not just geologically but also from a structural, behavioural and social point of view; a land, that is, where problems arise in acute and destabilizing forms; a land where unemployment is staggering, where all too often a high crime rate damages the social fabric; it is a land in which one has a constant feeling of being in a state of emergency.

You Calabrians have been able to respond to the emergency with surprising promptness and readiness, with an extraordinary capacity for adapting to hardship. I am sure you will be able to overcome today's difficulties to make way for a better future. Never give in to the temptation of pessimism or of withdrawal. Summon up the resources of your faith and your human gifts; strive to grow in the ability to collaborate, to care for others and for every public good, look after the wedding garment of love; persevere in witnessing to the human and Christian values that are so deeply rooted in the faith and history of this territory and of its population.

Dear friends, my Visit comes almost at the end of the process begun by this local Church as part of a quinquennial pastoral project. Together with you I would like to thank the Lord for the fruitful journey and for the many seeds of good that promise great hope for the future. To face the new social and religious situation, diverse from that of the past, perhaps more problematic but also richer in potential, a modern and organic pastoral endeavour is necessary, one that musters all Christian forces around the Bishop: priests, religious and lay people, animated by the common commitment to evangelization. In this regard, I learned with pleasure of the effort being made to listen attentively and perseveringly to the word of God, through organized monthly meetings in various diocesan centres and the spread of the practice of *lectio divina*. The School of the Social Doctrine of the Church is equally timely, both because of its well articulated proposal and because of its far-reaching circulation. I warmly hope that from these initiatives will spring a new generation of men and women who can promote not so much their private interests but rather the common good. I would also like to encourage and bless the efforts of all those, priests and lay people, who are involved in the preparation of Christian couples for marriage and the family, in order to give an evangelical and competent response to the many contemporary challenges in the area of the family and of life.

Moreover, I am aware of the zeal and dedication with which you priests carry out your pastoral service, as well as the systematic and effective work of formation you address to them, and especially to the youngest. Dear priests, I urge you to root your spiritual life ever more deeply in the Gospel, cultivating your inner life, an intense relationship with God and detaching yourselves with determination from a certain consumerist and worldly mentality, which is a recurrent temptation in the situation in which we live. Learn to grow in communion among yourselves and with your bishop, among yourselves and with the lay faithful, fostering esteem and reciprocal collaboration. There is no doubt that many benefits will derive from this for parish life and for civil society itself. May you be able to encourage the groups and movements, with discernment and in accordance with the well-known ecclesial criteria: they should be well integrated in the ordinary

pastoral service of the diocese and parishes, in a profound spirit of communion.

To you, lay faithful, young people and families I say: do not be afraid to live and to witness to faith in the different sectors of society, in the many contexts of human life! You have every reason to show you are strong, confident and courageous, and this is thanks to the light of faith and the power of love. And when you encounter opposition from the world, make the Apostle's words your own: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). This is how the saints behaved that blossomed down the centuries throughout Calabria. May it be they who keep you ever united and nourish in each one the desire to proclaim, with words and with works, the presence and love of Christ. May the Mother of God, whom you so deeply venerate, help you and lead you to profound knowledge of her Son. Amen!

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