



# The Holy See

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## ***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE CLERGY OF ROME***

*Basilica of St John Lateran  
Friday, 13 May 2005*

*Dear Priests and Deacons who serve the Diocese of Rome with your pastoral work,*

I am happy to meet you at the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of this Church, "which presides in charity". I greet with affection the Cardinal Vicar and thank him for his kind words, and I also greet the Vicegerent and the Auxiliary Bishops. I offer a friendly greeting to each one of you, and at this very first Meeting I want to express my gratitude to you for your daily efforts in the Lord's vineyard.

The extraordinary experience of faith that we lived on the occasion of the death of our beloved Pope John Paul II showed us a Church of Rome that is deeply united, full of life and rich in zeal: all this is also the fruit of your prayers and apostolate.

Thus, humbly attached to Christ, our One Lord, together we can and must encourage that "exemplarity" of the Church of Rome which is genuine service to our Sister Churches across the world. The indissoluble bond between *romanum* and *petrinum* implies and indeed requires the Church of Rome's participation in the universal concern of her Bishops.

But responsibility for this participation concerns you in a special way, dear priests and deacons, united to your Bishop by the sacramental bond that also makes you his precious collaborators. I am therefore counting on you, on your prayers, your acceptance and your dedication, so that our beloved Diocese may respond ever more generously to the vocation the Lord has entrusted to it. For my part, I assure you that despite my limitations, you can count on the sincerity of my paternal affection for you all.

Dear priests, the quality of your lives and your pastoral service seem to indicate that in this Diocese, as in many others of the world, we have now left behind us that period of identity crisis that troubled so many priests. However, still present are the causes of the "spiritual wilderness" that afflict humanity in our day and consequently also undermine the Church, which dwells among humankind. How can we not fear that they may also ensnare the lives of priests?

It is indispensable, therefore, to return ever anew to the solid root of our priesthood. This root, as we well know, is one: Jesus Christ our Lord. It is he whom the Father sent, he is the cornerstone (cf. I Pt 2: 7). Through him, through the mystery of his death and Resurrection, the Kingdom of God is established and the salvation of the human race brought about.

This Jesus, however, possesses nothing of his own; everything he has is from the Father and for the Father. So he says that his doctrine is not his own but comes from the One who sent him (cf. Jn 7: 16): and that he, the Son, cannot do anything by himself (cf. Jn 5: 19; 30).

Dear friends, this is also the true nature of our priesthood. In fact, all that constitutes our priestly ministry cannot be the product of our personal abilities. This is true for the administration of the Sacraments, but it is also true for the service of the Word: we are not sent to proclaim ourselves or our personal opinions, but the mystery of Christ and, in him, the measure of true humanism. We are not charged to utter many words, but to echo and bear the message of a single "Word", the Word of God made flesh for our salvation. Consequently, these words of Jesus also apply to us: "My doctrine is not my own; it comes from him who sent me" (Jn 7: 16).

Dear priests of Rome, the Lord calls us friends, he makes us his friends, he entrusts himself to us, he entrusts to us his Body in the Eucharist, he entrusts to us his Church. Therefore, we must be true friends to him, we must have the same perception as he has, we must want what he wants and not what he does not want. Jesus himself tells us: "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (Jn 15: 14). Let this be our common resolution: all of us together, to do his holy will, in which lies our freedom and our joy.

Since the priesthood is rooted in Christ, it is by its nature in the Church and for the Church. Indeed, the Christian faith is not something purely spiritual and internal, nor is our relationship with Christ itself exclusively subjective and private.

Rather, it is a completely concrete and ecclesial relationship. At times, the ministerial priesthood has a constitutive relationship with the Body of Christ in his dual and inseparable dimensions as Eucharist and as Church, as Eucharistic body and Ecclesial body.

Therefore, our ministry is *amoris officium* (St Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* 123, 5), it is the office of the Good Shepherd who offers his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10: 14-15). In the Eucharistic mystery, Christ gives himself ever anew, and it is precisely in the Eucharist that we

learn love of Christ, hence, love for the Church.

I therefore repeat with you, dear brothers in the priesthood, the unforgettable words of John Paul II: "Holy Mass is the absolute centre of my life and of every day of my life" (*Address at a Symposium in honour of the 30th anniversary of the Decree "Presbyterorum Ordinis"*, 27 October 1995, n. 4; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 15 November 1995, p. 7). And each one of us should be able to say these words are his own: Holy Mass is the absolute centre of my life and of my every day.

Likewise, obedience to Christ, who made amends for Adam's disobedience, is in practice expressed in ecclesial obedience, which for the priest in daily life means first and foremost obedience to his Bishop. In the Church, however, obedience is not something formalistic; it is obedience to the one who, in turn, obeys and personifies the obedient Christ. All this neither frustrates nor even attenuates the practical requirements of obedience, but guarantees theological depth and its Catholic tone: in the Bishop we obey Christ and the whole Church which he represents in this place.

