



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE NEOCATECHUMENAL WAY

Paul VI Hall

Friday, 20 January 2012

[Video]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Again this year I have the joy of being able to meet and share with you this moment of sending out for the mission. I extend a special greeting to Kiko Argüello, Carmen Hernández and Fr Mario Pezzi, and an affectionate greeting to you all: priests, seminarians, families, formators and members of the Neocatechumenal Way. Your presence today is a visible testimony of your joyful commitment to live the faith in communion with the whole Church and with the Successor of Peter, and to be courageous heralds of the Gospel.

In the passage from St Matthew which we have heard, the Apostles receive a precise mandate from Jesus: “go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). Initially they had doubted, in their hearts there was still uncertainty, amazement at the event of the Resurrection. And it is Jesus himself, the Risen One — the Evangelist stresses — who comes close to them, makes them feel his presence, sends them out to teach all that he has communicated to them, giving them the certitude that accompanies every herald of Christ: “And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). They are words that resonate loudly in your heart. You have sung *Resurrexit*, which expresses faith in the Living One, in the One who, in a supreme act of love, triumphed over sin and death and gives to human beings, to us, the warmth of God’s love, the hope of being saved, a future of eternity.

In these decades of the Way’s life one of your firm commitments has been to proclaim the Risen Christ, to respond to his words with generosity, often giving up personal and material securities,

even leaving your own countries, facing new and not always easy situations. Bringing Christ to people and bringing people to Christ: it is this that enlivens every evangelizing action. You do it in a way that helps those who have already received Baptism to rediscover the beauty of the life of faith, the joy of being Christian. "Following Christ" demands the personal adventure of the quest for him, going with him, but always also entails emerging from the closure of the self, breaking out of the individualism that all too often characterizes the society of our time, to replace selfishness with the community of the new person in Jesus Christ. And this happens in a profound personal relationship with him, in listening to his word, in taking the way he has pointed out to us, but it also happens inseparably in believing with his Church, with the saints in whom the true face of the Bride of Christ makes itself known ever anew.

It is a commitment — as we know — that is not always easy. Sometimes you are present in places where a first proclamation of the Gospel is necessary, the *missio ad gentes*; often, instead, in areas which although they have known Christ have grown indifferent to faith: secularism has eclipsed the sense of God there and has clouded the Christian values. Here, may your commitment and your witness be like the leaven which, with patience, respecting the times, with a *sensus Ecclesiae*, causes the whole mass to rise. The Church has recognized in the Way a special gift which the Holy Spirit has given to our times and the approval of the Statutes and of the "Catechetical Directory" are a sign of it. I encourage you to offer your original contribution to the cause of the Gospel. Always seek in your valuable work to be in profound communion with the Apostolic See and with the Pastors of the particular Churches, in which you are inserted. The unity and harmony of the Ecclesial Body are an important witness to Christ and to his Gospel in the world in which we live.

Dear families, the Church thanks you; she needs you for the New Evangelization. The family is an important cell for the ecclesial community, where people are trained in human and Christian life. With great joy I see your sons and daughters, so many children who look to you, dear parents, to your example. About a hundred families are about to leave for 12 Missions *ad gentes*. I invite you not to be afraid: those who bring the Gospel are never alone. I greet with affection the priests and seminarians: love Christ and the Church, communicate the joy of having encountered him and the beauty of having given him everything. I also greet the itinerants, those in charge and all the communities of the Way. Continue to be generous with the Lord: he will not let you lack his comfort!

The Decree approving the celebrations listed in the "Catechetical Directory of the Neocatechumenal Way" has just been read. They are not strictly speaking liturgical but are part of the itinerary of growth in faith. It is another factor which shows you that the Church accompanies you with attention in a patient discernment which understands your richness but also looks at the communion and harmony of the whole *Corpus Ecclesiae*.

This fact affords me the opportunity for a brief thought on the value of the Liturgy. The Second

Vatican Council defined it as the exercise of the priestly office of Christ and the work of his body which is the Church (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 7). At first sight this might appear strange, because the work of Christ designates the *historical* redemptive actions of Christ, his Passion, death and Resurrection. In what sense, then, is the Liturgy a work of Christ? The Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus are not only historical events. They reach and penetrate history but transcend it and remain ever present in Christ's Heart. In the Church's liturgical action there is the active presence of the Risen Christ which makes the Paschal Mystery itself present and effective for us today, for our salvation. By this act of the gift of himself which is ever present in his Heart we are drawn and enabled to participate in this presence of the Paschal Mystery. This work of the Lord Jesus, which is the true content of the Liturgy, entering into the presence of the Paschal Mystery, is also a work of the Church which, since she is his Body, is a single subject with Christ — *Christus totus caput et corpus* — St Augustine says. In the celebration of the sacraments Christ immerses us in the Paschal Mystery to make us pass from death to life, from sin to new existence in Christ.

This applies very specially to the celebration of the Eucharist, which, as the culmination of Christian life, is also the hinge of its rediscovery, for which the Neocatechumenate strives. As your Statute state, "the Eucharist is essential to the Neocatechumenate, since this is a post-baptismal catechumenate lived in small communities" (art. 13 § 1). Precisely to encourage people who have drifted away from the Church or have not received an appropriate formation to draw close to the riches of sacrament life, the Neocatechumens may celebrate the Sunday Eucharist in the small community, after the first Vespers of Sunday, according to the dispositions of the diocesan bishop (cf. *Statute*, art. 13 § 2). However, every Eucharistic celebration is an action of the one Christ together with his one Church and is therefore essentially open to all who belong to his Church. This public character of the Blessed Eucharist is expressed in the fact that every celebration of Holy Mass is ultimately directed by the bishop as a member of the Episcopal College, responsible for a specific local Church (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 26). It is the task of the celebration in the small communities — regulated by the liturgical books that must be faithfully followed, with the details approved in the *Statute of the Way* — to help all who follow the Neocatechumenal itinerary to perceive the grace of being inserted in the saving mystery of Christ which makes possible a Christian witness that can assume radical features. At the same time, the gradual growth in faith of the individual and of the small community should foster their insertion in the life of the large ecclesial community, whose usual place is in the liturgical celebration of the parish, in which and for which it is implemented (cf. *Statute*, art. 6). Nevertheless in this process it is also important not to be separate from the parish community, precisely in the celebration of the Eucharist which is the true place of the unity of all, where the Lord embraces us in the different states of our spiritual maturity and unites us in the one bread that makes us one body (cf. 1 Cor 10:16f.).

Courage! The Lord does not fail to accompany you and I too assure you of my prayers and thank you for your many signs of closeness. I ask you also to remember me in your prayers. May the

Blessed Virgin Mary help you with her maternal gaze and may my Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all the members of the Way, sustain you. Many thanks!

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