



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS TAKING PART
IN THE FORMATION UPDATE MEETING
ORGANIZED BY THE CONGREGATION
FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES***

*Hall of the Swiss, Castel Gandolfo
Saturday, 23 September 2006*

*Your Eminence,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

I am pleased to be able to meet you on the occasion of the Update Seminar organized by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and I address my most cordial welcome to each one of you.

I greet first of all Cardinal Ivan Dias, Prefect of the Missionary Dicastery for only a few months, and I thank him for his kind words on behalf of you all.

I next greet and thank those who have collaborated for the success of this formation course. I extend my affectionate thoughts to your young and enthusiastic diocesan Communities in which evangelization is showing promising signs of development, despite the sometimes difficult and demanding context. These days of brotherly coexistence will certainly be useful to you for the pastoral mission at their service that the Lord has recently entrusted to you.

You are called to be Pastors among peoples, many of whom do not yet know Jesus Christ. As those primarily responsible for Gospel proclamation, you must therefore make a considerable effort to ensure that all are given the possibility of accepting him.

More and more, you are feeling the need to inculturate the Gospel, to evangelize cultures and to

foster a sincere and open dialogue with one and all in order to build together a more brotherly and supportive humanity.

Only if you are impelled by the love of Christ can you bring to completion this apostolic task which demands the fearless zeal of men undaunted even by persecution and death for the Lord.

How can we forget the many priests, men and women religious and lay people in mission lands who have sealed with blood their fidelity to Christ and to the Church, in past centuries and in our times?

In the last few days, the oblation of Sr Leonella Sgorbati, a Consolata Missionary barbarically killed in Moga-dishu, Somalia, has been added to the number of these heroic Gospel witnesses. This martyrology, in the past and in our day, adorns the history of the Church. Even in suffering and apprehension, it keeps alive in our souls trust in the glorious flourishing of Christian faith, for as Tertullian says, "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians".

To you, Pastors of God's flock, is entrusted the mandate of safeguarding and transmitting faith in Christ, passed on to us through the living tradition of the Church and for which so many have given their lives. To carry out this task, it is essential that first of all you show you are "in all respects a model of good deeds, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity and sound speech that cannot be censured" (Ti 2: 7-8).

"Modern man", wrote my Predecessor of venerable memory, the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, "listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 41).

For this reason, it is only right that you give priority in your episcopal ministry to prayer and to the constant aspiration to holiness. It is important for you to ensure that your seminarians receive a sound formation and that your priests and catechists are given ongoing formation.

The preservation of the unity of faith in the diversity of its cultural expressions is another precious service that is asked of you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate. This requires that you be united with the flock after the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and that the flock always walk united with you.

As sentries of the People of God, firmly and courageously avoid divisions, especially when they are due to ethnic or social and cultural causes. Indeed, divisions undermine the unity of the faith and weaken the proclamation and witness of the Gospel of Christ, who came into the world to make the whole of humanity a holy people and one family in which God is the Father of all.

It is a cause of joy and consolation to note that in many of your Churches there is a constant

flourishing of vocations to the priesthood and to the Religious life, a marvellous gift of God to be accepted and furthered with gratitude and enthusiasm. May it be your concern to equip seminaries with a sufficient number of carefully chosen and trained formation teachers who are first and foremost examples and models for the seminarians.

As you well know, the seminary is the heart of the Diocese, and this is why the Bishop should take a personal interest in it. The future of your communities and that of the universal Church depends on the training of future priests and of all the other pastoral workers, especially catechists.

Venerable and dear Brothers, in a few days' time you will be returning to your own Dioceses enriched by this formative stay in Rome.

I will continue to feel united with you in spirit and I ask you to convey the assurance of my affection and closeness in prayer to your Communities, upon which I invoke the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy, Star of Evangelization, and the intercession of St Pius of Pietrelcina, whose liturgical memorial we are celebrating today.

With these sentiments, I impart my Blessing to you all, and gladly extend it to those who are entrusted to your care as Pastors, particularly the children, young people, the elderly, the sick, the poor and the suffering.

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