



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS OF AUSTRIA
ON THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT***

Saturday, 5 November 2005

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

The visit of the Pastors of the Church in Austria to the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul is a fixed appointment and a moment of assessment in the exercise of this office of great responsibility.

Therefore, dear Brothers, on the occasion of your *ad limina* visit I welcome you to the Apostolic Palace with deep joy. Your pilgrimage strengthens your bonds with the Successor of Peter, and at the same time enables you to experience anew the communion of the universal Church at her centre.

Precisely during the events of recent months, we have been able to experience the full freshness of the Church's vitality and her global missionary energy, especially during the 20th World Youth Day at Cologne last August. Although the spiritual impetus that God enables us to live in these special hours of grace is not always visible in the Church, we know of the promise of our divine Lord and Teacher for all times and all places: "Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world" (*Mt 28: 20*).

Thus, we know that this vital presence of the Risen Lord in his Church is brought about at the same time through the sacramental celebration of his Sacrifice, through Communion, in which we receive his Body and his Blood, and through the experience that is offered to us in the adoration of his Real Presence under the sacred species.

The intention of the Year of the Eucharist, which has just ended with the Synod of Bishops, was to

call the faithful's attention to the source of the Church's life and mission and to what the true summit is, the goal of all our efforts to lead people to their Saviour and to reconcile them in him with the Triune God.

On the basis of these experiences it is now necessary to analyze calmly and confidently the situation of the Austrian Dioceses in order to identify the key points that require our particular attention for the salvation and good of the flock: "Keep watch over yourselves, and over the whole flock the Holy Spirit has given you to guard. Shepherd the Church of God, which he has acquired at the price of his own blood" (*Acts 20: 28*). In the certainty of the Lord's presence, let us look courageously into the eyes of reality without letting optimism, which always attracts us, become an obstacle to calling things by their proper name with full objectivity and without embellishment.

Grievous events are occurring today: the secularization process, constantly gaining momentum in Europe at this time, has not even been halted at the gates of Catholic Austria. Identification with the Church has been eroded in many of the faithful and with it, the certainty of the faith and reverential awe for God's law are lacking.

Apart from these few observations, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, I do not need to recall in detail here the numerous critical sectors of social life in general and of the ecclesial situation in particular, because I know that they are your constant concerns. I share your anxiety about the Church in your Country.

So what can we do? God has prepared a remedy for the Church in our time; will you be able to use it to face courageously the challenges you encounter on your way in the third Christian millennium?

On the one hand, there is no doubt that we need a clear, courageous and enthusiastic profession of faith in Jesus Christ, who is also alive here and now in his Church and in whom, true to its essence, the human soul oriented to God can find happiness. On the other hand, we need to take numerous small and large missionary measures to bring about a "change of course".

As you well know, profession of faith is one of the Bishop's most important duties. "I have never shrunk from announcing to you God's design in its entirety", St Paul said at Miletus to the Presbyters of the Church of Ephesus (*Acts 20: 27*). It is true that we Bishops must act prudently. However, this prudence must not prevent us from presenting the Word of God in its full clarity, even those things that people are less willing to hear or that never fail to arouse protests and derision.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, you are well aware that there are topics concerning the truth of faith and especially moral doctrine that are not being adequately presented in catechesis and preaching in your Dioceses and that at times, for example, in youth ministry in the parishes or associations, are not being confronted at all or are not being clearly addressed as the Church

wishes.

I give thanks to God it is not like this everywhere. However, perhaps those responsible for preaching fear that here and there people might drift away if they spoke too clearly.

Yet experience generally shows that it is precisely the opposite that happens. Be under no illusion. An incomplete Catholic teaching is a contradiction in itself and cannot be fruitful in the long term. The proclamation of the Kingdom of God goes hand in hand with the need for conversion and love that encourages, that knows the way, that teaches an understanding that with God's grace even what seems impossible becomes possible. Only think how the teaching of religion, catechesis at various levels and preaching can be gradually improved, deepened and as it were completed.

Please use zealously the *Compendium* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Ensure that your priests and catechists use these instruments, that they are explained in parishes, associations and movements, and used in families as important reading.

In the uncertainty of this time in history and of our society, offer people the certainty of the complete faith of the Church. The clarity and beauty of the Catholic faith are such that they brighten human life even today! This is particularly true if it is presented by enthusiastic and convincing witnesses.

The clear, public and resolute witness of Bishops, which can give a direction to all the faithful and especially the priests in your special care, and the courage to strengthen the faith through your own attitude, must be accompanied by many measures, often seemingly insignificant and unnecessary, which have a public effect.

Something has been done to reawaken the missionary awareness of Christians in your Dioceses. In this regard I am thinking, for example, of the extraordinary city mission in Vienna, and of course, of the *Mitteleuropäischen Katholikentag* [Central European Catholic Day] that is an exceptional witness of Catholic faith linking the peoples in the face of European public opinion.

There is still much to be done to enable the Church in Austria to carry out her missionary mandate better. In fact, it is often measures of ordinary administration such as, for example, wise and correct decisions concerning personnel, that permanently improve the situation.

Whether it is a matter of going to Sunday Mass or receiving the Sacrament of Penance, how important example and encouraging words can frequently be! It is the precept of love that urges us not only to provide our neighbour with one or other social service, but also to help him or her to do the greatest good, to turn constantly to the living God, to communion with Jesus Christ, to the discovery of one's own vocation to holiness, to openness to God's will, to the joy of a life that in a certain sense already anticipates the eternal bliss.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, innumerable positive situations in ecclesial life, such as, for example, the practice and rediscovery of Eucharistic adoration in parishes, the devotion of many individuals and communities to the recitation of the Rosary and the constant good collaboration between the State and the Church for the good of human beings, outline the image of the Church in Austria as well as the great cultural wealth of your Country, so blessed by the Lord in the course of Christian history.

The spark of Christian zeal can be rekindled. Use all these gifts wherever you can, but do not be content with external piety. God is not satisfied by the fact that his people pay him lip service. God wants their hearts and gives us his grace if we do not drift away or cut ourselves off from him. I am well aware of your most dedicated efforts and those of many priests, deacons, Religious and lay people. I am certain that the Lord will accompany you and reward your fidelity and zeal with his divine blessing.

May the *Magna Mater Austriae*, the good Mother of Grace of Mariazell and the supreme Virgin of Austria, whose shrine has become so dear to me, give you and the faithful of your Country the strength and perseverance to continue with courage and confidence the great task of the authentic renewal of the living faith in your Homeland, in fidelity to the directives of the universal Church.

Through her intercession I impart my Apostolic Blessing to all of you for your pastoral work, and to all the faithful in Austria.

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