



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE NEWLY ORDAINED BISHOPS

*Hall of the Swiss, Castel Gandolfo
Thursday, 21 September 2006*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
My cordial greetings to each one of you.*

I first address my greeting to Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re who has interpreted your sentiments, and I extend it with affection to all those who have organized and coordinated your meeting.

In these days, you have heard the experience of several Heads of the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and some Bishops who have helped you reflect on certain aspects of the episcopal ministry, of great importance for our times. Today, it is the Pope who welcomes you with joy and is happy to share with you the sentiments and expectations that you are living in these first months of your episcopal ministry.

You will certainly already have had the experience of how Jesus, the Good Shepherd, acts in souls with his grace. "*My grace is sufficient for you*" (II Cor 12: 9), the Apostle Paul heard the Lord answer when he asked the Lord to spare him suffering. May this very awareness always nourish your faith and stimulate within you the search for ways to reach the hearts of all with the healthy optimism that you must always spread around you.

In the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, I noted that Bishops are primarily responsible for building up the Church as a family of God and a place of mutual help and availability (cf. n. 32).

To be able to carry out this mission, you received with episcopal consecration three special offices: the *munus docendi*, the *munus sanctificandi* and the *munus regendi*, which all together constitute the *munus pascendi*.

In particular, the aim of the *munus regendi* is growth in ecclesial communion, that is, in building a community in agreement and listening to the Apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread, prayer and fellowship (cf. Acts 2: 42).

Closely linked to the offices of teaching and of sanctifying, that of governing - the *munus regendi* precisely - constitutes for the Bishop an authentic act of love for God and for one's neighbour, which is expressed in pastoral charity.

The Second Vatican Council pointed this out authoritatively in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, proposing to the Bishops as their model Christ, the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve (cf. n. 27).

On this path, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* invites the Bishop to be constantly inspired by the Gospel image of the washing of the feet (cf. n. 42). Christ alone, who is the incarnate love of God (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 12), can point out to us authoritatively how to love and serve the Church.

Dear Brothers, after Christ's example, may each one of you make yourselves, in the daily care of your flock, "all things to all men" (cf. I Cor 9: 22), proposing the truth of the faith, celebrating the sacraments of our sanctification and witnessing to the charity of the Lord.

Accept with open hearts those who knock at your door: advise them, comfort them and sustain them on the way to God, seeking to lead them all to that unity in faith and love of which, by the Lord's will and in your respective Dioceses, you must be the visible principle and foundation (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 23).

May this be your first concern with regard to the priests. Always act towards them as fathers and elder brothers who know how to listen, accept, comfort and when necessary, also to correct; endeavour to collaborate with them and be close to them, especially at important moments of their ministry and their lives.

Then, seek to treat the young men who are preparing for the priestly and Religious life with equal concern.

By virtue of the office of governing (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 27), the Bishop is also called to judge and discipline the life of the People of God entrusted to his pastoral care with laws, instructions and suggestions, according to what is prescribed by the universal discipline of the Church.

This right and duty of the Bishop is especially important if the diocesan Community is to be internally united and to proceed in a profound communion of faith, love and discipline with the Bishop of Rome and with the entire Church.

I therefore urge you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, to be attentive guardians of this ecclesial communion and to promote and defend it, watching constantly over the flock of which you have been appointed Pastors.

This is an act of love that requires discernment, apostolic courage and patient kindness in seeking to convince and involve, so that your instructions will be well received and executed with conviction and promptness. With docile obedience to the Bishop, every member of the faithful contributes responsibly to the building up of the Church.

This will be possible if, conscious of your mission and your responsibility, you can nourish in each one of them the sense of belonging to the Church and the joy of fraternal communion involving the appropriate organisms foreseen by the ecclesial discipline. May building ecclesial communion be your daily commitment.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* and the *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* are insistent on indicating to each Pastor that his objective authority must be sustained by the authoritativeness of his life.

Serenity in relationships, sensitive treatment and simplicity of life are gifts that certainly enrich the human personality of the Bishop.

In his Book of *Pastoral Rule*, St Gregory the Great wrote that "the government of souls is the art of arts" (Part I, Chapter I).

It is an art that requires the constant growth of the virtues, among which I would like to recall prudence, which St Bernard described as "the mother of strength". Prudence will make you patient with yourselves and with others, courageous and firm in your decisions, merciful and just, concerned solely with your salvation and the salvation of your brethren "with fear and trembling" (cf. Phil 2: 12).

The total gift of yourselves, which the care of the Lord's flock requires, needs the support of an intense spiritual life, nourished by persevering personal and community prayer. Constant contact with God should therefore mark your days and accompany your every activity.

Living in intimate union with Christ will help you to achieve that necessary balance between inner recollection and the necessary effort required by the many occupations of life, avoiding exaggerated activism.

On the day of your episcopal consecration you promised to pray tirelessly for your people. Dear Brothers, always stay faithful to this commitment, which will enable you to exercise your pastoral ministry irreproachably.

Through prayer, the doors of your hearts are opened to God's plan, which is a plan of love to which he has called you by uniting you very closely with Christ through the grace of the episcopate. Following him, Shepherd and Guardian of your souls (cf. I Pt 2: 25), you will be impelled to strive for holiness without tiring, which is the fundamental goal of every Christian's life.

Dear Brothers, as I thank you for your welcome visit, I would like to assure you of my daily remembrance to the Lord for your ecclesial service, which I entrust to Our Lady *Mater Ecclesiae*. I invoke her protection upon you, upon your Dioceses and upon your ministry.

With these sentiments, I impart to you and to all your loved ones a special Apostolic Blessing.

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