



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MILAN
AND 7th WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES
(1-3 JUNE 2012)

CELEBRATION OF MID-MORNING PRAY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

Milan's Cathedral
Saturday, 2 June 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are gathered in prayer, responding to the invitation of the Ambrosian Hymn for the Hour of Terce. “It is the third hour. The wounded Jesus mounts the Cross”. This is a clear reference to Jesus’ loving obedience to the Father’s will. The Paschal Mystery has given rise to a new season: the death and Resurrection of Christ recreate innocence in humanity and elicit joy. In fact, the hymn continues: “From this the era of salvation begins — *Hinc iam beata tempora coepere Christi gratia*”.

We are gathered in the Cathedral Basilica, in this Cathedral, which is truly the heart of Milan. From here our thoughts extend to the immense Archdiocese of Milan which down the centuries and also in recent times has given the Church men outstanding in holiness of life and in their ministry, like St Ambrose and St Charles, Popes of uncommon stature, such as [Pius XI](#) and the Servant of God [Paul VI](#), as well as the Blesseds, Cardinal Andrea Carlo Ferrari and Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster.

I am very pleased to spend a little time with you! I address an affectionate thought of greeting to you all and to each one in particular, and I would like to reach out in a special way to those who are ill or very elderly. I greet with warm cordiality Cardinal Angelo Scola, your Archbishop, and thank him for his kind words. I greet with affection your Pastors emeritus, Cardinal Carlo Maria

Martini and Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, together with the other Cardinals and Bishops present.

At this moment we are living the mystery of the Church in its loftiest expression, liturgical prayer. Our lips, our hearts and our minds, in the prayer of the Church, express the needs and longings of all humanity. In the words of Psalm 119 [118] we have implored the Lord on behalf of all men and women, "Incline my heart to your testimonies... Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord". The daily prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours is an essential task of the ordained ministry in the Church. Further, through the Divine Office, which prolongs the central mystery of the Eucharist throughout the day, priests are in a special way united to the Lord Jesus, alive and active in time. The Priesthood: what a precious gift!

Dear Seminarians, you are preparing yourselves to receive it, learn how to savour it from this moment and live with commitment your precious time at the Seminary. During the Ordinations in 1958 Archbishop Montini said in this very Cathedral: "priestly life begins: a poem, a drama, a new mystery... a source of perpetual meditation... ever the object of discovery and wonder. [The priesthood]", he said, "is always newness and beauty for those who dedicate loving thought to it... it is a recognition of God's work in us" (*Homily for the Ordination of 46 priests*, 21 June 1958).

If Christ, to build his Church, puts himself into the hands of the priest, the priest in his turn must entrust himself to Christ without reserve; love for the Lord Jesus is the soul of the priestly ministry and the reason for it, just as it was the premise for him to assign to Peter the mission to feed his flock: "Simon..., do you love me more than these?".... Feed my lambs (Jn 21:15)".

The Second Vatican Council recalled that Christ "remains always the principle and source of the unity of their lives. Therefore priests will be the unity of their lives by joining themselves with Christ in the recognition of the Father's will and in the gift of themselves to the flock entrusted to them. In this way, by adopting the role of the Good Shepherd they will find in the practice of pastoral charity itself the bond of priestly perfection which will reduce to unity their life and activity" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 14).

The Council spoke of this very matter: on how to find in the different occupations, from one hour to the next, unity of life, the unity of being a priest, precisely in this source of profound friendship with Jesus, of inwardly being with him. And there is no opposition between the personal good of the priest and his mission. Indeed, pastoral charity is a unifying element of life that starts in an ever closer relationship with Christ in prayer so that priests may live the total gift of themselves to the flock in such a way that the People of God grow in communion with God and are a manifestation of the communion of the Blessed Trinity. Our every action, in fact, aims to lead the faithful to union with the Lord and thereby make ecclesial communion increase for the salvation of the world.

The three things: personal union with God, the good of the Church and the good of humanity in its totality, are not different or opposite but faith lived in concert.

A luminous sign of this pastoral charity and of an undivided heart are priestly celibacy and consecrated virginity. We have sung in St Ambrose's hymn: "If the Son of God is born in you, keep your life blameless". "To welcome Christ – *Christum suscipere*" – is a motif that recurs frequently in the holy Bishop of Milan's preaching. I quote a passage from his Commentary on St Luke "He who welcomes Christ into the intimacy of his house will be satiated with the greatest joys" (*Expos. Evangelii Secundum Lucam*, v, 16). The Lord Jesus was his great lode star, the principal subject of his thinking and preaching, and above all the term for a living and confidant love. Without any doubt, love for Jesus is equally valid for all Christians, but for the celibate priest and for those who have responded to the vocation to the consecrated life it acquires special significance. In order to repeat the "yes" to God's will every day the source and model is found only and always in Christ. St Ambrose who preached and fostered virginity in the Church with surprising intensity, and who in addition promoted the dignity of women, would ask himself "How can we retain Christ?". He would answer the question cited, "Not with knotted ropes, but with the bonds of love and with the affection of the soul" (*De Virginitate*, 13, 77). And in a famous sermon to virgins he said: "Christ is everything for us: if you desire to heal your wounds, he is the doctor; if you are parched by the heat of fever, he is a fountain; if you are oppressed by guilt, he is justice; if you have need of help, he is strength; if you are afraid of death, he is life; if you wish for paradise, he is the road; if you flee from darkness, he is light; if you look for food, he is nourishment" (*ibid.*, 16, 99).

Dear Consecrated Brothers and Sisters, I thank you for your testimony and encourage you: look to the future with trust, relying on the fidelity of God that will never be lacking, and the power of his grace that can work ever new marvels, also in and with us. The antiphons of this Saturday's Psalmody have in fact led us to contemplate the mystery of the Virgin Mary. Indeed in her we can recognize the "kind of poor and virginal life which Christ the Lord chose for himself and which his Virgin Mother embraced" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 46), a life in full obedience to God's will.

Once again the Hymn has reminded us of Jesus' words on the Cross: "From the glory of the Cross, Jesus speaks to the Virgin: "woman, behold, your son!"; and to John, "Behold, your mother!". Mary, Mother of Christ, extends and prolongs her divine motherhood in us too, so that the ministry of the word and of the sacraments, the life of contemplation and apostolic work in its many forms may persevere, unflagging and courageous, in service to God and in building up his Church.

At this moment I would like to thank God for the array of Milanese priests and men and women religious who have spent their energy in service to the Gospel, sometimes even going so far as to make the supreme sacrifice of life. Some of them have been held up for the worship and imitation of the faithful even in recent times: the Blessed priests Luigi Talamoni, Luigi Biraghi, Luigi Monza, Carlo Gnocchi and Serafino Morazzone; the Blessed men religious Giovanni Mazzucconi, Luigi Monti and Clemente Vismara, and the Blessed women religious, Maria Anna Sala and Enrichetta Alfieri.

Through their common intercession let us trustingly ask the Giver of every gift to make the ministry of priests ever fruitful and to strengthen the witness of consecrated men and women in order to show the world the beauty of the gift of self to Christ and to the Church and to renew Christian families in accordance with God's plan so that they may be places of grace and holiness, a fertile terrain for vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life. Amen. Many thanks.