



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO VITERBO AND BAGNOREGIO

MEETING WITH THE LOCAL PEOPLE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Piazza Sant'Agostino - Bagnoregio

Sunday, 6 September 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

My Pastoral Visit to your Diocesan Community began in Viterbo this morning with the solemn Eucharistic celebration and our meeting here in Bagnoregio more or less brings it to a close. I greet you all with affection: religious, civil and military authorities, priests, religious, pastoral workers, youth and families, and I thank you for your cordial welcome. I renew my thanks in the first place to your Bishop for his affectionate words that recalled my connections with St Bonaventure. And I greet with respect the Mayor of Bagnoregio, grateful for his courteous welcome on behalf of the whole city.

Giovanni Fidanza, who was to become Friar Bonaventure, linked his name with that of Bagnoregio in the well-known presentation of himself in the Divine Comedy. In saying: "Bonaventure of Bagnoregio's life am I, who always in great offices postponed considerations sinister" (Dante, *Paradise XII*, 127-129), he stresses that in the important tasks he had to do in the Church he always put off dealing with temporal realities, "considerations sinister", for the spiritual good of souls. He spent his childhood and adolescence here in Bagnoregio; he later followed St Francis for whom he felt special gratitude because, as he would later write, St Francis had "snatched him from the jaws of death" when he was a child (*Legenda Maior, Prologus*, 3,3) and had predicted "good fortune" for him, as your Mayor has just recalled. He established a deep and lasting bond with the Poverello of Assisi, drawing from him ascetic inspiration and ecclesiastical brilliance. You jealously preserve the famous relic of the "holy arm" of your illustrious fellow-citizen; you keep

alive his memory and deepen the knowledge of his teaching, especially through the Bonaventure Study Centre founded by Bonaventura Tecchi, which every year organizes specialized congresses devoted to studies on the Saint.

It is not easy to sum up the broad philosophical, theological and mystical doctrine that St Bonaventure bequeathed to us. In this Year for Priests I would like to invite priests especially to learn from this great Doctor of the Church, to deepen their knowledge of his teaching on wisdom rooted in Christ. He oriented every step of his speculation and mystical tension to wisdom, which flourishes in holiness, passing through stages that range from what he calls *uniform wisdom*, concerning the fundamental principles of knowledge, to *multiform wisdom*, that consists in the mysterious language of the Bible, then *omniform wisdom* that sees in every situation the Creator's reflection, to *formless wisdom*, in other words the experience of intimate mystical contact with God, when the human intellect brushes silently against the infinite Mystery (cf. J. Ratzinger, *San Bonaventura e la teologia della storia*, Ed. Porziuncola, 2006, pp. 92ff.). In memory of this profound seeker and lover of wisdom, I would also like to express encouragement and esteem for the service in the Ecclesial Community that theologians are called to render to that faith that seeks the intellect, that faith which is "a friend of intelligence", and becomes new life in accordance with God's plan.

I limit myself this evening to drawing from St Bonaventure's rich doctrinal and mystical patrimony some ideas for reflection that may prove useful to your Diocesan Community for its pastoral journey. In the first place, since the time of his studies in Paris, St Bonaventure was a tireless *seeker of God*, which he continued to be throughout his life. In his writings he points out the path to take. "Because God is on high", he writes, "it is necessary to make every effort to raise one's mind to him (*De reductione artium ad theologiam*, n. 25). Thus, Bonaventure plots a demanding route of faith on which reading will not suffice "without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without admiration, observation without exultation, diligence without compassion, industry without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, study without divine grace, the mirror without divinely inspired wisdom" (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, prol. 4). This journey of purification involves the entire person so that through Christ he may attain the transforming love of the Trinity. And given that with his grace, Christ since eternity God and for eternity man brings about a new creation in the faithful, exploration of the divine presence becomes contemplation of him in the soul, "where he dwells through the gift of the most bountiful love" (*ibid.*, iv, 4), until the person is at last transported in him. Faith, therefore, is a perfecting of our cognitive capacities and participation in the knowledge that God has of himself and of the world: we perceive hope as a preparation for the encounter with the Lord that will mark the complete fulfilment of that friendship which binds us to him from this moment. And love introduces us to divine life, making us view all men and women as brothers and sisters, in accordance with the will of our common heavenly Father.

As well as being a *seeker of God*, St Bonaventure was the seraphic *poet of creation* who, in the

sequela of St Francis, learned "to praise God in all things and through all his creatures", in which "the omnipotence, wisdom and goodness of the Creator are resplendent" (*ibid.*, i, 10). St Bonaventure presents a positive vision of the world, a gift of God's love to men and women. He recognizes in the world a reflection of the supreme Goodness and Beauty which, like St Augustine and St Francis before him, he defines as God himself. It is God who has given us all things. The true, the good and the beautiful come from him, as from the original source. We climb towards God as on the steps of a ladder until we reach and, as it were, grasp the Supreme Good and find in him our happiness and our peace. How useful it would be if today too we were to rediscover the beauty and value of creation in the light of divine goodness and beauty! In Christ, St Bonaventure notes, the universe itself can return to being a voice that speaks of God and urges us to explore it for his presence; it exhorts us to honour him and to glorify him in all things (cf. *ibid.*, i, 15). Here one notes the spirit of St Francis, whose love for all creatures was shared by our Saint.

St Bonaventure was a *messenger of hope*. We find a beautiful image of hope in one of his sermons for Advent, in which he compares the movement of hope with the flight of a bird that spreads its wings to their maximum capacity and draws on all its strength to flap them. In a certain sense it makes its whole self movement, to soar upwards and fly. Hoping is flying, St Bonaventure says. But hope requires that all our limbs become movement, projected to the true height of our being, towards the promises of God. Whoever hopes, he affirms, "must lift his head, turning his thoughts aloft, to the heights of our existence, namely to God" (*Sermo XVI, Dominica I Adv., Opera omnia*, IX, 40a).

In his speech Mr Mayor asked the question: "What will Bagnoregio be tomorrow?". Indeed, we all wonder about our future and that of the world, and this question has a lot to do with hope, for which every human heart thirsts. Yet in my Encyclical *Spe salvi*, I noted that just any kind of hope is not sufficient for facing and overcoming the difficulties of the present time; a "trustworthy hope" is indispensable which, in giving us the certainty of reaching a "great" goal, justifies "the effort of the journey" (cf. n. 1). Only the "great certitude of hope" assures us that despite the personal failures and contradictions of history, overall the "indestructible power of Love" always preserves us. Therefore, when this hope supports us we never risk losing the courage to contribute, as did the Saints, to the salvation of humanity, opening ourselves and the world to allow God to enter: opening ourselves to truth, love and light (cf. n. 35). May St Bonaventure help us "to spread the wings" of hope that urges us to be, like him, ceaseless seekers of God, poet of the beauties of creation and witnesses of that Love and Beauty which "move all things".

Thank you once again, dear friends, for your welcome. While I assure you of my remembrance in prayer, through the intercession of St Bonaventure and especially of Mary, the faithful Virgin and the Star of Hope, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you which I willingly extend to all the inhabitants of this beautiful land, rich in saints.

Thank you for your attention.

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