



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL
CONGRESS OF MILITARY ORDINARIATES**

Consistory Hall

Thursday, 26 October 2006

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the Fifth International Congress of Military Ordinariates and I address my greeting to each one of you. In particular, I greet Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re and thank him for his cordial words.

Twenty years ago, precisely on 21 April 1986, beloved John Paul II promulgated the Apostolic Constitution *Spirituali Militum Curae* (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], 2 June 1986, pp. 3, 7), which updated the canonical regulation of spiritual assistance to the Armed Forces in the light of the Second Vatican Council, taking into account changes affecting the Armed Forces and their national and international roles. Actually, the world scenario has undergone further transformation in recent decades.

Thus, although the Papal Document continues to be fully relevant because the Church never changes her pastoral approach, it must be constantly adjusted to bring it more into line with present-day needs. This is what you have most appropriately desired to do at this Congress, organized by the Congregation for Bishops.

First of all, it is important to re-read the *Introduction* of the Apostolic Constitution: it spells out the reasons for the Magisterial Intervention and expresses the pastoral spirit that enlivens, inspires and guides all its legal provisions.

The Document highlights two fundamental values: the value of the person and the value of peace. The entire structural revision, which likens the Ordinariates to Dioceses, the Ordinary to the Bishop and the Chaplain to the Parish Priest, obeys the criterion of service to the military personnel who "have need of a concrete and specific form of pastoral care" (cf. *Introduction*, *ibid.*).

At the same time, however, it is affirmed that the people for whom the Ordinariate is intended do not cease to be the faithful of the particular Church where they live or to whose rite they belong (cf. IV). This entails a need for communion and coordination between the Military Ordinariate and the other particular Churches (cf. II, 4).

All these matters emphasize the prime aim of the care of the *Christifideles*: to enable them to live their baptismal vocation and their membership in the Church to the full.

Thus, we have the same outlook as that adopted by the Servant of God John Paul II on the occasion of the Third Congress of Military Ordinaries in 1994 (cf. *Address to Participants in the Third International Congress of Military Ordinariates*, 11 March 1994; *ORE*, 23 March, p. 6).

Putting people first means giving priority to the soldier's Christian formation, guiding him and his relatives in the process of Christian initiation, in the development of his vocation and of his faith, and in witnessing.

At the same time, it means encouraging forms of brotherhood and community life, as well as liturgical and non-liturgical forms of prayer that are appropriate in the context and living conditions of military personnel.

The second aspect I would like to emphasize is the fundamental importance of the value of peace. In this regard, the *Introduction of Spirituali Militum Curae* expressly cites *Gaudium et Spes*, recalling that those doing military service must be considered as "ministers of the security and freedom of peoples", because, "if they carry out their duties properly, they also truly contribute to stabilizing peace" (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 79).

If, therefore, the Council calls members of the armed forces "custodians of security", how much more so would be the Pastors to whom they are entrusted!

I therefore urge you all to ensure that military Chaplains are authentic experts and teachers of what the Church teaches and practises, with a view to building peace in the world.

Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution is an important milestone in this teaching and its contribution in this context can be summed up in the words you have rightly chosen as the theme of this Congress: "*Ministerium pacis inter arma* - Soldiers at the service of peace".

My Predecessor considered this *ministerium pacis inter arma* "a new proclamation of the Gospel in the military world, of which the Christian soldiers and their communities cannot fail to be the first heralds" (*Address, Third International Congress of Military Ordinariates*, 11 March 1994; *ORE*, 23 March, n. 5, p. 6).

The Church is missionary by nature and her principal task is evangelization, which aims to proclaim and to witness to Christ and to promote his Gospel of peace and love in every environment and culture.

The Church is also called in the military world to be "salt", "light" and "leaven", to use the images to which Jesus himself refers, so that mindsets and structures may be ever more fully oriented to building peace, in other words, to that "order planned and willed by the love of God" (*Message for World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2006, n. 3; *ORE*, 21 December 2005, p. 6), in which people and peoples can develop to the full and see their own fundamental rights recognized (cf. *ibid.*, n. 4).

The Church's teaching on the subject of peace is an essential aspect of her social doctrine. Grafted onto very ancient roots, it continued to develop in the past century in a sort of "crescendo" which culminated in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, in the Encyclicals of Bl. John XXIII and of the Servants of God Paul VI and John Paul II, as well as in their Addresses to the United Nations Organization and their Messages for each World Day of Peace.

This insistent appeal for peace has influenced Western culture, fostering the ideal that the Armed Forces are "an exclusive service for the security and freedom of peoples" (John Paul II, *Address, Third International Convention of Military Ordinariates*; *ORE*, 23 March 1994, n. 5, p. 6).

Unfortunately, other - economic and political - interests fomented by international tensions sometimes cause this constructive tendency to meet with obstacles and delays, as also transpires from the difficulties that hinder disarmament processes.

From within the military world, the Church will continue to offer her specific service to the formation of consciences, certain that God's Word, liberally scattered and courageously guided by the service of charity and truth, will bear fruit in its own good time.

Dear and venerable Brothers, to offer people adequate pastoral care and to carry out the evangelizing mission, Military Ordinariates need priests and deacons who are motivated and trained, as well as lay people who can collaborate actively and responsibly with Pastors.

I therefore join you in praying to the Lord of the Harvest that he will send workers out to this harvest in which you are already working with admirable zeal.

May the shining examples of numerous Military Chaplains who served God and their brethren with

heroic dedication, such as Blessed Fr Secondo Pollo, encourage young people to dedicate their entire life to serving the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of love, justice and peace.

May the Virgin Mary always watch over your ministry and may you be accompanied by my Blessing, which I warmly impart to all of you and to your respective Ecclesial Communities.

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