



The Holy See

MEETING OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI WITH THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF BOLZANO-BRESSANONE

Cathedral of Bressanone

Wednesday, 6 August 2008

Translation from Italian of Bishop Wilhelm Egger's welcome:

Holy Father, we thank you for guiding us and for helping us to see our joys and problems with the eyes of faith. Today, on the 30th anniversary of his death, let us remember Paul VI. During his Pontificate our diocesan Council was given a new arrangement, an event that has borne many fruits.

Pope Benedict XVI:

Your Excellency, dear brothers, thank you for this family meeting in the beautiful cathedral of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone. It is a great joy for me to be with its priests; in the end, the Bishop of Rome is the Bishop and brother of all priests. His mandate is to strengthen his brethren in the faith. Today, at this lovely celebration, we also perceive here in the cathedral and with this beautiful music something of the splendour of the Face of Christ, and pray the Lord that he will help us even on dark days to take this light of his to others, to illuminate the world and life in this world.

Unfortunately I am unable to speak Ladin, but you will forgive me; on Sunday I shall have a text in order to be able to speak your language of Ladin too.

Michael Horrer, Seminarian: *Holy Father, my name is Michael Horrer and I am a seminarian. On the occasion of the XXIII World Youth Day of Sydney, in Australia, in which I took part with other young people of our Diocese, you constantly reaffirmed to the 400,000 youth present the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in us young people and in the Church. The theme of the Day was: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my*

witnesses" (Acts 1: 8). We young people have now returned - strengthened by the Holy Spirit and by his words - to our homes, our dioceses and our daily lives. Holy Father, how can we live the gifts of the Holy Spirit in practice, here in our country and in our daily lives, in such a way that our relatives, friends and acquaintances feel and experience his power, and how can we exercise our mission as Christ's witnesses? What can you advise us in order to ensure that our diocese stays young, despite the aging of the clergy, so that it also stays open to the Spirit of God who guides the Church?

Pope Benedict XVI:

Thank you for your question. I am glad to see a seminarian, a candidate for the priesthood of this diocese, in whose face, in a certain sense, I can rediscover the young face of the diocese. And I am glad to hear that, together with others, you were in Sydney where at a great celebration of faith we experienced together precisely that the Church is young. For Australians too, it was an important experience. At first they looked at this World Youth Day with great scepticism because it would obviously cause a lot of bother and many inconveniences to daily life, such as traffic jams, etc. However, in the end - as we also saw in the media whose prejudices crumbled, bit by bit - everyone felt involved in this atmosphere of joy and faith; they saw that young people come and do not create problems of security or of any other kind but can be together joyfully. They saw that faith today is a force that is present, a force that can give people the right orientation. This is why there was a moment in which we truly felt the breath of the Holy Spirit who sweeps away prejudices, who makes people understand that yes, here we find what closely affects us, this is the direction in which we must go; and in this way we can live, in this way the future unfolds.

You rightly said this was a strong moment of which we would take home with us a little spark. In daily life however, it is far more difficult in practice to perceive the action of the Holy Spirit, or even to be personally a means to enable him to be present, to ensure the presence of that breath which sweeps away the prejudices of time, which creates light in the darkness and makes us feel not only that faith has a future but that it is the future. How can we do this? We cannot of course do it on our own. In the end, it is the Lord who helps us but we must be available as instruments. I would say simply: no one can give what he does not personally possess; in other words we cannot pass on the Holy Spirit effectively or make him perceptible to others unless we ourselves are close to him. This is why I think that the most important thing is that we ourselves remain, so to speak, within the radius of the Holy Spirit's breath, in contact with him. Only if we are continually touched within by the Holy Spirit, if he dwells in us, will it be possible for us to pass him on to others. Then he gives us the imagination and creative ideas about how to act, ideas that cannot be planned but are born from the situation itself, because it is there that the Holy Spirit is at work. Thus, the first point: we ourselves must remain within the radius of the Holy Spirit's breath.

