



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SECRETARIAT OF STATE

Castel Gandolfo

Friday, 15 September 2006

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Collaborators,*

I cannot conclude this meeting without adding once again the words that well up from my heart at this moment. It is, in a certain sense, a moment of sadness; but above all it is a moment of profound gratitude.

Your Eminence, you have worked as Secretary of State with so many Popes - and lastly with me - with the dedication, competence and willingness to serve of which I have already spoken.

In associating myself with your words, I would like to extend my thanks to all the collaborators and to the Papal Representations throughout the world. I have more and more understood that it is only this great network of collaboration which enables me to respond to the Lord's mandate: "*Confirma fratres tuos in fide*".

Only by virtue of the confluence of all these skills, only by virtue of the humility of the demanding and highly expert commitment of so many people can this "strengthening of the brethren" in which the Pope obeys the Lord at last take place. He can carry out his mission satisfactorily thanks to your extensive collaboration.

Only in recent years, while I was Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, did I come to understand better what great competence exists here, what dedication, what humility and what willingness to truly serve the Lord in his Church! This curial labour is in fact pastoral work in

an eminent sense, for it truly helps guide the People of God to green pastures, as the Psalm says, where the Word of God is present and nourishes us throughout our lives.

Your Eminence, in these past weeks I have been wondering what sign of gratitude I would be able to give you at this moment. I had the joy of being accompanied by you on my Journey to Bavaria. We visited important Episcopal Sees: Munich, Regensburg and the ancient See of Freising - and we visited our national Shrine, so to speak, at Altötting, which for centuries has been called the "heart" of Bavaria. It is the true "heart" of this Land because there, in finding the Mother, we find the Lord. There, in all the vicissitudes of history, in all the problems also of the present, we once again discover, with the Mother's protection, the joy of the faith. There, our people are renewed.

Your Eminence, you were present when the Bishop of Passau presented to me a perennial keepsake of a copy of the 15th century figure of Our Lady, which still continues to attract pilgrims who desire to experience the love of our common Mother. I was able to obtain a faithful copy - less precious copies exist - of Our Lady of Altötting. And I think that this image of Our Lady of Altötting could not only be the sign of my eternal gratitude but also of our prayerful communication.

May Our Lady always be beside you and protect and guide you always! This is the expression of my sincere gratitude.

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