



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO VIGEVANO AND PAVIA (ITALY)

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Piazza Ducale, Vigevano

Saturday, 21 April 2007

"Cast the net... and you will find some" (Jn 21: 6).

We have heard Jesus' words once again in the Gospel passage just proclaimed. They are part of the account of the third appearance of the Risen One to the disciples, on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias, which tells of the miraculous catch.

After the "scandal" of the Cross, the disciples had returned to their land and their work as fishermen, to the activities they had carried out before they met Jesus. They had returned to their previous life and this suggests the atmosphere of dispersion and bewilderment that prevailed in their communities (cf. Mk 14: 27; Mt 26: 31).

It was difficult for the disciples to understand what had happened. But while everything seemed to have ended, once again, as on the road to Emmaus, it was Jesus who came to his friends. This time he met them by the lake, a place that evokes the trials and tribulations of life; he met them when day was breaking, after a futile night-long effort.

Their nets were empty. In a certain way, this seems to sum up their experience with Jesus: they had known him, they had been beside him, and he had promised them so many things. Nevertheless, they found themselves with empty nets and no fish.

Yet, here at dawn Jesus comes to meet them, even though they do not immediately recognize him

(cf. v. 4).

"Daybreak" in the Bible often points to God's extraordinary interventions. In the Book of Exodus, for example, it was "in the morning watch" that the Lord intervened "in the pillar of fire and of cloud" to save his people in the flight to Egypt (cf. Ex 14: 24). And again it was dawn when Mary Magdalene and the other women who had hastened to the tomb met the Risen Lord.

In the Gospel passage on which we are meditating, night had also passed and the Lord said to the disciples, exhausted by their efforts and disappointed at having caught no fish: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some" (v. 6).

Fish usually fall into the net at night when it is dark and not in the morning, by which time the water is transparent. Yet the disciples trusted Jesus and the result was a miraculously abundant catch with such a quantity of fish that they were unable to haul in the net (cf. v. 6).

At this point John, enlightened by love, turned to Peter and said: "It is the Lord!" (v. 7). The perceptive look of the disciple whom Jesus loved - an image of the believer - recognized the Teacher present on the lake shore. "It is the Lord!": his spontaneous profession of faith is also an invitation to us to proclaim that the Risen Christ is the Lord of our life.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Church in Vigevano repeat this evening with John's enthusiasm: Jesus Christ "is the Lord!". And may your diocesan Community be able to listen to the Lord, who through my words repeats to you: "Cast the net, Church of Vigevano, and you will find some!".

Indeed, I have come among you above all to encourage you to be daring witnesses of Christ. It is trusting adherence to his Word that will make your pastoral efforts fruitful. When work in the Lord's vineyard seems to have been in vain like the nightlong efforts of the Apostles, you must never forget that Jesus can reverse everything in an instant.

The Gospel passage we have heard reminds us, on the one hand, that we must dedicate ourselves to pastoral activities as if the result depended totally on our own efforts. Yet, on the other, it makes us realize that the true success of our mission is totally a gift of Grace.

In the mysterious plans of his wisdom, God knows when the time is to intervene.

Therefore, just as docile adherence to the Lord's words ensured that the disciples' net would be filled, so in every age, even our own, the Spirit can make the Church's mission in the world effective.

Dear brothers and sisters, here I am in your midst with great joy: I thank you and cordially greet

you all. I greet you as representatives of the People of God gathered in this particular Church whose spiritual centre is the Cathedral, outside of which we are celebrating the Eucharist.

I greet with affection Bishop Claudio Baggini, your Pastor, and I thank him for his cordial words at the beginning of the Celebration; with him, I greet the Metropolitan, Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, the Lombard Bishops and the other Prelates. I address a special, warm greeting to the priests, complimenting them on the generosity with which they carry out their ecclesial service, oblivious to effort or hardship.

I extend my greeting to the consecrated persons, the pastoral workers and all the lay faithful, whose precious collaboration is indispensable for the life of the various communities. An affectionate thought for the seminarians who are the hope of the Diocese cannot be lacking. I then offer a respectful greeting to the civil Authorities, to whom I am grateful for the significant message of courtesy that their presence expresses.

Lastly, my thoughts go to the faithful gathered in the various parishes to follow this occasion on television, and to all who are taking part in this Eucharistic assembly in the streets and squares adjacent to this evocative Piazza Ducale, set off by the artistic facade of the Cathedral in the background. It was devised by the distinguished Bishop Juan Caramuel of Vigevano, a famous European scientist, the fourth centenary of whose birth you celebrated solemnly a few months ago. With its unusual architecture, the facade harmoniously combines the temple on the square and the castle with its towers, thus symbolizing the wonderful synthesis of a tradition interwoven with the two essential dimensions of your City: civil and religious.