John's Gospel tell us that after the Resurrection the Lord went to his disciples, breathed upon them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit". This is a parallel to Genesis, where God breathes on the

mixture he made with the dust from the earth and it comes to life and becomes man. Then man, who is inwardly darkened and half dead, receives Christ's breath anew and it is this breath of God that gives his life a new dimension, that gives him life with the Holy Spirit. We can say, therefore, that the Holy Spirit is the breath of Jesus Christ and we, in a certain sense, must ask Christ to breathe on us always, so that his breath will become alive and strong and work upon the world. This means that we must keep close to Christ. We do so by meditating on his Word. We know that the principal author of the Sacred Scriptures is the Holy Spirit. When through his Word we speak with God, when we do not only seek the past in it but truly the Lord who is present and speaks to us, then, - as I said in Australia - it is as if we were to find ourselves strolling in the garden of the Holy Spirit; we talk to him and he talks to us. Here, learning to be at home in this environment, in the environment of the Word of God, is a very important thing which, in a certain sense, introduces us into the breath of God. And then, naturally, this listening, walking in the environment of the Word must be transformed into a response, a response in prayer, in contact with Christ. And of course, first of all in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist in which he comes to us and enters us and is, as it were, amalgamated with us. Then, however, also in the Sacrament of Penance which always purifies us, which washes away the grime that daily life deposits in us.

In short, it is a life with Christ in the Holy Spirit, in the Word of God and in the communion of the Church, in her community. St Augustine said: "If you desire the Spirit of God, you must be in the Body of Christ". Christ's Spirit moves within the Mystical Body of Christ.

All this must determine the shape that our day takes in such a way that it becomes structured, a day in which God has access to us all the time, in which we are in continuous contact with Christ and in which, for this very reason, we are continuously receiving the breath of the Holy Spirit. If we do this, if we are not too lazy, undisciplined or sluggish, then something happens to us: the day acquires a form and in it our life itself acquires a form and this light will shine from us without us having to give it much thought or having to adopt a "propagandist" - so to speak - way of acting: it comes automatically because it mirrors our soul.

To this I would then add a second dimension that is logically linked with the first: if we live with Christ we will also succeed in human things. Indeed, faith does not only involve a supernatural aspect, it rebuilds man, bringing him back to his humanity, as that parallel between Genesis and John 20 shows: it is based precisely on the natural virtues: honesty, joy, the willingness to listen to one's neighbour, the ability to forgive, generosity, goodness and cordiality among people. These human virtues show that faith is truly present, that we are truly with Christ and I believe that we should pay great attention to this, also regarding ourselves: to develop an authentic humanity in ourselves because faith involves the complete fulfilment of the human being, of humanity. We should pay attention to carrying out human tasks well and correctly, also in our profession, in respect for our neighbour, in being concerned about our neighbour, which is the best way to be concerned about ourselves: in fact, "existing" for our neighbour is the best way of "existing" for ourselves. And the latter subsequently gives rise to those initiatives that cannot be programmed:

communities of prayer, communities that read the Bible together or that even provide effective help for people in need, who require it, who are on the margins of life, for the sick, for the disabled and many other things. This is when our eyes are opened to see our personal skills, to assume the corresponding initiatives and to be able to imbue others with the courage to do the same. And precisely these human things can strengthen us, in a certain way putting us in touch anew with God's Spirit.

The head of the Order of the Knights of Malta in Rome told me that at Christmas he went to the station with several young people to take a bit of Christmas to the homeless. While he himself was turning back, he heard one young man telling another: "This is more powerful than the discothèque. It is really beautiful here because I can do something for others!". These are the initiatives that the Holy Spirit inspires in us. With few words they enable us to feel the Spirit's power and we are made attentive to Christ.

Well, perhaps I have not said very practical things just now, but I believe the most important thing is, first of all, that our life should be oriented to the Holy Spirit, because we live in the milieu of the Spirit, in the body of Christ, and from this we experience humanization, we nurture the simple human virtues and thus learn to be good in the broadest sense of the word. Thus, one acquires a sensitivity for good initiatives which later, of course, develop a missionary force and in a certain sense prepare the ground for the moment when it becomes reasonable and comprehensible to speak of Christ and of our faith.

