



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE PONTIFICAL ROMAN MAJOR SEMINARY
IN HONOUR OF THE MEMORIAL OF OUR LADY OF TRUST

LECTIO DIVINA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Chapel of the Seminary
Friday, 12 February 2010*

(Video)

*Your Eminence,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Friends,*

Every year it is a great joy to me to be with the seminarians of the Diocese of Rome, young men who are preparing themselves to respond to the Lord's call to be labourers in his vineyard and priests of his mystery. This is the joy of seeing that the Church lives, that the Church's future is also present in our region and, precisely, also in Rome.

In this [Year for Priests](#) let us be particularly attentive to the Lord's words about our service. The Gospel Passage that has just been read speaks indirectly but profoundly of our sacrament, of our call to be in the Lord's vineyard, to be servants of his mystery.

In this brief passage we find certain key words that give an idea of the proclamation that the Lord wishes to make with this text. "Abide": in this short passage we find the word "abide" ten times. We then find the new commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you", "No longer do I call you servants... but friends", "bear fruit"; and lastly, "Ask, and it will be given you... that your joy may be full". Let us pray to the Lord that he may help us enter into the meaning of his words, that these

words may penetrate our hearts, thus becoming in us the way and life, with us and through us.

The first words are: "Abide in me... in my love". Abiding in the Lord is fundamental as the first topic of this passage. Abide: where? In love, in the love of Christ, in being loved and in loving the Lord. The whole of chapter 15 explains where we are to abide, because the first eight verses explain and present the Parable of the Vine: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The vine is an Old Testament image that we find in both the Prophets and the Psalms and it has a double meaning: it is a parable for the People of God which is his vineyard. He planted a vine in this world, he tended this vine, he tended his vineyard, he protected his vineyard and what was his intention? It was of course to produce fruit, to harvest the precious gift of grapes, of good wine.

And thus the second meaning appears: wine is a symbol, the expression of the joy of love. The Lord created his people to find the answer to his love. This image of the vine, of the vineyard thus has a spousal meaning, it is an expression of the fact that God seeks his creature's love, through his Chosen People he wants to enter into a relationship of love, a spousal relationship with the world.

Then, however, history proved to be a history of infidelity: instead of precious grapes, only small "inedible fruits" are produced. The response of this great love is not forthcoming, this unity, this unconditional union between man and God in the communion of love does not come about, man withdraws into himself, he wants to keep himself to himself, he wants to have God for himself, he wants the world for himself. Consequently the vineyard is devastated, the boar from the forest and all the enemies arrive and the vineyard becomes a wilderness.

But God does not give up. God finds a new way of reaching a free, irrevocable love, the fruit of this love, the true grape: God becomes man, and thus he himself becomes the root of the vine, he himself becomes the vine and so the vine becomes indestructible. This people of God cannot be destroyed for God himself has entered it, he has put down roots in this land. The new People of God is truly founded in God himself who becomes man and thus calls us to be the new vine in him and to abide in him, to dwell in him.

Let us also bear in mind that in chapter 6 of John's Gospel we find the Discourse of the Bread that becomes the great Discourse on the Eucharistic mystery. In this chapter 15 we have the Discourse on the Vine: the Lord does not speak explicitly of the Eucharist. Naturally, however, behind the mystery of the wine is the reality that he has made himself fruit and wine for us, that his Blood is the fruit of the love born from the earth for ever and, in the Eucharist, this Blood becomes our blood, we are renewed, we receive a new identity because Christ's Blood becomes our blood. Thus we are related to God in the Son and, in the Eucharist, this great reality of life in which we are branches joined to the Son and thereby in union with eternal love becomes our reality.

