



The Holy See

CHRISM MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Saint Peter's Basilica
Holy Thursday, 5 April 2012*

Photo Gallery

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At this Holy Mass our thoughts go back to that moment when, through prayer and the laying on of hands, the bishop made us sharers in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, so that we might be “consecrated in truth” (Jn 17:19), as Jesus besought the Father for us in his high-priestly prayer. He himself is the truth. He has consecrated us, that is to say, handed us over to God for ever, so that we can offer men and women a service that comes from God and leads to him. But does our consecration extend to the daily reality of our lives – do we operate as men of God in fellowship with Jesus Christ? This question places the Lord before us and us before him. “Are you resolved to be more united with the Lord Jesus and more closely conformed to him, denying yourselves and confirming those promises about sacred duties towards Christ’s Church which, prompted by love of him, you willingly and joyfully pledged on the day of your priestly ordination?” After this homily, I shall be addressing that question to each of you here and to myself as well. Two things, above all, are asked of us: there is a need for an interior bond, a configuration to Christ, and at the same time there has to be a transcending of ourselves, a renunciation of what is simply our own, of the much-vaunted self-fulfilment. We need, I need, not to claim my life as my own, but to place it at the disposal of another – of Christ. I should be asking not what I stand to gain, but what I can give for him and so for others. Or to put it more specifically, this configuration to Christ, who came not to be served but to serve, who does not take, but rather gives – what form does it take in the often dramatic situation of the Church today? Recently a group of priests from a European country issued a summons to disobedience, and at the same time gave concrete examples of the forms

this disobedience might take, even to the point of disregarding definitive decisions of the Church's Magisterium, such as the question of women's ordination, for which Blessed Pope [John Paul II](#) stated irrevocably that the Church has received no authority from the Lord. Is disobedience a path of renewal for the Church? We would like to believe that the authors of this summons are motivated by concern for the Church, that they are convinced that the slow pace of institutions has to be overcome by drastic measures, in order to open up new paths and to bring the Church up to date. But is disobedience really a way to do this? Do we sense here anything of that configuration to Christ which is the precondition for all true renewal, or do we merely sense a desperate push to do something to change the Church in accordance with one's own preferences and ideas?

But let us not oversimplify matters. Surely Christ himself corrected human traditions which threatened to stifle the word and the will of God? Indeed he did, so as to rekindle obedience to the true will of God, to his ever enduring word. His concern was for true obedience, as opposed to human caprice. Nor must we forget: he was the Son, possessed of singular authority and responsibility to reveal the authentic will of God, so as to open up the path for God's word to the world of the nations. And finally: he lived out his task with obedience and humility all the way to the Cross, and so gave credibility to his mission. Not my will, but thine be done: these words reveal to us the Son, in his humility and his divinity, and they show us the true path.

Let us ask again: do not such reflections serve simply to defend inertia, the fossilization of traditions? No. Anyone who considers the history of the post-conciliar era can recognize the process of true renewal, which often took unexpected forms in living movements and made almost tangible the inexhaustible vitality of holy Church, the presence and effectiveness of the Holy Spirit. And if we look at the people from whom these fresh currents of life burst forth and continue to burst forth, then we see that this new fruitfulness requires being filled with the joy of faith, the radicalism of obedience, the dynamic of hope and the power of love.

Dear friends, it is clear that configuration to Christ is the precondition and the basis for all renewal. But perhaps at times the figure of Jesus Christ seems too lofty and too great for us to dare to measure ourselves by him. The Lord knows this. So he has provided "translations" on a scale that is more accessible and closer to us. For this same reason, Saint Paul did not hesitate to say to his communities: Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. For his disciples, he was a "translation" of Christ's manner of life that they could see and identify with. Ever since Paul's time, history has furnished a constant flow of other such "translations" of Jesus' way into historical figures. We priests can call to mind a great throng of holy priests who have gone before us and shown us the way: from Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch, from the great pastors Ambrose, Augustine and Gregory the Great, through to Ignatius of Loyola, Charles Borromeo, John Mary Vianney and the priest-martyrs of the 20th century, and finally Pope [John Paul II](#), who gave us an example, through his activity and his suffering, of configuration to Christ as "gift and mystery". The saints show us how renewal works and how we can place ourselves at its service. And they help us realize that God is not concerned so much with great numbers and with outward successes, but

achieves his victories under the humble sign of the mustard seed.

Dear friends, I would like briefly to touch on two more key phrases from the renewal of ordination promises, which should cause us to reflect at this time in the Church's life and in our own lives. Firstly, the reminder that – as Saint Paul put it – we are “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor 4:1) and we are charged with the ministry of teaching, the (*munus docendi*), which forms a part of this stewardship of God's mysteries, through which he shows us his face and his heart, in order to give us himself. At the meeting of Cardinals on the occasion of the recent Consistory, several of the pastors of the Church spoke, from experience, of the growing religious illiteracy found in the midst of our sophisticated society. The foundations of faith, which at one time every child knew, are now known less and less. But if we are to live and love our faith, if we are to love God and to hear him aright, we need to know what God has said to us – our minds and hearts must be touched by his word. The Year of Faith, commemorating the opening of the Second Vatican Council fifty years ago, should provide us with an occasion to proclaim the message of faith with new enthusiasm and new joy. We find it of course first and foremost in sacred Scripture, which we can never read and ponder enough. Yet at the same time we all experience the need for help in accurately expounding it in the present day, if it is truly to touch our hearts. This help we find first of all in the words of the teaching Church: the texts of the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church are essential tools which serve as an authentic guide to what the Church believes on the basis of God's word. And of course this also includes the whole wealth of documents given to us by Pope John Paul II, still far from being fully explored.

All our preaching must measure itself against the saying of Jesus Christ: “My teaching is not mine” (Jn 7:16). We preach not private theories and opinions, but the faith of the Church, whose servants we are. Naturally this should not be taken to mean that I am not completely supportive of this teaching, or solidly anchored in it. In this regard I am always reminded of the words of Saint Augustine: what is so much mine as myself? And what is so little mine as myself? I do not own myself, and I become myself by the very fact that I transcend myself, and thereby become a part of Christ, a part of his body the Church. If we do not preach ourselves, and if we are inwardly so completely one with him who called us to be his ambassadors, that we are shaped by faith and live it, then our preaching will be credible. I do not seek to win people for myself, but I give myself. The Curé of Ars was no scholar, no intellectual, we know that. But his preaching touched people's hearts because his own heart had been touched.

The last keyword that I should like to consider is “zeal for souls”: *animarum zelus*. It is an old-fashioned expression, not much used these days. In some circles, the word “soul” is virtually banned because – ostensibly – it expresses a body-soul dualism that wrongly compartmentalizes the human being. Of course the human person is a unity, destined for eternity as body and soul. And yet that cannot mean that we no longer have a soul, a constituent principle guaranteeing our unity in this life and beyond earthly death. And as priests, of course, we are concerned for the whole person, including his or her physical needs – we care for the hungry, the sick, the homeless.

And yet we are concerned not only with the body, but also with the needs of the soul: with those who suffer from the violation of their rights or from destroyed love, with those unable to perceive the truth, those who suffer for lack of truth and love. We are concerned with the salvation of men and women in body and soul. And as priests of Jesus Christ we carry out our task with enthusiasm. No one should ever have the impression that we work conscientiously when on duty, but before and after hours we belong only to ourselves. A priest never belongs to himself. People must sense our zeal, through which we bear credible witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us ask the Lord to fill us with joy in his message, so that we may serve his truth and his love with joyful zeal. Amen.

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