Fr Willibald Hopfgartner, O.F.M.: *Holy Father, my name is Willibald Hopfgartner, I am a Franciscan and I work in a school and in various areas of guidance of my Order. In your Discourse at Regensburg you stressed the substantial link between the divine Spirit and human reason. On the other hand, you also always underlined the importance of art and beauty, of aesthetics. Consequently, should not the aesthetic experience of faith in the context of the Church, for proclamation and for the Liturgy be ceaselessly reaffirmed alongside the conceptual dialogue about God (in theology)?*

Pope Benedict XVI:

Thank you. Yes, I think these two things go hand in hand: reason, precision, honesty in the reflection on the truth - and beauty. Reason that intended to strip itself of beauty would be halved, it would be a blinded reason. It is only when they are united that both these things form the whole, and precisely for faith this union is important. Faith must continuously face the challenges of thought in this epoch, so that it does not seem a sort of irrational legend that we keep alive but which really is a response to the great questions, and not merely a habit but the truth - as Tertullian once said. In his First Letter, St Peter wrote the phrase that medieval theologians took as a legitimation, as it were, a responsibility for their theological task: "Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" - an apologetic for

the *logos* of hope, that is, a transformation of the *logos*, the reason for hope in apologetics, in response to men. He was obviously convinced of the fact that the faith was the *logos*, that it was a reason, a light that came from creative Reason rather than a wonderful concoction, a fruit of our thought. And this is why it is universal and for this reason can be communicated to all.

Yet, precisely this creative *logos* is not only a technical *logos* - we shall return to this aspect with another answer - it is broad, it is a *logos* that is love, hence such as to be expressed in beauty and in good. Also, I did once say that to me art and the Saints are the greatest apologetic for our faith. The arguments contributed by reason are unquestionably important and indispensable, but then there is always dissent somewhere. On the other hand, if we look at the Saints, this great luminous trail on which God passed through history, we see that there truly is a force of good which resists the millennia; there truly is the light of light. Likewise, if we contemplate the beauties created by faith, they are simply, I would say, the living proof of faith. If I look at this beautiful cathedral - it is a living proclamation! It speaks to us itself, and on the basis of the cathedral's beauty, we succeed in visibly proclaiming God, Christ and all his mysteries: here they have acquired a form and look at us. All the great works of art, cathedrals - the Gothic cathedrals and the splendid Baroque churches - they are all a luminous sign of God and therefore truly a manifestation, an epiphany of God. And in Christianity it is precisely a matter of this epiphany: that God became a veiled Epiphany - he appears and is resplendent. We have just heard the organ in its full splendour. I think the great music born in the Church makes the truth of our faith audible and perceivable: from Gregorian chant to the music of the cathedrals, to Palestrina and his epoch, to Bach and hence to Mozart and Bruckner and so forth. In listening to all these works - the Passions of Bach, his Mass in B flat, and the great spiritual compositions of 16th-century polyphony, of the Viennese School, of all music, even that of minor composers - we suddenly understand: it is true! Wherever such things are born, the Truth is there. Without an intuition that discovers the true creative centre of the world such beauty cannot be born. For this reason I think we should always ensure that the two things are together; we should bring them together. When, in our epoch, we discuss the reasonableness of faith, we discuss precisely the fact that reason does not end where experimental discoveries end - it does not finish in positivism; the theory of evolution sees the truth but sees only half the truth: it does not see that behind it is the Spirit of the Creation. We are fighting to expand reason, and hence for a reason which, precisely, is also open to the beautiful and does not have to set it aside as something quite different and unreasonable. Christian art is a rational art - let us think of Gothic art or of the great music or even, precisely, of our own Baroque art - but it is the artistic expression of a greatly expanded reason, in which heart and reason encounter each other. This is the point. I believe that in a certain way this is proof of the truth of Christianity: heart and reason encounter one another, beauty and truth converge, and the more that we ourselves succeed in living in the beauty of truth, the more that faith will be able to return to being creative in our time too, and to express itself in a convincing form of art.