"Abide": abide in this great mystery, abide in this new gift of the Lord that has made us a people in

itself, in his Body and with his Blood. It seems to me that we must meditate deeply on this mystery, that is, that God makes himself Body, one with us; Blood, one with us; that we may abide abide in this mystery in communion with God himself, in this great history of love that is the history of true happiness. In meditating on this gift God made himself one of us and at the same time he made us all one, a single vine we must also begin to pray so that this mystery may penetrate our minds and hearts ever more deeply and that we may be ever more capable of living the greatness of the mystery and thus begin to put this imperative: "abide" into practice.

If we continue to read this Gospel passage attentively, we also find a second imperative: "abide", and "observe my commandments". "Observe" only comes second. "Abide" comes first, at the ontological level, namely that we are united with him, he has given himself to us beforehand and has already given us his love, the fruit. It is not we who must produce the abundant fruit; Christianity is not moralism, it is not we who must do all that God expects of the world but we must first of all enter this ontological mystery: God gives himself. His being, his loving, precedes our action and, in the context of his Body, in the context of being in him, being identified with him and ennobled with his Blood, we too can act with Christ.

Ethics are a consequence of being: first the Lord gives us new life, this is the great gift. Being precedes action and from this being action then follows, as an organic reality, for we can also be what we are in our activity. Let us thus thank the Lord for he has removed us from pure moralism; we cannot obey a prescribed law but must only act in accordance with our new identity. Therefore it is no longer obedience, an external thing, but rather the fulfilment of the gift of new life.

I say it once again: let us thank the Lord because he goes before us, he gives us what we must give, and we must then be, in the truth and by virtue of our new being, protagonists of his reality. Abiding and observing: observing is the sign of abiding and abiding is the gift that he gives us but which must be renewed every day of our lives.

Next comes this new commandment: "love one another as I have loved you". There is no greater love than this, "that a man lay down his life for his friends". What does this mean? Here too it is not a question of moralism. Some might say: "It is not a new commandment; the commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself already exists in the Old Testament". Others say: "This love should be even more radicalized; this love of others must imitate Christ who gave himself for us; it must be a heroic love, to the point of the gift of self". In this case, however, Christianity would be a heroic moralism. It is true that we must reach the point of this radicalism of love which Christ showed to us and gave for us, but here too the true newness is not what we do, the true newness is what he did: the Lord gave us himself, and the Lord gave us the true newness of being members of his Body, of being branches of the vine that he is. Therefore, the newness is the gift, the great gift, and from the gift, from the newness of the gift, also follows, as I have said, the new action.

St Thomas Aquinas says this very succinctly when he writes: "The New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit" (*Summa Theologiae*, I-IIae, q.106 a. 1). The New Law is not another commandment more difficult than the others: the New Law is a gift, the New Law is the presence of the Holy Spirit imparted to us in the sacrament of Baptism, in Confirmation, and given to us every day in the Most Blessed Eucharist. The Fathers distinguished here between "*sacramentum*" and "*exemplum*". "*Sacramentum*" is the gift of the new being, and this gift also becomes an example for our action, but "*sacramentum*" precedes it and we live by the sacrament. Here we see the centrality of the sacrament which is the centrality of the gift.

Let us proceed in our reflection. The Lord says: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you". No longer servants who obey orders, but friends who know, who are united in the same will, in the same love. Hence the newness is that God has made himself known, that God has shown himself, that God is no longer the unknown God, sought but not found or only perceived from afar. God has shown himself: in the Face of Christ we see God, God has made himself "known", and has thereby made us his friends. Let us think how, in humanity's history, in all the archaic religions, it is known that there is a God. This knowledge is deeply rooted in the human heart, the knowledge that God is one, that deities are not "the" God. Yet this God remains very distant, he does not seem to make himself known, he does not make himself loved, he is not a friend, but is remote. Religions, therefore, were not very concerned with this God, concrete life was concerned with the spirits that we meet every day and with which we must reckon daily. God remained distant.

Then we see the great philosophical movement: let us think of Plato and Aristotle who began to understand that this God is the *agathon*, goodness itself, that he is the *eros* that moves the world; yet this remains a human thought, it is an idea of God that comes close to the truth but it is an idea of ours and God remains the hidden God.