Jesus Christ was sent by the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of the entire human family, and we priests are enabled through the grace of the sacrament to share in this mission of his. As the Apostle Paul writes, "God... has given us the ministry of reconciliation.... This makes us ambassadors for Christ, God as it were appealing through us. We implore you, in Christ's name: be reconciled to God" (II Cor 5: 18-29). This is how St Paul describes our mission as priests.

Therefore, in the Homily prior to the Conclave, I spoke of the "holy restlessness" that must animate us, the concern to bring to everyone the gift of faith, to offer everyone the salvation that alone endures for ever. And in a city as large as Rome, which on the one hand is so steeped in faith yet in which so many people live who have not really perceived in their hearts the proclamation of faith, we should be especially impelled by this restless concern to bring this joy, this centre of life, which gives it meaning and direction.

Dear brother priests of Rome, the Risen Christ is calling us to be his witnesses and gives us the strength of his Spirit to enable us to be truly such. It is necessary, therefore, to be with him (cf. Mk 3: 14; Acts 1: 21-23) for life. As in the first description of the "munus apostolicum" in Mark 3, an account is given of what the Lord thought being an apostle should mean: being with him and being available for the mission. The two things go together and only by staying with him are we also and always on the move with the Gospel towards others.

Thus, it is essential to be with him, and in this way that restlessness pervades us and enables us to bring the power and joy of the faith to others with our whole lives and not only with just a few words.

The Apostle Paul's words can apply to us: "Yet preaching the Gospel is not the subject of a boast; I am under compulsion and have no choice. I am ruined if I do not preach it!... Although I am not bound to anyone, I made myself the slave of all so as to win over as many as possible.... I have made myself all things to all men in order to save at least some of them" (1 Cor 9: 16-22).

These words that are the self-portrait of the Apostle are also the portrait of every priest. Making oneself "all things to all men" is expressed in daily life, in attention to every person and family: in this regard, you priests of Rome have a great tradition, and I say so with deep conviction, and you are also honouring it today when the city has spread so much and is profoundly changed. It is crucial, as you well know, that the closeness and attention to everyone are always expressed in Christ's Name and constantly strive to lead people to him.

This closeness and dedication, of course, has a personal cost for each one of you, for us. It involves time, worry, the expenditure of energy. I am aware of your daily efforts and want to thank you on behalf of the Lord. But I also want to help you as much as I can so that you do not yield under this burden.

To be able to bear, indeed, even to grow, as persons and as priests, it is fundamental first of all to have intimate communion with Christ, whose food was to do the will of his Father (cf. Jn 4: 34): all we do is done in communion with him, and we thus rediscover ever anew the unity of our lives in the many facets of our daily occupations.

Let us also learn from the Lord Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself to do the will of the Father, the art of priestly asceticism which is also necessary today: it should not be exercised on a par with pastoral activities as an additional burden that makes our day even more difficult. On the contrary, we must learn how to surpass ourselves, how to give and how to offer our lives.

But, if all this is truly to happen within us so that our very action may truly become our asceticism and our self-giving, so that all this may not be just a wish, there is no doubt that we need moments in which to replenish our energies, including the physical, and especially to pray and meditate, returning to our inner selves and finding the Lord within us.

Thus, spending time in God's presence in prayer is a real pastoral priority; it is not an addition to pastoral work: being before the Lord is a pastoral priority and in the final analysis, the most important. John Paul II showed this to us in the most practical and enlightened way in every circumstance of his life and ministry.

Dear priests, we can never sufficiently emphasize how fundamental and crucial our personal response to the call to holiness is. It is not only the condition for our personal apostolate to be fruitful but also, and more generally, for the face of the Church to reflect the light of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1), thereby inducing people to recognize and adore the Lord.

We must first inwardly accept the Apostle Paul's plea that we let ourselves be reconciled to God (cf. II Cor 5: 20), asking the Lord with a sincere heart and courageous determination to take away from us all that separates us from God and is contrary to the mission we have received. The Lord is merciful, we are certain, and will answer our prayer.

My ministry as Bishop of Rome follows in the wake of the ministry of my Predecessors. I welcome in particular the precious heritage bequeathed by John Paul II: dear priests and deacons, let us walk on this path with serenity and trust.

We will continue to seek to increase communion in the great family of the diocesan Church and to collaborate to develop a missionary approach in our pastoral work in conformity with the basic guidelines of the Roman Synod, translated into action with special effectiveness by the City Mission. Rome is a very large Diocese and truly a very special one, because of the universal concern that the Lord has entrusted to his Bishop.

