



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY**
*Clementine Hall
Friday, 25 November 2011*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am delighted to meet with you, members and consultants of the [Pontifical Council for the Laity](#), gathered together for the 25th Plenary Assembly. I greet in particular Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko and thank him for his kind words, as well as Bishop Josef Clemens, the Secretary. I extend a warm welcome to each one of you and especially to the lay faithful, men and women, who make up the Dicastery.

In the period since your last Plenary Assembly you have been involved in various initiatives, as His Eminence has mentioned. I too would like to recall the Congress for the Lay People of Asia and the World Youth Day in Madrid. They were very intense moments of faith and ecclesial life, also important with a view to the great ecclesial events that we shall be celebrating next year: the 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization and the inauguration of the Year of Faith.

The Congress for the Lay People of Asia was organized last year in Seoul, with the help of the Church in Korea, on the theme: “Proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia Today”. The immense Asian continent is home to different peoples, cultures and religions of ancient origin, yet so far the Christian message has reached only a small minority, who all too often — as Your Eminence said — practise their faith in a difficult context, sometimes even of real persecution.

The Congress has afforded the lay faithful, associations, movements and new communities that work in Asia the opportunity to strengthen their commitment and courage for the mission. These brothers and sisters of ours bear an admirable witness by their adherence to Christ, allowing us to

perceive that in Asia, thanks to their faith, vast scenarios of evangelization are unfolding for the Church in the third millennium.

I am pleased to note that the Pontifical Council for the Laity is organizing a similar Congress for the lay people of Africa, scheduled to take place in Cameroon next year. These continental meetings are invaluable for giving an impetus to the work of evangelization, for reinforcing unity and for making the bonds between particular Churches and the universal Church stronger and stronger.

I would also like to draw attention to the latest [World Youth Day in Madrid](#). The theme, as we know, was faith: “Rooted and Built Up in Jesus Christ, Firm in the Faith” (cf Col 2:7). And I was truly able to contemplate an immense multitude of young people who had gathered enthusiastically from all over the world in order to meet the Lord and to live universal brotherhood. An extraordinary cascade of light, joy and hope illuminated Madrid, and not only Madrid but also old Europe and the entire world, clearly repropounding the timeliness of the search for God. No one was able to remain indifferent, no one could think that the question of God was unimportant for the human being of today. The youth of the whole world are waiting anxiously to celebrate the World Days dedicated to them and I know that you are already working on the event scheduled to take place in Rio de Janeiro in 2013.

In this regard, it seems particularly important to have chosen this year to address the theme of God at the Plenary Assembly: “The Question of God Today”. We should never tire of proposing anew this question, of “starting all over again from God” to restore to the human person the totality of his/her dimensions, namely full dignity.

Indeed, a mindset that has continued to spread in our time, ruling out every reference to the transcendent, has proved incapable of understanding and preserving the human aspect. The generalization of this mindset has given rise to the crisis we are experiencing today, which is a crisis of meaning and values even before being an economic and social crisis. The human person who seeks to exist solely positivistically, within the calculable and the measurable, ends up suffocated.

In this setting the question of God is, in a certain sense, “the question of questions”. It takes us back to the fundamental human questions, to the aspiration for truth, happiness and freedom inherent in the human heart that seek fulfilment. People who reawaken within themselves the question about God open themselves to a trustworthy hope, which makes the arduous journey in the present time worthwhile (cf. [Spe Salvi](#), n. 1).

But how is it possible to reawaken the question of God in such a way that it becomes the fundamental question? Dear friends, if it is true that “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person” ([Deus Caritas Est](#), n. 1), the

question about God is revealed by the encounter with those who have the gift of faith, with those who have a vital relationship with the Lord. God comes to be known through men and women who know him: the path towards him passes concretely through those who have met him. Your role as faithful lay people is particularly important here.

As *Christifideles Laici* notes, this is your specific vocation: in the Church's mission "a particular place falls to the lay faithful, by reason of their 'secular character', obliging them, in their proper and irreplaceable way, to work towards the Christian animation of the temporal order" (n. 36).

You are called to bear a transparent witness to the importance of the question of God in every field of thought and action. In the family, at work, as well as in politics and in the economy, people of today need to see for themselves and to feel tangibly how with God, or without God everything changes.

However the challenge of a mindset that is closed to the transcendent also obliges Christians themselves to return with greater determination to the centrality of God. Efforts have sometimes been made to make the presence of Christians in social assistance, in politics or in the economy more incisive, and the soundness of their faith may not have been sufficiently taken into account, almost as if it were a given acquired once and for all.

In fact, Christians do not dwell on a far off planet, immune from the world's "diseases", but share in the upheavals, bewilderment and difficulties of their time. Hence it is no less urgent to repropose the question of God in the ecclesial fabric itself too. How often, in fact, although they have described themselves as Christian, God is not the central reference point in their way of thinking and acting or in their fundamental decisions of life. Thus the first response to the major challenge of our time lies in the profound conversion of our hearts, so that baptism, which has made us the light of the world and the salt of the earth, may truly transform us.

Dear friends, the Church's mission stands in need of the contribution of each and every one of her members, especially of the lay faithful. In the walks of life to which the Lord has called you, in living out your baptism may you be courageous witnesses to the God of Jesus Christ. For this I entrust you to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of all peoples, and I warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and to your dear ones. Many thanks.