



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY***

*Hall of the Swiss, Castel Gandolfo
Friday, 22 September 2006*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters*

Today, I have the joy of meeting you for the first time, dear members and consultors of the Pontifical Council for the Laity who have gathered for your Plenary Assembly. A special feature of your Pontifical Council is the inclusion among its members and consultors, next to the Cardinals, Bishops, priests and Religious, of a majority of lay faithful from different continents and countries, and with the most varied apostolic backgrounds behind them.

I greet you all with affection and thank you for your service to the See of Peter and to the Church, scattered in every part of the world. I offer a special greeting to Archbishop Stanisław Rylko, President, whom I thank for his kind and respectful words, to Bishop Josef Clemens, Secretary, and to all those who work every day in your Dicastery.

Formerly, during the years of my service in the Roman Curia, I had the opportunity to appreciate the increasing importance of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in the Church; an importance that I have become even more aware of since the Lord called me to succeed the Servant of God John Paul II in guiding the entire Christian people, because I have been granted a more direct view of the work you carry out.

Indeed, I have had the opportunity of presiding at two indisputably important meetings promoted by your Dicastery: the World Youth Day, held in Cologne in August last year, and the Meeting in

St Peter's Square on the eve of Pentecost this year, attended by more than 100 Ecclesial Movements and New Communities.

I then think of the First Latin-American Congress of Ecclesial Movements, which your Pontifical Council organized in Bogotá in collaboration with CELAM from 9 to 12 March 2006, with a view to the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate.

After examining the theological and pastoral nature of the parish community at the previous Plenary Assembly, you are now dealing with the question from an active point of view, seeking useful elements to encourage an authentic parish renewal.

In fact, the theme of your meeting is *"The parish rediscovered: Paths of renewal"*. Actually, it is impossible to separate the theological, pastoral and active dimensions if one wishes to have access to the mystery of communion, of which the parish is called always to be a sign and an instrument of implementation.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the Evangelist Luke points out essential criteria for a correct understanding of the nature of the Christian community and hence, also of every parish, where he describes the first community of Jerusalem whose members were devoted to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the "breaking of bread and the prayers": a welcoming, supportive community ready to share everything (cf. 2: 42; 4: 32-35).

Parishes can relive this experience and grow in understanding and in fraternal attachment if they pray ceaselessly and continue to listen to the Word of God, and especially if they participate with faith in the celebration of the Eucharist at which the priest presides.

Beloved John Paul II wrote on this in his last Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*: "Parishes are communities of the baptized who express and affirm their identity above all through the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice" (n. 32).

Thus, the hoped-for renewal of parishes cannot only result from pastoral initiatives, albeit useful and timely, nor even less from programmes worked out theoretically. Inspired by the apostolic model as shown in the Acts of the Apostles, parishes "rediscover" themselves in the encounter with Christ, especially in the Eucharist. Nourished by the Eucharistic bread, they grow in Catholic communion, developing in full fidelity to the Magisterium and ever attentive to accepting and discerning the different charisms that the Lord brings forth in the People of God.

Parishes find strength in constant union with Christ in order to dedicate themselves without interruption to the service of the brethren, especially the poor, for whom they in fact represent the first reference point.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, while I express my deep appreciation to you for the activity of animation and service that you carry out, I cordially hope that the Plenary Assembly will help to make the lay faithful ever more aware of their mission in the Church, especially within the parish community, which is a "family" of Christian families.

I assure you of my constant remembrance of this in prayer, and as I invoke upon each one Mary's motherly protection, I willingly impart my Blessing to all of you, to your relatives and to the communities to which you belong.

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