



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI ON THE OCCASION OF THE 97th GERMAN KATHOLIKENTAG

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I greet all those who from every part of the universal Church have gathered together in front of the Cathedral of St Peter, Osnabrück, for this event, the opening of the 97th German *Katholikentag*. May the peace of Christ Our Lord, Crucified and Risen and ever close to his Church, be with you! I address a special greeting to the Bishop of Osnabrück, to the Cardinals present and to their co-workers in the episcopal ministry, as well as to the Central Committee of German Catholics which has organized this *Katholikentag* with the Diocese of Osnabrück. I also greet the representatives of public life and all who are present via radio and television.

"He brought me forth into a broad place" (Ps 18[17]: 19) is the motto that is guiding this *Katholikentag*. What is the "broad place" to which the encounter with God, faith, leads us?

There are many today who, contrary to what the Psalm says, fear that faith may limit their life, that they may be constrained by the commandments and the teachings of the Church and will not be free to move about the "broad place" of contemporary life and thought. They feel like the younger son in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15: 11-32), obliged to depart, leaving God aside, in order to enjoy to the full "the broad place" of the universe. In the end, however, this "broad place" becomes narrow and empty. Only when our life has successfully risen to God's heart will we have found that "broad place" for which we were created. A life without God does not become any freer and broader. The human being is destined for the infinite. For him nothing else can suffice. Yet those who leave God out limit their lives and the world to the "finite", to what we ourselves can do and think, and this is always too little. Above all, God enlarges our hearts so that we no longer think only of ourselves, are no longer only concerned with ourselves. The heart that is open to God becomes - through the breadth of God - in turn generous and large. This person no longer needs to seek anxiously his own happiness, his own success or to attach importance to the opinion of

others.

He is now free and generous, open to God's call. He can give his whole self confidently because he knows - wherever he goes - that in God's hands he is safe. The one who is big-hearted will be able to keep a place of honour for God and his neighbour in his life and will be healed through his encounter with God. We all know how much our world today needs this encounter and how people are thirsting for the water of life that God alone can give which in them becomes "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4: 14). Let us trust that the encounter with God, in his Word and in the celebration of the Eucharist, will enlarge our hearts and transform us into water welling up with faith for our neighbour. Let us trust that the many meetings in the next few days - also with guests of other denominations and religions will increase love for God who has so much room in his heart for human beings and who is Love.

However, the "broad place" to which God leads us is not only the "depth" within us but also the "breadth" of the future. For this reason the motto of the *Katholikentag* calls us to strengthen within us trust in God, the trust that God will lead us to a good future. "Take heart, it is I; have no fear", Jesus exclaimed to the disciples who, with the wind against them, were bent over their oars on the Sea of Gennesaret (Mk 6: 50). Although sometimes the present blows a stormy wind in our faces and we are filled with great fear for the future, we must have confidence we must not be afraid because God comes to our aid. If we understand the future in this way we shall be able to confront its challenge. We shall then be able to shape the future and to make the most of the opportunities it offers us. I ask this of you who are meeting in Osnabrück: do not only let others shape the future, but take part in the current debates with imagination and a capacity for persuasion! For this reason it is right that in Osnabrück you look first of all to God, celebrating Mass and listening to the incentives that come from Scripture, to speak subsequently in the various public and social arenas. With the Gospel as a parameter, play an active role in your Country's political and social life. As lay Catholics, dare to take part in the formation of the future, together with the priests and Bishops! With God behind you, you can act courageously, because it is he who reassures us that he wants "to give you a future and a hope" (Jer 29: 11).

Lastly, I would like to offer a special greeting to you young people, present in large numbers for the *Katholikentag*, and with you Bishop Bode, in charge of the youth apostolate of the German Bishops' Conference, who is especially close to you and invited you. I met many of you on the occasion of the [World Youth Day in Cologne in 2005](#), and I hope to meet many of you again in a short time at the World Youth Day which this year will be taking place in Sydney. I am glad that today you have met in Osnabrück to strengthen one another in faith, hope and love. Make the most of this opportunity and let yourselves be led by the message of the *Katholikentag* into the "broad space" of the opportunities that God is offering you! God wants to imbue your whole life and wants to show you how great is the freedom of those who put their lives in his hands. The life of those who live their life with God becomes a broad place!

Dear brothers and sisters, I accompany your days in Osnabrück with my prayers and I impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all!

From the Vatican 11 May 2008, Pentecost Sunday.

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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