So, dear Fr Hopfgartner, thank you for your question; let us seek to ensure that the two categories, the aesthetic and the noetic (intellectual), are united and that in this great breadth the entirety and

depth of our faith may be made manifest.

Fr Willi Fusaro: *Holy Father, I am Fr Willi Fusaro, I am 42 years old and I have been ill since the year of my priestly ordination. I was ordained in June 1991; then in September of the same year I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. I am a parish cooperator at Corpus Domini Parish, Bolzano. I was deeply impressed by John Paul II, especially in the last part of his Pontificate, when he bore his human weakness with courage and humility before the whole world. Given your closeness to your beloved Predecessor and on the basis of your personal experience, what can you say to me and to all of us to truly help elderly or sick priests to live their priesthood well and fruitfully in the presbyterate and in the Christian community? Thank you!*

Pope Benedict XVI:

Thank you, Reverend Father. I would say that, for me, both parts of the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II's Pontificate were equally important. In the first part in which we saw him as a giant of faith: with incredible courage, extraordinary force, a true joy of faith and great lucidity, he took the Gospel message to the ends of the earth. He spoke to everyone, he explored new paths with the Movements, interreligious dialogue, ecumenical meetings, deepening the manner in which we listen to the divine Word, with everything... with his love for the Sacred Liturgy. He truly brought down - we can say - not the walls of Jericho but the walls between two worlds with the power of his own faith. His testimony lives on, unforgettable, and continues to be a light for this millennium.

However, I must say that because of the humble testimony of his "passion", to my mind these last years of his Pontificate were no less important; just as he carried the Lord's Cross before us and put into practice the words of the Lord: "Follow me, carry the Cross with me and walk in my footsteps!". With such humility, such patience with which he accepted what was practically the destruction of his body and the growing inability to speak, he who had been a master of words thus showed us visibly - it seems to me - the profound truth that the Lord redeemed us with his Cross, with the Passion, as an extreme act of his love. He showed us that suffering is not only a "no", something negative, the lack of something, but a positive reality. He showed us that suffering accepted for love of Christ, for love of God and of others is a redeeming force, a force of love and no less powerful than the great deeds he accomplished in the first part of his Pontificate. He taught us a new love for those who suffer and made us understand the meaning of "in the Cross and through the Cross we are saved". We also have these two aspects in the life of the Lord. In the first part he teaches the joy of the Kingdom of God, brings his gifts to men and then, in the second part, he is immersed in the Passion until his last cry from the Cross. In this very way he taught us who God is, that God is love and that, in identifying with our suffering as human beings, he takes us in his arms and immerses us in his love and this love alone bathes us in redemption, purification and rebirth.

Therefore, I think that we all - and increasingly so in a world that thrives on activism, on youth, on

being young, strong and beautiful, on succeeding in doing great things - must learn the truth of love which becomes a "passion" and thereby redeems man and unites him with God who is love. So I would like to thank all who accept suffering, who suffer with the Lord, and to encourage all of us to have an open heart for the suffering and for the elderly; to understand that their "passion" is itself a source of renewal for humanity, creating love in us and uniting us to the Lord. Yet, in the end, it is always difficult to suffer. I remember Cardinal Mayer's sister. She was seriously ill and when she became impatient he said to her : "You see, now you are with the Lord". And she answered him: "It is easy for you to say so because you are healthy, but I am suffering my 'passion'. It is true, in a true "passion" it becomes ever more difficult to be truly united with the Lord and to maintain this disposition of union with the suffering Lord. Let us therefore pray for all who are suffering and do our utmost to help them, to show our gratitude for their suffering and be present to them as much as we can, to the very end. This is a fundamental message of Christianity that stems from the theology of the Cross: the fact that suffering and passion are present in Christ's love is the challenge for us to unite ourselves with his Passion. We must love those who suffer not only with words but with all our actions and our commitment. I think that only in this way are we truly Christian. I wrote in my Encyclical *Spe Salvi* that the ability to accept suffering and those who suffer is the measure of the humanity one possesses. When this ability is lacking, man is reduced and redefined. Therefore, let us pray the Lord to help us in our suffering and lead us to be close to all those who suffering in this world.

