



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO TEACHERS AND STUDENTS OF THE ALMO COLLEGIO CAPRANICA

Clementine Hall

Friday, 20 January 2012

*Your Eminence,
Your Excellency,
Dear Brothers,*

It always gives me joy to meet the community of the Almo Collegio Capranica which has been one of the seminaries of the Diocese of Rome for more than five centuries. I greet with affection all of you and of course, in particular, His Eminence Cardinal Martino and the Rector, Mons. Ermenegildo Manicardi. And I thank His Eminence for his courteous words. On the occasion of the Feast of St Agnes, Patroness of the College, I would like to offer you a few thoughts which her status suggests.

St Agnes is one of the famous Roman maidens who demonstrated the genuine beauty of faith in Christ and of friendship with him. Her double description as Virgin and Martyr refers to the totality of the dimensions of holiness that is also required of you by your Christian faith and by the special vocation to the priesthood with which the Lord has called you to bind yourselves to him.

Martyrdom — for St Agnes — meant generously and freely accepting to spend her young life totally and without reserve to ensure that the Gospel was proclaimed as the truth and beauty that illuminate existence. In Agnes' martyrdom, which she courageously embraced in the Stadium of Domitian, the beauty of belonging to Christ without hesitation and of entrusting ourselves to him shines out for ever.

Still today, for anyone strolling in Piazza Navona, the Saint's statue, high up on the pediment of the Church of Sant'Agnese in Agone, reminds us that this City of ours is also founded on friendship with Christ and on the witness to his Gospel borne by many of his sons and daughters.

The generous gift of themselves to him and for the good of their brethren is a basic component of Rome's spiritual features.

Agnes also sealed in martyrdom the other crucial element of her life, *virginity* for Christ and for the Church. Indeed, the conscious, free and mature choice of virginity, testifies to the wish to belong totally to Christ, and paves the way to the total gift of self in martyrdom. If martyrdom is a heroic final act, virginity is the result of a long friendship with Jesus, developed in constant listening to his word, in the dialogue of prayer, in the Eucharistic encounter.

While she was a young girl Agnes had learned that being disciples of the Lord means expressing love for him, staking one's whole life on him. Her dual status — Virgin and Martyr — reminds us that a credible witness to faith must be a person who lives for Christ, with Christ and in Christ, transforming his or her life in accordance with the loftiest requirements of giving freely.

The priest's formation also demands wholeness, completeness, the practice of asceticism, perseverance and heroic fidelity in all its constituent aspects; it must be based on a solid spiritual life enlivened by an intense relationship with God at a personal and community level, with special attention in liturgical celebrations and the reception of the sacraments. Priestly life calls for a growing yearning for holiness, a clear *sensus Ecclesiae* [sense of Church] and an openness to brotherhood without exclusion or partiality.

The priest's journey to holiness also depends upon his decision to work out, with God's help, his own knowledge and commitment, a true and sound personal culture which is the product of enthusiastic and constant study. Faith has a rational and intellectual dimension of its own which is essential to it. For a seminarian and for a young priest still grappling with academic studies, it is a matter of assimilating that synthesis of faith and reason which is proper to Christianity. The Word of God became flesh and the presbyter, a true priest of the Incarnate Word, must become, increasingly, a luminous and profound transparency of the eternal Word who was given to us.

Those who are also mature in their overall cultural formation can more effectively become teachers and animators of that adoration "in Spirit and truth" of which Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:23).

This adoration which is formed through listening to the Word of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit, is called, especially in the Liturgy, to become the "*rationabile obsequium*" of which the Apostle Paul speaks to us, a form of worship in which man himself, in his totality as a being endowed with reason, becomes adoration, a glorification of the living God, a worship that cannot be attained by conforming to this world, but by letting himself be transformed by Christ, renewing his way of thinking in order to discern the will of God, "what is good, acceptable and perfect (cf. Rom 12:1-2).

Dear students of the Capranica College, your commitment in the journey to holiness, with a solid cultural training, corresponds with the original intention of this Institute, founded 555 years ago by Cardinal Domenico Capranica. May you always have a profound sense of the history and tradition of the Church! The fact that you are in Rome is a gift that must make you particularly sensitive to the depth of Catholic tradition. You already feel this tangibly in the history of the building that hosts you. In addition, you are living these years of formation especially close to the Successor of Peter: this enables you to perceive with special clarity the Church's universal dimension and the desire for the Gospel to reach all peoples.

Here you have the possibility of broadening your horizons with international experiences; here, especially, you breathe catholicity. Make the most of what you are offered for the future service of the Diocese of Rome or of the Dioceses you come from! From the friendship that will arise from community life, learn to recognize the diverse situations of the nations and Churches in the world so as to form a catholic vision. Prepare yourselves to be close to every person you meet, letting no culture be a barrier to the Word of life of which you are heralds also with your own lives.

Dear friends, the Church has great expectations of young priests in the work of evangelization and of the New Evangelization. I encourage you so that in your daily labour, rooted in the beauty of the authentic Tradition and deeply united with Christ, you may be able to bring it to your communities with truth and joy.

With the intercession of the Virgin and Martyr, Agnes, and of Mary Most Holy, Star of Evangelization, may your work to enhance the fruitfulness of your ministry. I warmly impart to you and to your loved ones the Apostolic Blessing. Many thanks.