A Regensburg professor recently wrote to me, a professor of physics who had read my [Discourse to the University](#) very late. He wrote to tell me that he could not agree, or not fully, with my logic. He said: "Of course, the idea is convincing that the rational structure of the world demands a creative reason that made this rationality which is not explained by itself". And he continued: "But if a demiurge can exist", this is how he put it, "a demiurge seems to me certain by what you say, I do not see that there is a God who is good, just and merciful. I can see that there is a reason that precedes the rationality of the cosmos, but I cannot see the rest". Thus God remains hidden to him. It is a reason that precedes our reasoning, our rationality, the rationality of being, but eternal love does not exist, the great mercy that gives us life does not exist.

And here, in Christ, God showed himself in his total truth, he showed that he is reason and love, that eternal reason is love and thus creates. Unfortunately, today too, many people live far from Christ, they do not know his face and thus the eternal temptation of dualism, which is also hidden

in this professor's letter, is constantly renewed, in other words perhaps there is not only one good principle but also a bad principle, a principle of evil; perhaps the world is divided and there are two equally strong realities and the Good God is only part of the reality. Today, even in theology, including Catholic theology, this thesis is being disseminated: that God is not almighty. Thus an apology is sought for God who would not, therefore, be responsible for the great store of evil we encounter in the world. But what a feeble apology! A God who is not almighty! Evil is not in his hands! And how could we possibly entrust ourselves to this God? How could we be certain of his love if this love ended where the power of evil began?

However, God is no longer unknown: in the Face of the Crucified Christ we see God and we see true omnipotence, not the myth of omnipotence. For us human beings, almightiness, power, is always identified with the capacity to destroy, to do evil. Nevertheless the true concept of omnipotence that appears in Christ is precisely the opposite: in him true omnipotence is loving to the point that God can suffer: here his true omnipotence is revealed, which can even go as far as a love that suffers for us. And thus we see that he is the true God and the true God, who is love, is power: the power of love. And we can trust ourselves to his almighty love and live in this, with this almighty love.

I think we should always meditate anew on this reality, that we should thank God because he has shown himself, because we know his Face, we know him face to face; no longer like Moses who could only see the back of the Lord. This too is a beautiful idea of which St Gregory of Nyssa said: "Seeing only his back, means that we must always follow Christ". But at the same time God showed us his Countenance with Christ, his Face. The curtain of the temple was torn. It opened, the mystery of God is visible. The first commandment that excludes images of God because they might only diminish his reality is changed, renewed, taking another form. Today we can see God's Face in Christ the man, we can have an image of Christ and thus see who God is.

I think that those who have understood this, who have been touched by this mystery, that God has revealed himself, that the curtain of the temple has been torn asunder, that he has shown his Face, find a source of permanent joy. We can only say "thank you. Yes, now we know who you are, who God is and how to respond to him". And I think that this joy of knowing God who has shown himself, to the depths of his being, also embraces the joy of communicating this: those who have understood this, who live touched by this reality, must do as the first disciples did when they went to their friends and brethren saying: "We have found the one of whom the Prophets spoke. He is present now". Mission is not an external appendix to the faith but rather the dynamism of faith itself. Those who have seen, who have encountered Jesus, must go to their friends and tell them: "We have found him, he is Jesus, the One who was Crucified for us".

Then, continuing, the text says: "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide". With this we return to the beginning, to the image, to the Parable of the Vine: it is created to bear fruit. And what is the fruit? As we have said, the fruit is love. In the

Old Testament, with the Torah as the first stage of God's revelation of himself, the fruit was understood as justice, that is, living in accordance with the Word of God, living in accordance with God's will, hence, living well.

