



The Holy See

**VIDEO MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
AT THE NATIONAL MEETING OF THE CHURCH OF FRANCE
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE OPENING OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL
[LOURDES, 24-25 MARCH 2012]**

Dear Brothers and Sisters of France,

It gives me great joy to be able to address my warm good wishes to you who have come in large numbers to Lourdes in response to the summons of your bishops to celebrate the opening of the Second Vatican Council. In my prayers and in my heart, I join you in your demonstration of faith at the Grotto of Massabielle. The Second Vatican Council was and remains an authentic sign of God for our time. If we can interpret and accept it within the Tradition of the Church and under the reliable guidance of the Magisterium, it will be, increasingly, a great force for the Church's future. I therefore warmly hope that this anniversary will be an opportunity for spiritual and pastoral renewal, for you and for the whole of the Church in France. Indeed, we are thus granted to become better acquainted with the texts which the Council Fathers left us as a legacy — and which have lost none of their value — in order to assimilate them and make them productive in our day.

This renewal, which comes in continuity, takes many different forms. Moreover, the Year of Faith which I have chosen to propose to the entire Church on this occasion must enable us to make our faith more aware and to revive our adherence to the Gospel. This demands an ever greater openness to Christ and, in particular, rediscovering the taste for the Word of God, in order to achieve a profound conversion of our heart and to walk the highways of the world to proclaim the Gospel of hope to the men and women of our time, in a respectful dialogue with all. May this time of grace also permit us to strengthen communion within the great family which is the Catholic Church and to contribute to restoring unity among all Christians, which was one of the Council's main objectives.

The renewal of the Church also passes through the witness borne through the life of Christians themselves so that the Word of Truth which the Lord bequeathed to us will shine out. Dear friends, in being witnesses of the faith such as St Bernadette, the humble visionary of Lourdes, Pauline Jaricot who inspired a new missionary impetus in the Church and many others produced by the land of France, you will grow in the knowledge of Christ. Through their service to God and their brethren, these men and women show us the extent to which faith is a personal and community act which also entails a public testimony and commitment which we cannot afford to overlook! St Joan of Arc – the 600th anniversary of whose death we are celebrating this year – wanted to bring the Gospel to the heart of the most dramatic situations of history and of the Church of her time, is a shining example.

Rediscovering the joy of believing and the enthusiasm of communicating the force and beauty of faith is an essential pivot of the New Evangelization to which the entire Church is invited. May you set out fearlessly to lead the men and women of your country towards friendship with Christ!

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Immaculate Virgin, Our Lady of Lourdes, who played such an important role in the mystery of salvation, also be for you a light on the way that leads to Christ, may she help you to grow in faith. I warmly impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you all, bishops and faithful, pilgrims in Lourdes, and to you, our brothers and sisters in France who have joined us via radio or television.