



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO MEMBERS OF THE VATICAN CHAPTER

Clementine Hall

Monday, 8 October 2007

Dear Members of the Vatican Chapter,

I have been looking forward to meeting you for a long time and I gladly take this opportunity to express to you my personal esteem and affection. I address a cordial greeting to each one of you. I greet in particular Archbishop Angelo Comastri, Archpriest, whom I thank for his presentation of this ancient and venerable institution. With him, I greet the Vicar, Bishop Vittorio Lanzani, the Canons and the Coadjutors. I appreciated, Your Excellency, the fact that as Archpriest you referred to the uninterrupted presence of clergy praying in the Vatican Basilica since the time of St Gregory the Great. It has been a continuous, deliberately discreet but faithful and persevering presence.

Properly speaking, however, your Chapter was founded in 1053, when Pope Leo IX confirmed that the Archpriest and Canons of St Peter's who had settled in the Monastery of St Stephen the Great would be granted the same possessions and privileges that his Predecessors had conferred upon them. It was later, during the Pontificate of Eugene III (1145-53), that the General Chapter acquired the characteristics of a well-structured and autonomous community. Indeed, the transition from a monastic structure at the service of the Basilica to today's canonical structure was essentially long and gradual. Under the Archpriest's guidance, the activity of the Vatican Chapter focused from the outset on a wide range of commitments: the liturgical sphere, for a harmonious celebration and the daily supervision of the services connected to worship; the administrative context, for the management of the patrimony of the Basilica and its affiliated churches; the pastoral sector, in which the Chapter was entrusted with the care of the Borgo district; the charitable sector, in which the Chapter carried out its own activities of assistance and collaboration with the Santo Spirito Hospital and other institutions. From the 11th century to this day, at least 11

Popes have belonged to the Vatican Chapter. I would like to recall among them the 20th century Popes in particular, Pius XI and Pius XII. Ever since the 16th century, when the construction of the new Basilica began - we celebrated the fifth centenary of the laying of the foundation stone last year - the history of the Vatican Chapter has been linked to that of the Fabric of St Peter's. They are two separate institutions but are united in the person of the Archpriest, who ensures that their reciprocal collaboration is fruitful.

The Chapter's work in the life of the Vatican Basilica, especially in the last decades of the past century, has sought more and more to rediscover its true, original function that consisted above all in the ministry of prayer. If prayer is fundamental for all Christians, for you, dear brothers, it is as it were a "professional" task. As I said during [my recent Journey in Austria](#), prayer is at the same time both a service to the Lord who deserves to be ceaselessly praised and adored and a testimony for people. Moreover, when God is faithfully praised and worshipped, his blessings are unending (cf. [Address at Holy Cross Abbey](#), 9 September 2007; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 12 September, p. 10). This is the proper nature of the Vatican Chapter and the contribution that the Pope expects of you: to recall with your prayerful presence at Peter's tomb that nothing can come before God; that the Church is entirely oriented to him and to his glory; that the primacy of Peter is at the service of the unity of the Church, and that this in turn is at the service of the saving plan of the Most Holy Trinity.

Dear and venerable Brothers, I trust profoundly in you and in your ministry so that St Peter's Basilica may become an authentic place of prayer, adoration and praise of the Lord. It is more necessary than elsewhere that a permanent community of prayer should exist here, by Peter's tomb, in this sacred place visited every day by thousands of pilgrims and tourists from all over the world, which can guarantee continuity with tradition and at the same time intercede for the Pope's intentions in the Church and in the world today. In this perspective, I invoke upon you the protection of St Peter, of St John Chrysostom, whose relics are preserved precisely in your Chapel, and of the other Saints and Blesseds enshrined in the Basilica. May the Immaculate Virgin watch over you. Her image, which you venerate in the Chapel of the Choir, was crowned by Bl. Pius IX in 1854 and, 50 years later in 1904, St Pius X surrounded it with stars. Once again, I thank you for the zeal with which you carry out your task, and as I assure you of my special remembrance in Holy Mass, I warmly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to your loved ones.

