



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO LORETO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE AGORÀ
OF ITALIAN YOUTH

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Plain of Montorso
Sunday, 2 September 2007*

After [last night's Vigil](#), our Meeting in Loreto is now coming to an end around the altar with the solemn Eucharistic celebration. Once again, my most cordial greeting to you all. I extend a special greeting to the Bishops and I thank Archbishop Angelo Bagnasco who has expressed your common sentiments. I greet the Archbishop of Loreto who has welcomed us with affection and kindness. I greet the priests, the men and women religious and all those who have carefully prepared this important event of faith. I offer a respectful greeting to the Civil and Military Authorities present, with a particular remembrance for Hon. Mr Francesco Rutelli, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers.

This is truly a day of grace! The Readings we have just heard help us to understand the marvellous work the Lord has done in bringing so many of us here to Loreto, to meet in a joyful atmosphere of prayer and festivity. In a certain sense, our gathering at the Virgin's Shrine fulfils the words of the Letter to the Hebrews: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God". Celebrating the Eucharist in the shadow of the Holy House, we too come to the "festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven". Thus, we can experience the joy of having come "to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect". With Mary, Mother of the Redeemer and our Mother, let us above all go to meet

"the Mediator of a New Covenant", Our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Heb 12: 22-24). The Heavenly Father, who in many and various ways spoke to our fathers (cf. Heb 1: 1), offering his Covenant and often encountering resistance and rejection, desired in the fullness of time to make a new, definitive and irrevocable agreement with human beings, sealing it with the Blood of his Only-Begotten Son, who died and rose for the salvation of all humanity. Jesus Christ, God made man, took on our own flesh in Mary, participated in our life and chose to share in our history. To realize his Covenant God sought a young heart and he found it in Mary, "a young woman".

God also seeks young people today. He seeks young people with great hearts who can make room for him in their lives to be protagonists of the New Covenant. To accept a proposal as fascinating as the one Jesus offers us, to make the covenant with him, it is necessary to be youthful within, to be capable of letting oneself be called into question by his newness, to set out with him on new roads. Jesus has a fondness for young people, as the conversation with the rich young man clearly shows (cf. Mt 19: 16-22; Mk 10: 17-22); he respects their freedom but never tires of proposing loftier goals for life to them: the newness of the Gospel and the beauty of holy behaviour. Following her Lord's example, the Church continues to show the same attention. This is why, dear young people, she looks at you with immense affection, she is close to you in moments of joy and festivity, in trials and in loss. She sustains you with the gifts of sacramental grace and accompanies you in the discernment of your vocation. Dear young people, let yourselves be involved in the new life that flows from the encounter with Christ and you will be able to be apostles of his peace in your families, among your friends, within your Ecclesial Communities and in the various milieus in which you live and work.

But what is it that makes people "young" in the Gospel sense? Our Meeting, which is taking place in the shadow of a Marian Shrine, invites us to look to Our Lady. Let us therefore ask ourselves: How did Mary spend her youth? Why was it that in her the impossible became possible? She herself reveals it to us in the Canticle of the Magnificat. God "regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (Lk 1: 48a). It was Mary's humility that God appreciated more than anything else in her. And it is precisely of humility that the other two Readings of today's liturgy speak to us. Is it not a happy coincidence that this message is addressed to us exactly here in Loreto? Here, we think spontaneously of the Holy House of Nazareth, which is the Shrine of humility: the humility of God who took flesh, who made himself small, and the humility of Mary who welcomed him into her womb; the humility of the Creator and the humility of the creature. Jesus, Son of God and Son of man, was born from this encounter of humility. "The greater you are, the more you humble yourself, so you will find favour in the sight of the Lord. For great is the might of the Lord" (3: 18-20) says the passage in Sirach; and in the Gospel, after the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus concludes: "Every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 14: 11). Today, this perspective mentioned in the Scriptures appears especially provocative to the culture and sensitivity of contemporary man. The humble person is perceived as someone who gives up, someone defeated, someone who has nothing to say to the world. Instead, this is the principal way, and not only because humility is a great human virtue but

because, in the first place, it represents God's own way of acting. It was the way chosen by Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, who "being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2: 8).

Dear young people, I seem to perceive in these words of God about humility an important message which is especially current for you who want to follow Christ and belong to his Church. This is the message: do not follow the way of pride but rather that of humility. Go against the tide: do not listen to the interested and persuasive voices that today are peddling on many sides models of life marked by arrogance and violence, by oppression and success at any cost, by appearances and by having at the expense of being. How many messages, which reach you especially through the mass media, are targeting you! Be alert! Be critical! Do not follow the wave produced by this powerful, persuasive action. Do not be afraid, dear friends, to prefer the "alternative" routes pointed out by true love: a modest and sound lifestyle; sincere and pure emotional relationships; honest commitment in studies and work; deep concern for the common good. Do not be afraid of seeming different and being criticized for what might seem to be losing or out of fashion; your peers but adults too, especially those who seem more distant from the mindset and values of the Gospel, are crying out to see someone who dares to live according to the fullness of humanity revealed by Jesus Christ.