Fr Karl Golser: *Holy Father, my name is Karl Golser, I am a professor of moral theology here in Bressanone and also director of the Institute for Justice, Peace and the Preservation of the Creation; I am also a canon. I am pleased to recall the period in which I was able to work with you at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. As you know, the Catholic Church has deeply forged the history and culture of our Country. Today, however, we sometimes have the feeling that, as Church, we have somewhat retired to the sacristy. The declarations of the Papal Magisterium on the important social issues do not find the right response in parishes and ecclesial communities. Here in Alto Adige, for example, the authorities and many associations forcefully call attention to environmental problems and in particular to climate change. The principal arguments are the melting of glaciers, landslides in the mountains, the problems of the cost of energy, traffic, and the pollution of the atmosphere. There are many initiatives for safeguarding the environment. However, in the average awareness of our Christians, all this has very little to do with faith. What can we do to increase the sense of responsibility for Creation in the life of our Christian communities? What can we do in order to view Creation and Redemption as more closely united? How can we live a Christian lifestyle in an exemplary way that will endure? And how can we combine this with a quality of life that is attractive for all the people of our earth?*

Pope Benedict XVI:

Thank you very much, dear Prof. Golser: you would certainly be far more able than I to answer these questions but I shall try just the same to say something. You have thus touched on the

theme of Creation and Redemption and I think that this indissoluble bond should be given new prominence. In recent decades the doctrine of Creation had almost disappeared from theology, it was almost imperceptible. We are now aware of the damage that this has caused. The Redeemer is the Creator and if we do not proclaim God in his full grandeur - as Creator and as Redeemer - we also diminish the value of the Redemption. Indeed, if God has no role in Creation, if he is relegated merely to a historical context, how can he truly understand the whole of our life? How will he be able to bring salvation to man in his entirety and to the world in its totality? This is why, for me, the renewal of the doctrine of Creation and a new understanding of the inseparability of Creation and Redemption are of supreme importance. We must recognize anew: he is the *Creator Spiritus*, the Reason that exists in the beginning, from which all things are born and of which our own reason is but a spark. And it is he, the Creator himself, who did and can enter into history and operate in it precisely because he is the God of the whole and not only of a part. If we recognize this it will obviously follow that the Redemption, being Christian, and simply Christian faith, also means responsibility always and everywhere with regard to Creation. Twenty-three years ago Christians were accused - I do not know if this accusation is still held - of being the ones truly responsible for the destruction of Creation because the words contained in Genesis - "subdue the earth" - were said to have led to that arrogance with regard to creation whose consequences we are reaping today.

I think we must learn again to understand this accusation in all its falsity: as long as the earth was seen as God's creation, the task of "subduing" it was never intended as an order to enslave it but rather as the task of being guardians of creation and developing its gifts; of actively collaborating in God's work ourselves, in the evolution that he ordered in the world so that the gifts of Creation might be appreciated rather than trampled upon and destroyed.

If we observe what came into being around monasteries, how in those places small paradises, oases of creation were and continue to be born, it becomes evident that these were not only words. Rather, wherever the Creator's Word was properly understood, wherever life was lived with the redeeming Creator, people strove to save creation and not to destroy it. Chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans also fits into this context. It says that the whole of Creation has been groaning in travail because of the bondage to which it has been subjected, awaiting the revelation of God's sons: it will feel liberated when creatures, men and women who are children of God, treat it according to God's perspective. I believe that we can establish exactly this as a reality today. Creation is groaning - we perceive it, we almost hear it - and awaits human beings who will preserve it in accordance with God. The brutal consumption of Creation begins where God is not, where matter is henceforth only material for us, where we ourselves are the ultimate demand, where the whole is merely our property and we consume it for ourselves alone. And the wasting of creation begins when we no longer recognize any need superior to our own, but see only ourselves. It begins when there is no longer any concept of life beyond death, where in this life we must grab hold of everything and possess life as intensely as possible, where we must possess all that is possible to possess.

