



The Holy See

MISSA PRO ECCLESIA

FIRST MESSAGE

OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

AT THE END OF THE EUCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION WITH THE MEMBERS OF THE COLLEGE OF CARDINALS IN THE SISTINE CHAPEL

Wednesday, 20 April 2005

*Venerable Brother Cardinals,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
All you men and women of good will,*

1. "Favour and peace be yours in abundance" (I Pt 1: 2)! At this time, side by side in my heart I feel two contrasting emotions. On the one hand, a sense of inadequacy and human apprehension as I face the responsibility for the universal Church, entrusted to me yesterday as Successor of the Apostle Peter in this See of Rome. On the other, I have a lively feeling of profound gratitude to God who, as the liturgy makes us sing, never leaves his flock untended but leads it down the ages under the guidance of those whom he himself has chosen as the Vicars of his Son and has made shepherds of the flock (cf. *Preface of Apostles I*).

Dear friends, this deep gratitude for a gift of divine mercy is uppermost in my heart in spite of all. And I consider it a special grace which my Venerable Predecessor, John Paul II, has obtained for me. I seem to feel his strong hand clasping mine; I seem to see his smiling eyes and hear his words, at this moment addressed specifically to me, "Do not be afraid!".

The death of the Holy Father John Paul II and the days that followed have been an extraordinary period of grace for the Church and for the whole world. Deep sorrow at his departure and the sense of emptiness that it left in everyone have been tempered by the action of the Risen Christ,

which was manifested during long days in the unanimous wave of faith, love and spiritual solidarity that culminated in his solemn funeral Mass.

We can say it: John Paul II's funeral was a truly extraordinary experience in which, in a certain way, we glimpsed the power of God who, through his Church, wants to make a great family of all the peoples by means of the unifying power of Truth and Love (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1). Conformed to his Master and Lord, John Paul II crowned his long and fruitful Pontificate at the hour of his death, strengthening Christian people in their faith, gathering them around him and making the entire human family feel more closely united.

How can we not feel sustained by this testimony? How can we fail to perceive the encouragement that comes from this event of grace?

2. Surprising all my expectations, through the votes of the Venerable Father Cardinals, divine Providence has called me to succeed this great Pope. I am thinking back at this moment to what happened in the neighbourhood of Caesarea Philippi some 2,000 years ago. I seem to hear Peter's words: *"You are the Christ..., the Son of the living God"*, and the Lord's solemn affirmation: *"You are 'Peter' and on this rock I will build my Church.... I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven"* (cf. Mt 16: 15-19).

You are Christ! You are Peter! I seem to be reliving the same Gospel scene; I, the Successor of Peter, repeat with trepidation the anxious words of the fisherman of Galilee and listen once again with deep emotion to the reassuring promise of the divine Master. Although the weight of responsibility laid on my own poor shoulders is enormous, there is no doubt that the divine power on which I can count is boundless: *"You are 'Peter', and on this rock I will build my Church"* (Mt 16: 18). In choosing me as Bishop of Rome, the Lord wanted me to be his Vicar, he wanted me to be the "rock" on which we can all safely stand. I ask him to compensate for my limitations so that I may be a courageous and faithful Pastor of his flock, ever docile to the promptings of his Spirit.

I am preparing to undertake this special ministry, the "Petrine" ministry at the service of the universal Church, with humble abandonment into the hands of God's Providence. I first of all renew my total and confident loyalty to Christ: *"In Te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum!"*.

Your Eminences, with heartfelt gratitude for the trust you have shown me, I ask you to support me with your prayers and with your constant, active and wise collaboration. I also ask all my Brothers in the Episcopate to be close to me with their prayers and advice, so that I may truly be the *Servus servorum Dei*. Just as the Lord willed that Peter and the other Apostles make up the one Apostolic College, in the same way the Successor of Peter and the Bishops, successors of the Apostles - the Council has forcefully reasserted this (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 22) -, must be closely united with one another. This collegial communion, despite the diversity of roles and functions of the Roman

Pontiff and the Bishops, is at the service of the Church and of unity in the faith, on which the efficacy of evangelizing action in the contemporary world largely depends. Therefore, it is on this path, taken by my Venerable Predecessors, that I also intend to set out, with the sole concern of proclaiming the living presence of Christ to the whole world.

3. I have before my eyes in particular the testimony of Pope John Paul II. He leaves a Church that is more courageous, freer, more youthful. She is a Church which, in accordance with his teaching and example, looks serenely at the past and is not afraid of the future. With the Great Jubilee she entered the new millennium, bearing the Gospel, applied to today's world through the authoritative rereading of the Second Vatican Council. Pope John Paul II rightly pointed out the Council as a "compass" by which to take our bearings in the vast ocean of the third millennium (cf. Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, nn. 57-58). Also, in his spiritual Testament he noted, "I am convinced that it will long be granted to the new generations to draw from the treasures that this 20th-century Council has lavished upon us" (17 March 2000; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], 13 April 2005, p. 4).

Thus, as I prepare myself for the service that is proper to the Successor of Peter, I also wish to confirm my determination to continue to put the Second Vatican Council into practice, following in the footsteps of my Predecessors and in faithful continuity with the 2,000-year tradition of the Church. This very year marks the 40th anniversary of the conclusion of the Council (8 December 1965). As the years have passed, the Conciliar Documents have lost none of their timeliness; indeed, their teachings are proving particularly relevant to the new situation of the Church and the current globalized society.