Therefore, dear friends, the way of humility is not the way of renunciation but that of courage. It is not the result of a defeat but the result of a victory of love over selfishness and of grace over sin. In following Christ and imitating Mary, we must have the courage of humility; we must entrust ourselves humbly to the Lord, because only in this way will we be able to become docile instruments in his hands and allow him to do great things in us. The Lord worked great miracles in Mary and in the Saints! I am thinking, for example, of Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena, Patrons of Italy. I am thinking also of splendid young people like St Gemma Galgani, St Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin, St Louis Gonzaga, St Dominic Savio, St Maria Goretti, born not far from here, and the Blesseds, Piergiorgio Frassati and Alberto Marvelli. And I am also thinking of numerous young men and women who belong to the ranks of the "anonymous" Saints, but who are not anonymous to God. For him, every individual person is unique, with his or her own name and face. All, and you know it, are called to be Saints!

As you see, dear young people, the humility the Lord has taught us and to which the Saints have borne witness, each according to the originality of his or her own vocation, is quite different from a renunciatory way of life. Let us look above all at Mary. At her school, we too, like her, can experience that "yes" of God to humanity from which flow all the "yesses" of our life. It is true, the challenges you must face are many and important. The first however, is always that of following Christ to the very end without reservations and compromises. And following Christ means feeling oneself a living part of his body which is the Church. One cannot call oneself a disciple of Jesus if one does not love and obey his Church. The Church is our family in which love for the Lord and for our brothers and sisters, especially through participation in the Eucharist, enables us to

experience the joy of already having a foretaste, now, of the future life that will be totally illuminated by Love. May our daily commitment be to live here below as though we were already in Heaven above.

Thus, feeling oneself as Church is a vocation to holiness for all; it is a daily commitment to build communion and unity, overcoming all resistance and rising above every incomprehension. In the Church we learn to love, teaching ourselves to accept our neighbour freely, to show caring attention to those in difficulty, to the poor and to the lowliest. The fundamental motivation that unites believers in Christ is not success but goodness, a goodness that is all the more authentic the more it is shared, and which does not primarily consist in having or in being powerful, but in being. In this way one builds the city of God with human beings, a city which at the same time grows on earth and comes down from Heaven because it develops in the encounter and collaboration between people and God (cf. Rv 21: 2-3).

Following Christ, dear young people, also entails the constant effort to make one's own contribution to building a society that is more just and sober and in which all may enjoy the goods of the earth.

I know that many of you are generously dedicated to witnessing to your faith in the various social environments, active as volunteers and working to promote the common good, peace and justice in every community. There is no doubt that one of the fields in which it seems urgent to take action is that of safeguarding creation. The future of the planet is entrusted to the new generations, in which there are evident signs of a development that has not always been able to protect the delicate balances of nature. Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions that can recreate a strong alliance between humankind and the earth. A decisive "yes" is needed to protect creation and also a strong commitment to invert those trends which risk leading to irreversibly degrading situations. I therefore appreciated the Italian Church's initiative to encourage sensitivity to the problems of safeguarding creation by establishing a National Day, which occurs precisely on 1 September. This year attention is focused above all on *water*, a very precious good which, if it is not shared fairly and peacefully, will unfortunately become a cause of harsh tensions and bitter conflicts.

Dear young friends, after listening to your reflections yesterday evening and last night, letting myself be guided by God's Word, I now want to entrust to you my considerations which are intended as a paternal encouragement to follow Christ in order to be witnesses of his hope and love. For my part, I will continue to be beside you with my prayers and affection, so that you may persevere enthusiastically on the journey of the *Agora*, this unique triennial journey of listening, dialogue and mission. Today, concluding the first year with this wonderful Meeting, I cannot fail to invite you to look ahead already to the great event of [World Youth Day](#) that will be held in July next year in Sydney. I ask you to prepare yourselves for this important manifestation of youthful faith by meditating on the Message which examines in depth the theme of the Holy Spirit, to live together a new springtime of the Spirit. Therefore, I am expecting many of you even in Australia, at the end of your second year of the *Agora*. Lastly, let us turn our gaze, our eyes, once again to Mary, model of

humility and courage. Virgin of Nazareth, help us to be docile to the work of the Holy Spirit, as you were; help us to become ever more holy, disciples in love with your Son Jesus; sustain and guide these young people so that they may be joyful and tireless missionaries of the Gospel among their peers in every corner of Italy. Amen!

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