I think, therefore, that true and effective initiatives to prevent the waste and destruction of Creation can be implemented and developed, understood and lived only where creation is considered as beginning with God; where life is considered as beginning with God and has greater dimensions - in responsibility before God - and one day will be given to us by God in fullness and never taken away from us: in giving life we receive it.

Thus, I believe we must strive with all the means we have to present faith in public, especially where a sensitivity for it already exists. And I think that the sensation that the world may be slipping away - because it is we ourselves who are chasing it away - and feeling oppressed by the problems of Creation, afford us a suitable opportunity in which our faith can speak publicly and make itself felt as a propositional initiative. Indeed, it is not merely a question of discovering technologies that prevent the damage, even though it is important to find alternative sources of energy, among other things. Yet, none of this will suffice unless we ourselves find a new way of living, a discipline of making sacrifices, a discipline of the recognition of others to whom creation belongs as much as it belongs to us who may more easily make use of it; a discipline of responsibility with regard to the future of others and to our own future, because it is a responsibility in the eyes of the One who is our Judge and as such is also Redeemer but, truly, also our Judge.

Consequently, I think in any case that the two dimensions - Creation and Redemption, earthly life and eternal life, responsibility for the Creation and responsibility for others and for the future - should be juxtaposed. I also think it is our task to intervene clearly and with determination on public opinion. To be heard, we must at the same time demonstrate by our own example, by our own way of life, that we are speaking of a message in which we ourselves believe and according to which it is possible to live. And let us ask the Lord to help us all to live out the faith and the responsibility of faith in such a way that our lifestyle becomes a testimony; and then to speak in such a way that our works may credibly convey faith as an orientation in our time.

Fr Franz Pixner, dean at Kastelruth: *Holy Father, I am Franz Pixner and I am the pastor of two large parishes. I myself, together with many of my confreres and lay persons, are concerned about the increasing burden of pastoral care caused by, for example, the pastoral units that are being created: the intense pressure of work, the lack of recognition, difficulties concerning the Magisterium, loneliness, the dwindling number of priests but also of communities of the faithful. Many people wonder what God is asking of us in this situation and how the Holy Spirit wishes to encourage us. In this context arise questions concerning, for example, the celibacy of priests, the ordination of viri probati to the priesthood, the involvement of charisms, particularly those of women, in pastoral care, making men and women collaborators trained in theology responsible for conferring Baptism and preaching homilies. The question is also asked how we priests, confronted by the new challenges, can help one another in a brotherly community, at the various levels of the diocese, diaconate and pastoral and parish unit. We ask you, Holy Father, to give us some good advice for all these questions. Thank you!*

Pope Benedict XVI:

Dear dean, you have opened a whole series of questions that occupy and concern pastors and all of us in this age, and you certainly know that I cannot answer all of them here. I imagine that you will have repeated opportunities to consider them with your Bishop and we in turn we will speak of them at the Synod of Bishops. All of us, I believe stand in need of this dialogue with one another, of the dialogue of faith and responsibility, in order to find the straight narrow path in this era, full of difficult perspectives on faith and challenges for priests. No one has an instant recipe, we are all searching together.

With this reservation, I find myself together with all of you in the midst of this process of toil and interior struggle, I shall try to say a few words, precisely as part of a broader dialogue.

In my answer I would like to examine two fundamental aspects: on the one hand, the irreplaceableness of the priest, the meaning and the manner of the priestly ministry today; and on the other - and this is more obvious than it used to be - the multiplicity of charisms and the fact that all together they are Church, they build the Church and for this reason we must strive to reawaken charisms. We must foster this lively whole which in turn then also supports the priest. He supports others, others support him and only in this complex and variegated whole can the Church develop today and toward the future.