4. My Pontificate begins in a particularly meaningful way as the Church is living the special Year dedicated to the Eucharist. How could I fail to see this providential coincidence as an element that must mark the ministry to which I am called? The Eucharist, the heart of Christian life and the source of the Church's evangelizing mission, cannot but constitute the permanent centre and source of the Petrine ministry that has been entrusted to me.

The Eucharist makes constantly present the Risen Christ who continues to give himself to us, calling us to participate in the banquet of his Body and his Blood. From full communion with him flows every other element of the Church's life: first of all, communion among all the faithful, the commitment to proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel, the ardour of love for all, especially the poorest and lowliest.

This year, therefore, the Solemnity of *Corpus Christi* must be celebrated with special solemnity. Subsequently, the Eucharist will be the centre of the World Youth Day in Cologne in August, and in October, also of the Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, whose theme will be: "*The Eucharist, source and summit of the life and mission of the Church*". I ask everyone in the coming months to intensify love and devotion for Jesus in the Eucharist, and to express courageously and

clearly faith in the Real Presence of the Lord, especially by the solemnity and the correctness of the celebrations.

I ask this especially of priests, whom I am thinking of with deep affection at this moment. The ministerial Priesthood was born at the Last Supper, together with the Eucharist, as my Venerable Predecessor John Paul II so frequently emphasized. "All the more then must the life of a priest be 'shaped' by the Eucharist" (*Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2005*, n. 1; *ORE*, 23 March, p. 4). In the first place, the devout, daily celebration of Holy Mass, the centre of the life and mission of every priest, contributes to this goal.

5. Nourished and sustained by the Eucharist, Catholics cannot but feel encouraged to strive for the full unity for which Christ expressed so ardent a hope in the Upper Room. The Successor of Peter knows that he must make himself especially responsible for his Divine Master's supreme aspiration. Indeed, he is entrusted with the task of strengthening his brethren (cf. Lk 22: 32).

With full awareness, therefore, at the beginning of his ministry in the Church of Rome which Peter bathed in his blood, Peter's current Successor takes on as his primary task the duty to work tirelessly to rebuild the full and visible unity of all Christ's followers. This is his ambition, his impelling duty. He is aware that good intentions do not suffice for this. Concrete gestures that enter hearts and stir consciences are essential, inspiring in everyone that inner conversion that is the prerequisite for all ecumenical progress.

Theological dialogue is necessary; the investigation of the historical reasons for the decisions made in the past is also indispensable. But what is most urgently needed is that "purification of memory", so often recalled by John Paul II, which alone can dispose souls to accept the full truth of Christ. Each one of us must come before him, the supreme Judge of every living person, and render an account to him of all we have done or have failed to do to further the great good of the full and visible unity of all his disciples.

The current Successor of Peter is allowing himself to be called in the first person by this requirement and is prepared to do everything in his power to promote the fundamental cause of ecumenism. Following the example of his Predecessors, he is fully determined to encourage every initiative that seems appropriate for promoting contacts and understanding with the representatives of the different Churches and Ecclesial Communities. Indeed, on this occasion he sends them his most cordial greeting in Christ, the one Lord of us all.

6. I am thinking back at this time to the unforgettable experience seen by all of us on the occasion of the death and funeral of the late John Paul II. The Heads of Nations, people from every social class and especially young people gathered round his mortal remains, laid on the bare ground, in an unforgettable embrace of love and admiration. The whole world looked to him with trust. To many it seemed that this intense participation, amplified by the media to reach the very ends of the

planet, was like a unanimous appeal for help addressed to the Pope by today's humanity which, upset by uncertainties and fears, was questioning itself on its future.

The Church of today must revive her awareness of the duty to repropose to the world the voice of the One who said: "*I am the light of the world. No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness; no, he shall possess the light of life*" (Jn 8: 12). In carrying out his ministry, the new Pope knows that his task is to make Christ's light shine out before the men and women of today: not his own light, but Christ's.

Aware of this I address everyone, including the followers of other religions or those who are simply seeking an answer to the fundamental questions of life and have not yet found it. I address all with simplicity and affection, to assure them that the Church wants to continue to weave an open and sincere dialogue with them, in the search for the true good of the human being and of society.

I ask God for unity and peace for the human family, and declare the willingness of all Catholics to cooperate for an authentic social development, respectful of the dignity of every human being.

I will make every conscientious effort to continue the promising dialogue initiated by my Venerable Predecessors with the different civilizations, so that mutual understanding may create the conditions for a better future for all.

I am thinking in particular of the young. I offer my affectionate embrace to them, the privileged partners in dialogue with Pope John Paul II, hoping, please God, to meet them in Cologne on the occasion of the upcoming [World Youth Day](#). I will continue our dialogue, dear young people, the future and hope of the Church and of humanity, listening to your expectations in the desire to help you encounter in ever greater depth the living Christ, eternally young.

7. Mane nobiscum, Domine! Stay with us, Lord! This invocation, which is the principal topic of the [Apostolic Letter of John Paul II for the Year of the Eucharist](#), is the prayer that wells up spontaneously from my heart as I prepare to begin the ministry to which Christ has called me. Like Peter, I too renew to him my unconditional promise of fidelity. I intend to serve him alone, dedicating myself totally to the service of his Church.

To support me in my promise, I call on the motherly intercession of Mary Most Holy, in whose hands I place the present and future of the Church and of myself. May the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and all the Saints also intercede for us.

With these sentiments I impart to you, Venerable Brother Cardinals, to those who are taking part in this rite and to all who are watching it on television and listening to it on the radio, a special, affectionate Blessing.

©Copyright - Libreria Editrice Vaticana