Therefore, dear priests, your relationship with the diocesan Bishop, who unfortunately I am, cannot have the daily immediacy I would have liked and which may be possible in other situations. Through the work of the Cardinal Vicar and the Auxiliary Bishops, to whom I express my deep gratitude, I can nonetheless be concretely close to each one of you, in the joys and difficulties that accompany every priest on his journey.

I would like above all to assure you of that deeper and more decisive closeness that binds the Bishop to his priests and deacons in daily prayer, and you may be sure that the clergy of Rome are truly particularly present in my prayers. And we are close in faith and love for Christ and in entrustment to Mary, Mother of the one High Priest. That serenity and trust which we all feel we need, both for our apostolic work and for our personal lives, derive precisely from our union with Christ and with the Virgin.

Dear priests and deacons, these are some of the thoughts that I wanted to bring to your attention. Before giving the floor to you for your questions and reflections, I still have some very joyful news to announce. We received a communiqué today. It was written by Cardinal Saraiva Martins, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, together with Archbishop Nowak, Secretary of the Congregation:

*The Holy Father then read the Latin text regarding the Cause of the late Pope John Paul II:*

*Instante Em.mo ac Rev.mo Domino D. Camillo S.R.E. Cardinali Ruini, Vicario Generali Suae Sanctitatis pro Dioecesi Romana, Summus Pontifex BENEDICTUS XVI, attentis peculiaribus expositis adiunctis, in audentia eidem Cardinali Vicario Generali die 28 mensis Aprilis huius anni 2005 concessa, dispensavit a tempore quinque annorum expectationis post mortem Servi Dei Ioannis Pauli II (Caroli Wojtyla), Summi Pontificis, ita ut causa Beatificationis et Canonizationis*

*eiusdem Servi Dei statim incipi posset. Contrariis non obstantibus quibuslibet.*

*Datum Romae, ex aedibus huius Congregationis de Causis Sanctorum, die 9 mensis Maii A.D. 2005.*

**Iosephus Card. Saraiva Martins**

*Praefectus*

**Eduardus Nowak**

*Archiepiscopus tit. Lunensis*

*a Secretis*

The floor is now yours. At the end, I will do my best to answer you.

*The Holy Father responded "off the cuff" to interventions made by members of the clergy of Rome, which followed his formal Address:*

At the end, I can only say "thank you" for the richness and depth of these contributions, where a Presbytery full of enthusiasm, of love for Christ and for the flock entrusted to us and of love for the poor is evident. And not only of the city of Rome, but truly of the universal Church, of all our brothers and sisters. Thank you also for the affection you have expressed for me; it helps me greatly.

Presently, I do not feel in a position to enter into details regarding what has been said. It would be good to continue a true discussion, and I hope that it will be possible to have a concrete question-and-answer discussion.

Now, I simply express my gratitude for everything. I truly perceive your pastoral dedication, I perceive your desire to build the Church of Christ here in Rome, I perceive your reflections on how to do better, I perceive how all springs forth from a great love for the Lord and the Church.

I would only like to touch on three or four points that have remained in my mind. You have spoken of this "Roman" and "universal" interlacement. For me, this seems to be a very important point.

On the one hand, this is an authentic local Church that must live as such. There are some people who suffer, who live, who want to believe or are unable to believe. It is here, in the parishes, that the Church of Rome must grow with her great responsibility for the world as she carries within herself this mandate, in a certain way, of "exemplarity"; in this way, there appears in the Church of Rome the face of the Church as such, and it is a model for other local Churches. To be a model, we ourselves must be a local Church that is busy each day in the humble work demanded by this "being Church", in a determined place at a determined time.

You have spoken of the parish as a fundamental structure, assisted and enriched by movements. And it seems to me that precisely during the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II, a fruitful combination between the constant element of the parochial structure and, let us say, the "charismatic" element, was created, which offers new initiatives, new inspirations, new life. Under the wise guidance of the Cardinal Vicar and the Auxiliary Bishops, all parish priests can together be truly responsible for the growth of the parish, taking in all of the factors that can come from the movements and the living reality of the Church in varied dimensions.

But I wanted to speak once more about this Roman and universal interlacement. One of our brothers spoke of our responsibility towards Africa. We have seen how, in Rome, Africa is present, India is present, the universe is present. And this presence of our brothers and sisters obliges us to think not only of ourselves, but to feel precisely in this moment of history, in all of these circumstances with which we are familiar, the presence of the other Continents.

It seems to me that at this time we have a particular responsibility towards Africa, towards Latin America and towards Asia, where Christianity - with the exception of the Philippines - is still a very large minority, even if in India it is growing and shows itself a strength for the future. And so, we also think of this responsibility.

Africa is a Continent that has enormous potential and the enormous generosity of the people, with an impressive, living faith. But we must confess that Europe exported not only faith in Christ, but also all of the vices of the Old Continent.

