



## The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO A GROUP OF NEWLY ORDAINED BISHOPS  
TAKING PART IN A TWO-WEEK SEMINAR  
ORGANIZED BY THE CONGREGATION  
FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES***

Papal Summer Residence - Hall of the Swiss, Castel Gandolfo  
Saturday, 20 September 2008

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

I welcome you with joy on the occasion of the Follow-up Seminar organized by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. I warmly thank Cardinal Ivan Dias, the Dicastery's Prefect, for his fraternal greeting on behalf of you all. The Seminar in which you are taking part is being held during the Pauline Year which we are celebrating throughout the Church with the intention of deepening knowledge of the missionary spirit and charismatic personality of St Paul, seen by all as the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

I am sure that the spirit of this "teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (1 Tm 2: 7; cf. 2 Tm 1: 11) has become present in your prayers, in your reflection and in your exchanges, and that it will not fail to illumine and enrich your pastoral and episcopal ministry. In my Homily for the inauguration of the Pauline Year, commenting on the expression "a teacher of the Gentiles" I observed that these words open to the future, projecting the Apostle's spirit to all peoples and all generations. For us, Paul is not merely a figure of the past whom we remember with veneration. He is also *our* teacher, an apostle and herald of Jesus Christ for us too. Yes, he is our teacher and we must learn from him to look with sympathy at the people to whom we have been sent. We must also learn from him to seek in Christ the light and grace to proclaim the Good News today; we must imitate his example to take the human and geographical paths of the contemporary world, tirelessly bringing Christ to those who have already opened their hearts to him, as well as those who are not yet acquainted with him.

Your lives as pastors are in many aspects similar to the life of the Apostle Paul. The field of your pastoral work is often immense, extremely difficult and complex. Geographically, the majority of your dioceses are very extensive and often lack roads and the means of communication. This makes it difficult to reach the faithful who are furthest from the centre of your diocesan communities. In addition, the wind of dechristianization, religious indifferentism, secularization and the relativization of values is blowing ever more strongly upon your societies, as elsewhere. This creates an environment in which the weapons of preaching may seem, as with Paul in Athens, to lack the necessary force. In many regions Catholics are a minority, sometimes even a very small one. This obliges you to compete with other religions that are much stronger and not always welcoming in your regard. Lastly, there are situations in which, as Pastors, you must defend your faithful from persecution and violent attacks.

Do not be afraid or discouraged by all these drawbacks that may sometimes even be serious; rather, let yourselves be advised and inspired by St Paul who had to suffer a great deal for the same reasons, as we learn from his Second Letter to the Corinthians. In travelling over sea and land, he suffered persecution, scourging and even stoning; he faced the dangers of the voyages, hunger, thirst, frequent lack of food, cold and nakedness; he worked without ever flagging, living to the full his anxiety for the Churches (cf. 2 Cor 11: 24ff.). He did not shrink from difficulties and suffering because he was well aware that they are part of the cross which, as Christians, we must carry every day. He thoroughly understood the condition to which Christ's call exposes the disciple: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Mt 16: 24). For this reason he recommended his spiritual son and disciple Timothy: "Take your share of suffering for the Gospel" (2 Tm 1: 8), thereby indicating that evangelization and its success pass through the cross and suffering. He says to each one of us: "take your share of suffering for the Gospel" with me. Suffering unites a person to Christ and to the brethren and expresses the fullness of love, whose source and supreme trial is, precisely, the Cross of Christ.

Paul had reached this conviction after the experience of persecution that he had had to face in preaching the Gospel; but it was on this path that he discovered the riches of Christ's love and the truth of his mission as an Apostle. In my Homily inaugurating the Pauline Year I said in this regard: "the truth that he experienced in his encounter with the Risen One was well worth the fight, persecution and suffering. But what most deeply motivated him was being loved by Jesus Christ and the desire to communicate this love to others" (*Homily, First Vespers of the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul*, 28 June 2008). Yes, Christ had made Paul "his own" (Phil 3: 12), with his love, and it is only on this basis that all Paul's activities and suffering can be explained.

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, you are at the beginning of your episcopal ministry. Do not hesitate to have recourse to this powerful teacher of evangelization, learning from him how to love Christ, how to sacrifice yourselves at the service of others, how to identify with the peoples among whom you are called to preach the Gospel and how to proclaim and witness to his presence as the Risen One. To learn these lessons it is indispensable to invoke the help of Christ's grace

insistently.

Paul constantly appealed for this grace in his Letters. As successors of the Apostles, it is you who must carry ahead Paul's mission of taking the Gospel to peoples; may you be inspired by him in understanding your vocation and depend closely upon the enlightenment of Christ's Spirit.

He will guide you on the paths of the new evangelization that are often impracticable but always enthralling. I accompany you in your pastoral mission with my prayers and with an affectionate Apostolic Blessing, which I impart to each one of you and to all the faithful of your Christian communities.

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