



The Holy See

VISIT OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE PONTIFICAL LATERAN UNIVERSITY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Pontifical Lateran University

Saturday, 21 October 2006

Extemporaneous greeting on his arrival:

I am happy to be here in "my" University, because this is the University of the Bishop of Rome. I know that here the truth is sought, and so ultimately, Christ is sought, because he is the Truth in person. This journey towards the truth - trying to know the truth better in all of its expressions - is in reality a fundamental ecclesial service.

A great Belgian theologian wrote a book, "Love of the Arts and the Desire of God", and has shown that in the monastic tradition the two things go together, because God is Word and speaks to us through Scripture. Therefore, suppose that we begin to read, study and deepen the knowledge of the Arts, and thus deepen our knowledge of the Word.

In this sense, the opening of the Library is both an academic, university event and a spiritual, theological event, precisely because through reading, on the path towards the truth, studying the words to find the Word, we are at the service of the Lord. A service of the Gospel for the world, because the world needs the truth. There is no freedom without truth; [without it] we are not in total harmony with the original idea of the Creator.

Thank you for your work! May the Lord bless you in this Academic Year.

Your Eminences,

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dearest Students,*

I am particularly pleased to be able to share with you the beginning of the Academic Year, which coincides with the solemn inauguration of the new Library and of this Lecture Hall.

I thank the Grand Chancellor, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, for the words of welcome that he kindly addressed to me in the name of the entire academic community.

I greet the University Rector, Bishop Rino Fisichella, and I thank him for his speech opening this solemn academic event.

I greet the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, the Academic Authorities and all the Professors, and also all who work within the University. Then, I greet with special affection all the students, because the University is created for them.

I recall my last Visit to the Lateran with pleasure and, as if time had not elapsed, I would like to take up again the theme then under discussion, almost as though we had been interrupted only for a few seconds.

A context such as the academic one invites in its peculiar way to enter anew the theme of the crisis of culture and identity, which in these decades dramatically places itself before our eyes.

The University is one of the best qualified places to attempt to find opportune ways to exit from this situation. In the University, in fact, the wealth of tradition that remains alive through the centuries is preserved - and especially the Library is an essential means to safeguard the richness of tradition - in it and can be illustrated in the fecundity of the truth when it is welcomed in its authenticity with a simple and open soul.

In the University the young generations are formed who await a serious, demanding proposal, capable of responding in new contexts to the perennial question on the meaning of our existence. This expectation must not be disappointed.

The contemporary context seems to give primacy to an artificial intelligence that becomes ever more dominated by experimental techniques, and in this way forgets that all science must always safeguard man and promote his aspiration for the authentic good.

To overrate "doing", obscuring "being", does not help to recompose the fundamental balance that everyone needs in order to give their own existence a solid foundation and valid goal.

Every man, in fact, is called to give meaning to his own actions, above all when this is put in the perspective of a scientific discovery that weakens the very essence of personal life.

To let oneself be taken up by the taste for discovery without safeguarding the criteria that come from a more profound vision would be to fall easily into the drama of which an ancient myth speaks: Young Icarus, exhilarated by the flight towards absolute freedom and heedless of the warning of his old father Daedalus, flew ever nearer to the sun, forgetting that the wings with which he flew in the sky were made of wax. His violent fall and death were the price of his illusion.

The ancient fable has a perennially valid lesson. In life there are other illusions that one cannot trust without risking disastrous consequences for the existence of one's self and others.

The university professor has the duty not only to investigate the truth and to arouse perennial wonder from it, but also to foster its knowledge in every facet and to defend it from reductive and distorted interpretations.

To make the theme of truth central is not merely a speculative act, restricted to a small circle of thinkers; on the contrary, it is a vital question in order to give a more profound identity to personal life and to heighten responsibility in social relations (cf. Eph 4: 25).

In fact, if the question of the truth and the concrete possibility for every person to be able to reach it is neglected, life ends up being reduced to a plethora of hypotheses, deprived of assurances and points of reference.

As the famous humanist, Erasmus, once said: "Opinions are the source of happiness at a cheap price! To understand the true essence of things, even if it treats of things of minimal importance, costs great endeavour" (cf. *The Praise of Folly*, XL, VII).

It is this endeavour that the University must commit itself to accomplish; it passes through study and research in a spirit of patient perseverance. This endeavour, however, enables one to enter progressively into the heart of questions and to open oneself to passion for the truth and to the joy of finding it.

The words of the holy Bishop Anselm of Aosta remain totally current: "That I may seek you desiring you, that I may desire you seeking you, that I may find you loving you, and that loving you I may find you again" (cf. *Proslogion*, 1).

May the space of silence and contemplation, which are the indispensable background upon which to gather the questions the mind raises, find within these walls attentive persons who know how to value the importance, the efficacy and the consequences for personal and social living.

God is the ultimate truth to whom all reason naturally tends, solicited by the desire to totally fulfil the journey assigned to it. God is not an empty word or an abstract hypothesis; on the contrary, he is the foundation upon which to build one's life.

To live in the world "*veluti si Deus daretur*" brings with it the assumption of a responsibility that knows how to be concerned with investigating every feasible route in order to come as near as possible to him who is the goal towards which everything tends (cf. I Cor 15: 24).

The believer knows that this God has a Face and that once for all, with Jesus Christ, he has drawn near to each man.

The Second Vatican Council acutely recalled this: "For, by his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22). To know him is to know the full truth, thanks to which one can find freedom: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8: 32).

Before concluding, I want to express deep appreciation for the construction of the new building complex that completes the university structure well, making it ever more suitable for study, research and the animation of life in the entire community.

You have wished to dedicate this Lecture Hall to my poor person. I thank you for the thought; I hope that it can be a fruitful centre of scientific activity through which the Lateran University can serve as an instrument for fruitful dialogue between the different religious and cultural realities, in the common search for ways that favour the good and the respect of all.

With these sentiments, while I ask the Lord to effuse in this place the abundance of his light, I entrust the itinerary of this Academic Year to the protection of the Most Holy Virgin, and to all I heartily impart the Apostolic Blessing.