



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE ROMAN MAJOR SEMINARY
FOR THE ANNUAL FEAST OF OUR LADY OF TRUST**

Friday, 20 February 2009

*Your Eminence,
Dear Friends,*

It is always a great joy for me to be in my Seminary, to see the future priests of my Diocese, to be with you under the sign of Our Lady of Trust. With the one who helps and accompanies us, who gives us real certainty in being always assisted by divine grace, and we go forward!

Now we wish to see what St Paul tells us with this text: "You were called to freedom". Since the beginning and throughout all time but especially in the modern age freedom has been the great dream of humanity. We know that Luther was inspired by this passage from the Letter to the Galatians and that he concluded that the monastic Rule, the hierarchy, the Magisterium seemed to him as a yoke of slavery from which it was necessary to liberate oneself. Subsequently, the Age of Enlightenment was totally guided, penetrated, by this desire for freedom, which was considered to have finally been reached. But Marxism too presented itself as a road towards freedom.

We ask ourselves this evening: what is freedom? How can we be free? St Paul helps us to understand this complicated reality that is freedom, inserting this concept into fundamentally anthropological and theological context. He says: "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love be servants of one another". The Rector has already told us that the "flesh" is not the body, but, in the language of St Paul, "flesh" is an expression of the absolutization of self, of the self that wants to be all and to take all for its own. The absolute "I" who depends on nothing and on no one seems to possess freedom truly and definitively. I am free if I depend on no one, if I can do anything I want. But exactly this absolutization of the I is "flesh", that is a degradation of man. It is not the conquest of freedom: libertinism is not freedom, but rather freedom's failure.

And Paul dares to propose a strong paradox: "Through love, be servants" (in Greek: *douléuete*). In other words freedom, paradoxically, is achieved in service. We become free if we become servants of one another. And so Paul places the whole matter of freedom in the light of the truth of man. To reduce oneself to flesh, seemingly elevating oneself to divine status "I alone am the man" leads to deception. Because in reality it is not so: man is not an absolute, as if the "I" can isolate itself and behave only according to its own will. It is contrary to the truth of our being. Our truth is that above all we are creatures, creatures of God, and we live in relationship with the Creator. We are relational beings. And only by accepting our relationality can we enter into the truth; otherwise we fall into deception and in it, in the end, we destroy ourselves.

We are creatures, therefore dependent on the Creator. In the Age of Enlightenment, to atheism especially this appeared as a dependence from which it was necessary to free oneself. In reality, however, it would be only a fatal dependence were this God Creator a tyrant and not a good Being only if he were to be like human tyrants. If, instead, this Creator loves us and our dependence means being within the space of his love, in that case it is precisely dependence that is freedom. In this way we are in fact within the charity of the Creator; we are united to him, to the whole of his reality, to all of his power. Therefore this is the first point: to be a creature means to be loved by the Creator, to be in this relationship of love that he gives us, through which he provides for us. From this derives first of all our truth, which is at the same time a call to charity.

Therefore, to see God, to orient oneself to God, know God, know God's will, enter into the will that is, into the love of God is to enter ever more into the space of truth. And this journey of coming to know God, of loving relationship with God, is the extraordinary adventure of our Christian life; for in Christ we know the face of God, the face of God that loves us even unto the Cross, unto the gift of himself.

But creaturely relationality implies a second type of relationship as well. We are in relationship with God, but together, as a human family, we are also in relationship with each other. In other words, human freedom is, in part, being within the joy and ample space of God's love, but it also implies becoming one with the other and for the other. There is no freedom in opposing the other. If I make myself the absolute, I become the enemy of the other; we can no longer live together and the whole of life becomes cruelty, becomes a failure. Only a shared freedom is a human freedom; in being together we can enter into the harmony of freedom.

And therefore this is another very important point: only in the acceptance of the other, accepting also the apparent limitations on my freedom that derive from respect for that of the other only by entering into the net of dependence that finally makes us a single family am I on the path to communal freedom.

Here a very important element appears: what is the measure of sharing freedom? We see that man needs order, laws, so that he can realize his freedom which is a freedom lived in common.

And how can we find this correct order, in which no one is oppressed but rather each one can give his contribution to form this sort of concert of freedoms? If there is no common truth of man as it appears in the vision of God, only positivism remains and one has the impression of something imposed in an even violent manner. From this emerges rebellion against order and law as though it entails slavery.

