



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO FATHER NOTKER WOLF
ABBOT PRIMATE OF THE CONFEDERATED BENEDICTINES
ON THE OCCASION OF THE NINTH CENTENARY
OF THE DEATH OF ST ANSELM**

*To the Most Reverend Father Notker Wolf,
Abbot Primate of Confederated Benedictines*

The nine-hundredth year of the death of St Anselm has now come, which we wish to fittingly commemorate and honour. The Saint is truly to be considered European, who was born in northern Italy in the year 1033 and became a Benedictine monk in the Abbey of Bec in Normandy in the year 1060, finally he departed from this world as Archbishop of Canterbury in Anglia in 1109. Recalling his memory with a devoted spirit, we wish to elevate and to illumine the treasure of his wisdom, so that people now living, most especially Europeans may approach him to take up his solid and copious teaching.

Although he was Archbishop, he desired before all things to be a Benedictine monk, directly aware of the importance and weight of monastic life. Dedicating his *Epistle on the Incarnation of the Word* to the Blessed Pope Urban II, he is called *Brother Anselm, by life a sinner, by habit a monk, whether commanding or intrusting to God, called Bishop of the metropolitan see of Canterbury* (In *S. Anselmi, Opera omnia*, II, ed. F. S. Schmitt, Rome 1940, p. 3). To a certain young monk he wrote: *I encourage and advise you, that your mind always be zealous to extend itself to better things. And if you seek counsel in what way you can do this: love the monastic way of life above all things* (Ep. 232, ed. Schmitt, I. c., IV, Edinburgh 1949, p. 138). His *Prologus Orationum sive Meditationum*, which he wrote for *stimulating the disposition of reading for the love or fear of God, or for the discussion of the same*, discloses how much of the meaning of *Lectio divina* as practised Anselm understood that it is the hinge of Benedictine life concerning which he recalls: They [*the meditations*] *must not be read in commotion, but in quiet, and not hastily and quickly, but little by little with attentive and slow meditation* (*Orationes sive Meditationes, Prol.*, ed. Schmitt, I. c., iii, Edinburgh 1946, p. 3). The words of St Benedict concerning the monastic life, which is turned

toward seeking God (*si revera Deum quaerit*) and of the love itself of Christ, to whom nothing is to be preferred (*nihil amori Christi praeponere*), are the principle words, indeed, which lead him unto investigating theology (cf. the *Regula* of St Benedict, c. 58, 7; c. 4, 21).

The system of his theological work, therefore, is discerned from the Benedictine life, which he lived out both at Bec and Canterbury. Because he is eager to understand more profoundly the mysteries of the faith, in his writings no separation comes between learning and devotion, theology and mystery. St Anselm as a theologian prays and praying inquires into theology. His great work, which is entitled *Proslogion*, just as the *Confessiones* of St Augustine, is at one and the same time a prayer and the desire of contemplating the face of God. He confides much to human understanding as to the gift of God. Dedicating his work *Cur Deus homo* to Pope Urban II, he plainly upholds the duty of reason, nay more the office of reason for more profoundly investigating faith for contemplating the beauty of truth: *Where (the sacred page) says: "unless you will have believed, you will not understand", it plainly tells us the intention for striving toward understanding, when it instructs in what way we ought to advance toward it. Finally, because I understand the intellect, which we grasp in this life, to be the medium between faith and sight: the more one advances toward it, the more I judge one to approach to the sight unto which we all strive (Cur Deus homo. Commendatio operis, ed. Schmitt, I. c., II, Rome 1940, p. 40).*

The instruction of this outstanding Teacher held before the eyes, St Anselm's College, Rome, founded by [Pope Leo XIII](#) as an international academic Institute, destined for educating young Benedictines of the whole world, strives to preserve and to pass on those special principles, which, according to the mind of the same Holy Patron, belong to the monastic life and intellectual work. But in today's times the Pontifical Athenaeum of St Anselm, however much it preserves the Benedictine character, is open not only to monks, but also to nuns and sisters, to students of the secular clergy and to the laity. Even non-Catholic students are accustomed to go there to be instructed. This College, accordingly, has become truly an international academic Institute. There, philosophical, theological and liturgical education is handed on, which results in uniting faith and the intellectual understanding of the same faith, just as St Anselm did in his times. This holy teacher concludes his *Proslogion* with that famous chapter, which is on full joy: *I pray, O God, may I know you, love you, that I may rejoice over you. And if I am not able in this life unto the full at least may I progress day by day until it comes to the full. May your knowledge advance here in me, and may it there become full; may your love grow and may it there become full: so that here my joy may be great in hope, and there it may be full in reality (Prosl. 16, ed. Schmitt, I. c., I, Seckau 1938, p. 121).*

Desiring indeed that by that universal prayer, joy and hope made full, they may be instructed and more fully obtain the instruction of the teacher himself, we wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing as the seal of Our benevolence expressly to you most reverend Father, to the entire Benedictine confederation, to teachers, students and to all approaching thereto.

From the Vatican, on the seventh day of the month of March, in the year 2009, the fourth of Our Pontificate.

BENEDICT XVI

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