This continues but at the same time is transcended: true justice does not consist in obedience to a few norms, rather it is love, creative love that finds in itself the riches and abundance of good. Abundance is one of the key words of the New Testament. God himself always gives in abundance. In order to create man, he creates this abundance of an immense cosmos; to redeem man he gives himself, in the Eucharist he gives himself. And anyone who is united with Christ, who is a branch of the Vine and who abides by this law does not ask: "Can I still do this or not?", "Should I do this or not?". Rather, he lives in the enthusiasm of love that does not ask: "Is this still necessary or is it forbidden?", but simply, in the creativity of love, wants to live with Christ and for Christ and give his whole self to him, thus entering into the joy of bearing fruit. Let us also bear in mind that the Lord says: "I chose you and appointed you that you should go": this is the dynamism that dwells in Christ's love; to go, in other words not to remain alone for me, to see my perfection, to guarantee eternal beatification for me, but rather to forget myself, to go as Christ went, to go as God went from the immensity of his majesty to our poverty, to find fruit, to help us, to give us the possibility of bearing the true fruit of love. The fuller we are of this joy in having discovered God's Face, the more real will the enthusiasm of love in us be and it will bear fruit.

And finally, we come to the last words in this passage: "Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you": a brief catechesis on prayer that never ceases to surprise us. Twice in this chapter 15 the Lord says: "ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you", and he says it once more in chapter 16. And we want to say: "But no, Lord it is not true". There are so many good and deeply-felt prayers of mothers who pray for a dying child which are not heard, so many prayers that something good will happen and the Lord does not grant it. What does this promise mean? In chapter 16 the Lord offers us the key to understanding it: he tells us what he gives us, what all this is, *chara*, joy. If someone has found joy he has found all things and sees all things in the light of divine love. Like St Francis, who wrote the great poem on creation in a bleak situation, yet even there, close to the suffering Lord, he rediscovered the beauty of being, the goodness of God and composed this great poem.

It is also useful to remember at the same time some verses of Luke's Gospel, in which the Lord, in a parable, speaks of prayer, saying, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!". The Holy Spirit, in the Gospel according to Luke, is joy, in John's Gospel he is the same reality: joy is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is joy or, in other words from God we do not ask something small or great, from God we invoke the divine gift, God himself; this is the great gift that God gives us: God himself. In this regard we must learn to pray, to pray for the great reality, for the divine reality, so that God may give us himself, may give us his Spirit and thus we may respond to the demands of life and help others in their suffering. Of course he teaches us the "Our Father". We

can pray for many things. In all our needs we can pray: "Help me!". This is very human and God is human, as we have seen; therefore it is right to pray God also for the small things of our daily lives.

However, at the same time, prayer is a journey, I would say flight of stairs: we must learn more and more what it is that we can pray for and what we cannot pray for because it is an expression of our selfishness. I cannot pray for things that are harmful for others, I cannot pray for things that help my egoism, my pride. Thus prayer, in God's eyes, becomes a process of purification of our thoughts, of our desires. As the Lord says in the Parable of the Vine: we must be pruned, purified, every day; living with Christ, in Christ, abiding in Christ, is a process of purification and it is only in this process of slow purification, of liberation from ourselves and from the desire to have only ourselves, that the true journey of life lies and the path of joy unfolds.

As I have already said, all the Lord's words have a sacramental background. The fundamental background for the Parable of the Vine is Baptism: we are implanted in Christ; and the Eucharist: we are one loaf, one body, one blood, one life with Christ. Thus this process of purification also has a sacramental background: the sacrament of Penance, of Reconciliation, in which we accept this divine pedagogy which day by day, throughout our life, purifies us and increasingly makes us true members of his Body. In this way we can learn that God responds to our prayers, that he often responds with his goodness also to small prayers, but often too he corrects them, transforms them and guides them so that we may at last and really be branches of his Son, of the true vine, members of his Body.

Let us thank God for the greatness of his love, let us pray that he may help us to grow in his love and truly to abide in his love.