But if we can find the order of the Creator in our nature, the order of truth that gives each one his place, then order and law can be the very instruments of freedom against the slavery of selfishness. To serve one another becomes the instrument of freedom, and here we could add a whole philosophy of politics according to the Social Doctrine of the Church, which helps us to find this common order that gives each one his place in the common life of humanity. The first reality meriting respect, therefore, is the truth: freedom opposed to truth is not freedom. To serve one another creates the common space of freedom.

And then Paul continues saying: "The whole law is fulfilled in one word, namely, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". Behind this affirmation appears the mystery of God Incarnate, appears the mystery of Christ who in his life, in his death, in his Resurrection becomes the living law. The first words of our Reading "You were called to freedom" alluded directly to this mystery. We have been called by the Gospel, we have truly been called in Baptism, in the participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ. In this way we have passed from the "flesh", from selfishness to communion with Christ. And thus we are in the fullness of the law.

You probably all know the beautiful words of St Augustine: "*Dilige et fac quod vis* Love and do what you will". What Augustine says is the truth, if we have well understood the word "love". "Love and do what you will" but we must really be in communion with Christ, penetrated by him, identifying ourselves with his death and Resurrection and united to him in the communion of his Body. By participating in the sacraments, by listening to the word of God truly the divine will the divine law enters into our will. Our will identifies with his, we become one single will and thus we can truly be freed; we can truly do what we want to do, because we want with Christ we want in the truth and with the truth.

Therefore, let us pray the Lord to help us in this journey that begun with Baptism, a journey of identification with Christ that is fulfilled ever anew in the Eucharist. In the Third Eucharistic Prayer we say: "That we... become one body, one spirit in Christ". It is a moment in which, through the Eucharist and through our true participation in the mystery of Christ's death and Resurrection, we become one spirit with him. We exist in this identity of will, and thus we truly reach freedom.

Behind these words the law is fulfilled behind this single statement that becomes reality in communion with Christ, there appear behind the Lord the figures of all the Saints who have entered into this communion with Christ. They appear in this unity of being, in this unity with his will. Our Lady appears foremost, in her humility, in her goodness, in her love. Our Lady gives us

this trust, takes us by the hand, guides us, helps us along the path of becoming united to the will of God as she has been from her first moment, having expressed this union in her "*Fiat*".

And finally, after these beautiful things, once again in the Letter there is mention of a slightly sad situation in the Galatians' community, when Paul says: "If you bite and devour one another take care that you are not consumed by one another.... Walk by the Spirit". It seems to me that in this community which was no longer on the path of communion with Christ, but of the exterior law of the "flesh" polemics naturally surfaced also, and Paul says: "You have become wild beasts, one biting the other". Thus he alludes to the polemics that are born where faith degenerates into intellectualism and humility is substituted by the arrogance of being better than the other.

We see well that today too there are similar things where instead of entering into communion with Christ, in the Body of Christ that is the Church everyone wants to be better than everyone else, and with intellectual arrogance each wants to make it known that he/she is the best. And this leads to destructive polemics, born from a caricature of the Church that should be of one soul and one heart.

In this warning of St Paul we must also today find a reason for an examination of conscience: not to think ourselves above others, but to bring ourselves into Christ's humility, into Our Lady's humility, to enter into the obedience of faith. Precisely in this way does the great space of truth and freedom in love truly open before us too.

Lastly, we want to thank God because he has shown us his face in Christ, because he has given us Our Lady, he has given us the Saints; he has called us to be one body, one spirit with him. And we pray that he may help us to be ever more engaged in this communion with his will; thus to find ourselves within his freedom, love and joy.

After the dinner the Holy Father spoke extemporaneously:

They tell me that you are expecting another word from me. Perhaps I have already spoken too much, but I would like to express my gratitude, my joy at being with you. Now in speaking at table I have learned more about the history of the Lateran, beginning from Constantine, to Sixtus V, Benedict XVI and Pope Lambertini. Thus I have seen all the problems of the history and the ever new rebirth of the Church in Rome. And I have understood that in the discontinuity of the exterior events there is the great continuity of the unity of the Church in every age. And also in regard to the composition of the Seminary I have understood that it is an expression of the catholicity of our Church. From all the continents we are one Church and we have one common future. Let us only hope that there may be more vocations because, as the Rector said, we need labourers in the Lord's vineyard. Thank you all!

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