



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT

TO SANTA MARIA DI LEUCA AND BRINDISI (APULIA - ITALY)

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO PRIESTS, DEACONS AND SEMINARIANS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BRINDISI

Cathedral of Brindisi

Sunday, 15 June 2008

Dearest priests, deacons and seminarians,

I am pleased to address my cordial greeting to all of you gathered in this beautiful Cathedral, reopened for worship after its restoration last November. I thank Archbishop Rocco Talucci for the warm welcome he has addressed to me in your name and for all his gifts. I greet the priests to whom I wish to express my satisfaction at the immense and structured pastoral work they carry out. I greet the deacons, the seminarians and everyone present and express my joy at being surrounded by a large crowd of souls consecrated for the advent of the Kingdom of God. Here in the Cathedral, which is the heart of the Diocese, we all feel at home, united by the bond of Christ's love. Let us commemorate here with gratitude those who spread Christianity in these regions: Brindisi was the first city of the West to welcome the Gospel, which reached it on the Roman consular roads. Among the evangelizing Saints I think of Bishop St Leucius, of St Oronzo, St Theodore of Amasea and St Lawrence of Brindisi, proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by John XXIII. Their presence lives on in the hearts of the people and is witnessed to by many of the city's monuments.

Dear brothers, in seeing you gathered in this Church, in which many of you received your diaconal and presbyteral ordination, I remember the words that St Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the Christians of Ephesus: "Your excellent presbyters, who are a credit to God, are as suited to the Bishop as strings to a harp. So in your harmony of mind and heart the song you sing is Jesus Christ". And the holy Bishop added: "Every one of you should form a choir, so that, in harmony of

sound through harmony of hearts, and in unity taking the note from God, you may sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father. If you do this, he will listen to you" (*Letter to the Ephesians*, 4). Persevere, dear priests, in seeking this unity of intention and reciprocal help, so that fraternal charity and unity in pastoral work are an example and incentive for your communities. This, above all, was the goal of the pastoral visits your Archbishop made to your parishes which ended last March. Due, precisely, to your generous collaboration, it was not merely a juridical exercise but an extraordinary event of ecclesial and formative value. I am certain that it will be fruitful since the Lord will make the seed sown with love grow abundantly in the hearts of the faithful.

I would like to encourage you with my presence today to place yourselves with ever growing openness at the service of the Gospel and of the Church. I know that you already work with zeal and intelligence, sparing no energy in spreading the joyful Gospel proclamation. Christ, to whom you have consecrated your lives, is with you! In him we all believe, to him alone we entrust our lives, it is he whom we desire to proclaim to the world. May Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Jn 14: 6), be the object of our thought, the topic of our words, the reason for our life. Dear brother priests, if your faith is to be strong and vigorous, as you well know, it must be nourished with assiduous prayer. Thus be models of prayer, become masters of prayer. May your days be marked by times of prayer, during which, after Jesus' example, you engage in a regenerating conversation with the Father. I know it is not easy to stay faithful to this daily appointment with the Lord, especially today when the pace of life is frenetic and worries absorb us more and more. Yet we must convince ourselves: the time he spends in prayer is the most important time in a priest's life, in which divine grace acts with greater effectiveness, making his ministry fruitful. The first service to render to the community is prayer. And therefore, time for prayer must be given a true priority in our life. I know that there are many urgent things: as regards myself, an audience, a document to study, a meeting or something else. But if we are not interiorly in communion with God we cannot even give anything to others. Therefore, God is the first priority. We must always reserve the time necessary to be in communion of prayer with our Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, I would now like to congratulate you on the new Archdiocesan Seminary which was inaugurated last November by my Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone. On the one hand, it expresses the present state of a Diocese, understood as the culmination of work undertaken by priests and parishes in the area of the pastoral care of youth, in teaching the catechism, in the religious animation of families. On the other hand, the Seminary is a precious investment for the future, because it ensures that through patient and generous work the Christian community will not be deprived of shepherds of souls, of teachers of faith and of zealous guides and witnesses of Christ's charity. Besides being the place of your formation, dear seminarians, true hope of the Church, this seminary of yours is also a place for the up-dating and continuing formation of youth and adults who wish to make their contribution to the cause of the Kingdom of God. The careful formation of seminarians and the continuing formation of priests and other pastoral workers is a primary concern of your Bishop, to whom God has entrusted the

mission of guiding the People of God who live in your City as a wise pastor.

Another opportunity for the spiritual growth of your community is the Archdiocesan Synod, the first since the Second Vatican Council and since the unification of the two Dioceses of Brindisi and Ostuni. It is an opportunity to relaunch the apostolic commitment of the entire Diocese but above all it is a privileged moment of communion that is a help in the rediscovery of the value of fraternal service, as indicated in the biblical scene of the washing of the feet (cf. Jn 13: 12-17) that you chose, with the words of Jesus that comment on it: "As I have done" (Jn 13: 15). If it is true that the Synod, every Synod, is called to establish laws and to issue the appropriate norms for an organic pastoral activity, raising and stimulating renewed commitment to evangelization and Gospel witness, it is also true that a Synod must reawaken in every baptized person the missionary outreach that constantly animates the Church.

Dear brother priests, the Pope assures you of his special remembrance in prayer so that you may continue on the journey of authentic spiritual renewal which you have been making with your community. May the experience of "being together" in faith and reciprocal love help you in this commitment, like the Apostles around Christ in the Upper Room. It was there that the Divine Teacher taught them, opening their eyes to the splendour of the truth and giving them the sacrament of unity and love: the Eucharist. In the Upper Room, during the Last Supper, at the moment of the washing of the feet, it clearly emerged that service is one of the fundamental dimensions of Christian life. It is therefore a duty of the Synod to help all the members of your local Church to rediscover the meaning and the joy of service: a service for love. This applies above all for you, dear priests, configured to Christ "Head and Pastor", always ready to guide his flock. Be thankful and happy for the gift received! Be generous in carrying out your ministry! Sustain it with assiduous prayer and a continuing cultural, theological and spiritual formation!

While I renew the expression of my lively appreciation and my warmest encouragement, I invite you and the entire Archdiocese to prepare for the Pauline Year which is shortly to begin. It can be an occasion on which to relaunch generous missionary activity, for a more profound proclamation of the Word of God, welcomed, meditated and translated into a fruitful apostolate, as it happened exactly for the Apostle to the Gentiles. Conquered by Christ, Paul lived entirely for him and for his Gospel, spending his existence even to the point of martyrdom. May you be assisted by the Blessed Mother of the Church and Virgin of Listening; may the Patron Saints of this beloved land of Apulia protect you. Be missionaries of God's love; may each of your parishes experience the joy of belonging to Christ. As a pledge of divine grace and of the gifts of his Spirit, I gladly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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