It exported the sense of corruption, it exported the violence that is currently devastating Africa. And we must acknowledge our responsibility so that the exportation of the faith, an answer to the intimate hope of every human being, is stronger than the exportation of the vices of Europe. This seems to me a great responsibility.

The weapons trade is still alive, with the exploitation of the earth's goods. We Christians must do much more in these regards so that faith is made present, and with faith, the strength to resist these vices and to rebuild a Christian Africa, destined to be a happy Africa, a great Continent of new humanism.

Something was then said about the need, on one hand, to proclaim, to speak, but on the other, also to listen. To me, this seems important in two ways.

The priest, deacon, catechist and Religious must, on the one hand, proclaim, be witnesses. But naturally, for this they must listen, in a two-fold sense: on the one hand, with their soul open to Christ, interiorly listening to his Word so that it is assimilated and transformed and forms my being; and on the other, listening to today's humanity, our neighbours, those of my parish, those for whom I have been given a certain responsibility.

Naturally, listening to the world of today that exists also in us, we listen to all the problems, all the difficulties that are contrary to faith. And we must be able to seriously take upon ourselves these problems.

In his First Letter, St Peter, the first Bishop of Rome, says that we Christians must be ready to explain our faith. This presupposes that we ourselves have understood the reason of faith, that we have truly "digested", even rationally, with the heart, with the wisdom of heart, this word that can truly be an answer for others.

In the First Letter of St Peter, in the Greek text, with a fine play on words, it is written: "apologia", the answer to the "logos", of the reason for our faith. And so, the "logos", the reason for the faith, the word of faith, must become the answer of faith. And we know well that the language of faith is often very far from today's men and women; it can bring them close only if it becomes in us our modern-day language. We are contemporary, we live in this world, with these thoughts, these emotions. If it is transformed in us, one can find the answer.

Naturally, I am aware and we all know that many are not immediately able to identify themselves with, to understand, to assimilate all that the Church teaches. It seems to me important firstly to awaken this intention to believe with the Church, even if personally someone may not yet have assimilated many particulars. It is necessary to have this will to believe with the Church, to have trust that this Church - the community not only of 2,000 years of pilgrimage of the people of God, but the community that embraces heaven and earth, the community where all the righteous of all times are therefore present - that this Church enlivened by the Holy Spirit truly carries within the "compass" of the Spirit and therefore is the true subject of faith.

The individual, then, is inserted into this subject, adheres to it, and so, even if he or she is still not completely penetrated by this, the person has trust and participates in the faith of the Church, wants to believe with the Church. To me, this seems like our lifelong pilgrimage: to arrive with our thought, our affections, with our entire life at the communion of faith. We can offer this to everyone, so that little by little one can identify and especially take this step over and over again to trust in the faith of the Church, to insert themselves in this pilgrimage of faith, so as to receive the light of faith.

To conclude, I would like once more to say "thank you" for the contribution expressed here regarding Christocentrism, the requirement for our faith to be ever nourished by personal encounter with Christ, a personal friendship with Jesus.

Romano Guardini correctly said 70 years ago that the essence of Christianity is not an idea but a Person. Great theologians have tried to describe the essential ideas that make up Christianity. But in the end, the Christianity that they constructed was not convincing, because Christianity is in the first place an Event, a Person. And thus in the Person we discover the richness of what is



contained. This is important.

And here I think we also find an answer to a difficulty often voiced today regarding the missionary nature of the Church. From many comes the temptation to think this way regarding others: "But why do we not leave them in peace? They have their authenticity, their truth. We have ours. And so, let us live together in harmony, leaving all persons as they are, so that they search out their authenticity in the best way".

But how can one's personal authenticity be discovered if in reality, in the depth of our hearts, there is the expectation of Jesus, and the genuine authenticity of each person is found exactly in communion with Christ and not without Christ? Said in another way: If we have found the Lord and if he is the light and joy of our lives, are we sure that for someone else who has not found Christ he is not lacking something essential and that it is our duty to offer him this essential reality?

We then leave what will transpire to the direction of the Holy Spirit and the freedom of each person. But if we are convinced and we have experienced the fact that without Christ life is incomplete, is missing a reality, the fundamental reality, we must also be convinced that we do harm to no one if we show them Christ and we offer them in this way too the possibility to discover their true authenticity, the joy of having discovered life.

In closing, I would like to say "thank you" to all who make up the Presbytery and the Ecclesial Community of Rome, to the parish and vice-parish priests, to all who collaborate in the various offices, to deacons, catechists and above all to the men and women religious who are somewhat the "heart" of the ecclesial life of a Diocese. Thank you for this witness that you give.

Let us all go forward together, moved by the love of Christ. And in this way, we will succeed!

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