"Cast your net... and you will find some!" (Jn 21: 6). Dear Ecclesial Community of Vigevano, what does Christ's invitation "to cast the net" really mean?

In the first place, it means, as it meant for the disciples, believing in him and trusting his word. Jesus asks you too, like them, to follow him with sincere and steadfast faith.

Listen to his words, therefore, and meditate on them every day. For you, this docile listening is implemented in practice in the decisions of your last Diocesan Synod, which concluded in 1999. At the end of that Synod, beloved John Paul II, who met you at a [special Audience on 17 April 1999](#), exhorted you: "Put out into the deep; do not be afraid to venture on to the high seas!" ([Address to Pilgrims from the Diocese of Vigevano](#), 17 April 1999; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 12 May, p. 8).

May the missionary enthusiasm awakened in your diocesan Community by that providential Meeting, inspired and desired by the late Bishop Giovanni Locatelli who ardently hoped that the Pope would visit Vigevano, never be extinguished in your hearts.

As you follow the fundamental guidelines of the Synod and your current Pastor's directives, stay united with one another and be open to the vast horizons of evangelization.

May these words of the Lord give you constant guidance: "All men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13: 35). Bear one another's burdens; sharing, collaborating and feeling co-responsible for one another is the spirit that must constantly motivate your Community. This style of communion demands the contribution of all: the Bishop and priests, the men and women religious, the lay faithful, the associations and the various groups committed to the apostolate.

The individual parishes, like the pieces of a mosaic in full harmony with one another, will form a lively particular Church, organically inserted into the entire People of God. Associations, communities and lay groups can make an indispensable contribution to evangelization, both for formation and for spiritual, charitable, social and cultural animation, always working in harmony with the diocesan pastoral programme and obeying the Bishop's instructions.

Next, I encourage you to continue to care for youth, both those you "know" and those you "do not know".

In this perspective, do not tire of promoting in a concrete and far-reaching way the pastoral care of vocations, which helps young people in search of a true meaning for their lives.

And lastly, what can be said of the family? It is the structural element of social life, which is why the fabric of the Ecclesial Community *[after warm applause]* - and I see that we agree - and civil society itself can only be renewed by working on behalf of families.

Your land is rich in religious traditions, spiritual leaven and a hardworking Christian life. Down the centuries, faith has forged thought, art and culture, fostering solidarity and respect for human dignity.

The exemplary figures of priests and laypeople are a particularly eloquent expression of your rich Christian patrimony; with a life programme rooted in the Gospel and the Church's teaching, especially during the social upheavals at the end of the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th, they witnessed to authentic Gospel values as an effective support for a free and just coexistence, paying special attention to those in greatest need.

This shining spiritual legacy, rediscovered and nourished, can only be a secure reference point for effective service to the people of our time and for a journey of civilization and authentic progress. "Cast the net... and you will find some!". Jesus' command was docilely accepted by the saints and their lives were marked by the miracle of an abundant spiritual catch. I am thinking in a special way of your heavenly Patrons: St Ambrose, St Charles Borromeo, Bl. Matteo Carreri.

I am also thinking of two distinguished sons of this area, the causes of whose beatification are underway: Venerable Francesco Pianzola, a priest motivated by an ardent evangelical spirit who was able to respond to the forms of spiritual poverty of his time with a courageous missionary approach, attentive to those who were most distant and particularly to the young; and the Servant of God Teresio Olivelli, a layman of Catholic Action who died in the concentration camp at Hersbruck when he was only 29 years old, a sacrificial victim of brutal violence which he tenaciously countered with the ardour of love.

These two exceptional figures of faithful disciples of Christ are an eloquent sign of the wonders the Lord has worked in the Church of Vigevano. Mirror these models, who make the action of Grace manifest and are an encouragement to the People of God to follow Christ on the demanding path of holiness.

Dear brothers and sisters of the Diocese of Vigevano, my thoughts lastly go to the Mother of God, whom you venerate under the title *Madonna della Bozzola*. I entrust all your Communities to her so that they may obtain a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit on this beloved Diocese.

The exhausting yet sterile nocturnal fishing of the disciples is a perennial warning for the Church of all ages: alone, without Jesus, we can do nothing! In apostolic tasks our own forces do not suffice; even if our work is well organized it proves ineffective without divine Grace.

Let us pray together that your diocesan Community will be able to receive Christ's mandate joyfully and with renewed generosity be ready to "cast" its nets. It will then certainly experience a miraculous catch, a sign of the dynamic power of the Word and Presence of the Lord, who ceaselessly confers upon his People a "renewed youth of the Spirit" (*Collect*).

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