On the one hand, there will always be a need for the priest who is totally dedicated to the Lord and therefore totally dedicated to humanity. In the Old Testament there is the call to "sanctification" which more or less corresponds to what we mean today by "consecration", or even "priestly Ordination": something is delivered over to God and is therefore removed from the common sphere, it is given to him. Yet this means that it is now available for all. Since it has been taken and given to God, for this very reason it is now not isolated by being raised from the "for", to the "for all". I think that this can also be said of the Church's priesthood. It means on the one hand that we are consigned to the Lord, separated from ordinary life, but on the other, we are consigned to him because in this way we can belong to him totally and totally belong to others. I believe we must continuously seek to show this to young people - to those who are idealists, who want to do something for the whole - show them that precisely this "extraction from the common" means "consignment to the whole" and that this is an important way, the most important way, to serve our brethren. Part of this, moreover, is truly making oneself available to the Lord in the fullness of one's being and consequently, finding oneself totally available to men and women. I think celibacy is a fundamental expression of this totality and already, for this reason, an important reference in this world because it only has meaning if we truly believe in eternal life and if we believe that God involves us and that we can be for him.

Therefore, the priesthood is indispensable because in the Eucharist itself, originating in God, the Church is built; in the Sacrament of Penance purification is conferred; in the Sacrament, the

priesthood is, precisely, an involvement in the "for" of Jesus Christ. However, I know well how difficult it is today - when a priest finds himself directing not only one easily managed parish but several parishes and pastoral units; when he must be available to give this or that advice, and so forth - how difficult it is to live such a life. I believe that in this situation it is important to have the courage to limit oneself and to be clear about deciding on priorities. A fundamental priority of priestly life is to be with the Lord and thus to have time for prayer. St Charles Borromeo always used to say: "You will not be able to care for the souls of others if you let your own perish. In the end you will no longer do anything even for others. You must always have time for being with God". I would therefore like to emphasize: whatever the demands that arise, it is a real priority to find every day, I would say, an hour to be in silence for the Lord and with the Lord, as the Church suggests we do with the breviary, with daily prayers, so as to continually enrich ourselves inwardly, to return - as I said in answering the first question - to within the reach of the Holy Spirit's breath. And to order priorities on this basis: I must learn to see what is truly essential, where my presence as a priest is indispensable and where I cannot delegate anyone else. And at the same time, I must humbly accept when there are many things I should do and where my presence is requested that I cannot manage because I know my limits. I think people understand this humility.

And I now must link the other aspect to this: knowing how to delegate, to get people to collaborate. I have the impression that people understand and also appreciate it when a priest is with God, when he is concerned with his office of being the person who prays for others: "we", they say, "cannot pray so much, you must do it for us: basically, it is your job, as it were, to be the one who prays for us". They want a priest who honestly endeavours to live with the Lord and then is available to men and women - the suffering, the dying, the sick, children, young people (I would say that they are the priorities) - but also who can distinguish between things that others do better than him, thereby making room for those gifts. I am thinking of Movements and of many other forms of collaboration in the parish. May all these things also be reflected upon in the diocese itself, new forms of collaboration should be created and interchanges encouraged. You rightly said that in this it is important to look beyond the parish to the diocesan community, indeed, to the community of the universal Church which in her turn must direct her gaze to see what is happening in the parish and what the consequences are for the individual priest.

You then touched on another point, very important in my eyes: priests, even if they live far apart are a true community of brothers who should support and help one another. In order not to drift into isolation, into loneliness with its sorrows, it is important for us to meet one another regularly. It will be the task of the diocese to establish how best to organize meetings for priests - today we have cars which make travelling easier - so that we can experience being together ever anew, learn from one another, mutually correct and help one another, cheer one another and comfort one another, so that in this communion of the presbyterate, together with the Bishop we can carry out our service to the local Church. Precisely: no priest is a priest on his own; we are a presbyterate and it is only in this communion with the Bishop that each one can carry out his service. Now, this beautiful communion recognized by all at the theological level, must also be

expressed in practice in the ways identified by the local Church, and it must be extended because no Bishop is a Bishop on his own but only a Bishop in the College, in the great communion of Bishops. This is the communion we should always strive for. And I think that it is a particularly beautiful aspect of Catholicism: through the Primacy, which is not an absolute monarchy but a service of communion, that we may have the certainty of this unity. Thus in a large community with many voices, all together we make the great music of faith ring out in this world.

Let us pray the Lord to comfort us when we think we cannot manage any longer: let us support one another and then the Lord will help us to find the right paths together.

Fr Paolo Rizzi, parish priest and lecturer in theology at the Higher Institute for Religious Sciences:
Holy Father, I am parish priest and lecturer in theology at the Higher Institute for Religious Sciences. We would like to hear your pastoral opinion about the situation concerning the Sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation. Always more often the children, boys and girls, who receive these Sacraments prepare themselves with commitment to the catechetical meetings but do not take part in the Sunday Eucharist, and then one wonders: what is the point of all this? At times we might feel like saying: "Then just stay at home". Instead we continue as always to accept them, believing that in any case it is better not to extinguish the wick of the little flickering flame. We think, that is, that in any case, the gift of the Spirit can have an effect beyond what we can see, and that in an epoch of transition like this one it is more prudent not to make drastic decisions. More generally, 35 years ago I thought that we were beginning to be a little flock, a minority community, more or less everywhere in Europe; that we should therefore administer the sacraments only to those who are truly committed to Christian life. Then, partly because of the style of John Paul II's Pontificate, I thought things through again. If it is possible to make predictions for the future, what do you think? What pastoral approaches can you suggest to us? Thank you.

Pope Benedict XVI:

Well, I cannot give an infallible answer here, I can only seek to respond according to what I see. I must say that I took a similar route to yours. When I was younger I was rather severe. I said: the sacraments are sacraments of faith, and where faith does not exist, where the practice of faith does not exist, the Sacrament cannot be conferred either. And then I always used to talk to my parish priest when I was Archbishop of Munich: here too there were two factions, one severe and one broad-minded. Then I too, with time, came to realize that we must follow, rather, the example of the Lord, who was very open even with people on the margins of Israel of that time. He was a Lord of mercy, too open - according to many official authorities - with sinners, welcoming them or letting them invite him to their dinners, drawing them to him in his communion.

Therefore I would say substantially that the sacraments are naturally sacraments of faith: when there is no element of faith, when First Communion is no more than a great lunch with beautiful

clothes and beautiful gifts, it can no longer be a sacrament of faith. Yet, on the other hand, if we can still see a little flame of desire for communion in the faith, a desire even in these children who want to enter into communion with Jesus, it seems to me that it is right to be rather broad-minded. Naturally, of course, one purpose of our catechesis must be to make children understand that Communion, First Communion is not a "fixed" event, but requires a continuity of friendship with Jesus, a journey with Jesus. I know that children often have the intention and desire to go to Sunday Mass but their parents do not make this desire possible. If we see that children want it, that they have the desire to go, this seems to me almost a sacrament of desire, the "will" to participate in Sunday Mass. In this sense, we naturally must do our best in the context of preparation for the sacraments to reach the parents as well, and thus to - let us say - awaken in them too a sensitivity to the process in which their child is involved. They should help their children to follow their own desire to enter into friendship with Jesus, which is a form of life, of the future. If parents want their children to be able to make their First Communion, this somewhat social desire must be extended into a religious one, to make a journey with Jesus possible.

I would say, therefore, that in the context of the catechesis of children, that work with parents is very important. And this is precisely one of the opportunities to meet with parents, making the life of faith also present to the adults, because, it seems to me, they themselves can relearn the faith from the children and understand that this great solemnity is only meaningful, true and authentic if it is celebrated in the context of a journey with Jesus, in the context of a life of faith. Thus, one should endeavour to convince parents, through their children, of the need for a preparatory journey that is expressed in participation in the mysteries and that begins to make these mysteries loved. I would say that this is definitely an inadequate answer, but the pedagogy of faith is always a journey and we must accept today's situations. Yet, we must also open them more to each person, so that the result is not only an external memory of things that endures but that their hearts that have truly been touched. The moment when we are convinced the heart is touched - it has felt a little of Jesus' love, it has felt a little the desire to move along these lines and in this direction. That is the moment when, it seems to me, we can say that we have made a true catechesis. The proper meaning of catechesis, in fact, must be this: to bring the flame of Jesus' love, even if it is a small one, to the hearts of children, and through the children to their parents, thus reopening the places of faith of our time.