



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO AREZZO, LA VERNA AND SANSEPOLCRO

(MAY 13, 2012)

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

"Il Prato" Park, Arezzo

Sunday, 13 May 2012

[Video]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a great joy for me to be able to break the Bread of the Word of God and of the Eucharist with you. I extend my cordial greetings to you all and I thank you for your warm welcome! I greet your Pastor, Archbishop Riccardo Fontana, whom I thank for his kind words of welcome, the other Bishops, priests, men and women religious and the representatives of Ecclesial Associations and Movements. A respectful greeting goes to the Mayor, Mr Giuseppe Fanfani, grateful for his greeting, to Senator Mario Monti, Prime Minister of Italy, and to the other civil and military Authorities. A special thank you to all those who have generously cooperated to make my Pastoral Visit a success.

Today I am welcomed by an ancient Church: expert in relations and well-deserving in her commitment to building through the centuries a city of man in the image of the City of God. In the land of Tuscany, the community of Arezzo has distinguished itself many times throughout history by its sense of freedom and its capacity for dialogue among different social components. Coming among you for the first time, my hope is that this City may always understand how to make the most of this precious legacy.

In past centuries, the Church in Arezzo has been enriched and enlivened by many expressions of the Christian faith, among which the highest is that of the Saints. I am thinking especially of St

Donatus, your Patron, whose witness of life, which fascinated the Christianity of Medieval times, is still relevant. He was a fearless evangelist, so that all might be liberated from pagan customs and rediscover in the Word of God the strength to affirm the dignity of every person and the true meaning of freedom. Through his preaching, as Bishop he led his people back to unity through prayer and the Eucharist. The chalice was broken and then pieced back together by St Donatus, of whom Gregory the Great speaks (cf. *Dialogues* i, 7, 3). It is the image of a work of peace carried out by the Church within society, for the common good. Such was recorded for you by St Peter Damian and with him the great Camaldolese tradition of Casentino which for a thousand years, has offered its spiritual wealth to this diocesan Church and to the universal Church.

In your Cathedral Pope Bl. Gregory X is buried almost as if to show in different times and cultures the continuity of service that the Church of Christ wishes to render to the world. He, sustained by the light of the young Mendicant Orders, by theologians and Saints like St Thomas Aquinas and St Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, had to confront the great problems of his time: reform of the Church; reconciliation of the schism with the Christian East, which he attempted to bring about at the Council of Lyons; concern for the Holy Land; peace and relations among peoples. He was the first in the West to have an exchange of ambassadors with Kublai Khan of China.

Dear friends, the First Reading presents us with an important moment which manifests the universality of the Christian Message: in the house of Cornelius St Peter baptizes the first pagans. In the Old Testament, God wanted the blessing of Hebrew people not to be exclusive but extended to all nations. Ever since the call of Abraham he had said: “[B]y you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (Gen 12:3). Thus Peter, inspired from on High, understood that “God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35). Peter’s gesture becomes an image of the Church open to all of humanity. Following the great tradition of your Church and of your Communities, may you be genuine witnesses of God’s love for men!

But how can we, in our weakness, carry this love? St John, in the Second Reading, tells us emphatically that liberation from sin and from its consequences does not come about by our own initiative, but of God’s. It was not we who loved him but he who loved us and who took upon himself our sin and washed it away with the blood of Christ. God loved us first and wants us to enter into his communion of love, to collaborate in his work of redemption.

In the Gospel passage the invitation of the Lord resonates: “I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (Jn 15:16). It is a message meant in a specific way for the Apostles but, in a broad sense, regards all the disciples of Jesus. The whole Church, all of us are sent out into the world to spread the Gospel Message and the good news of salvation. But it is always God’s initiative; he calls us to various ministries, so that each one plays a proper role in the common good. He calls us to the ministerial priesthood, to the consecrated life, to married life, to working in the world: all are asked to respond generously to the Lord, sustained

by his Word which comforts us: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (*ibid.*).

Dear friends, I am aware of your Church’s commitment to promoting Christian life. Be a leaven in society, be present as Christians, be active and consistent. With its centuries-old history, the City of Arezzo embodies significant expressions of culture and values. Among the treasures of your tradition, there is the proud nature of Christian identity, witnessed through many signs and rooted in devotion like the one to Our Lady of Consolation. This land was the birthplace of great Renaissance figures, from Petrarch to Vasari, and played an active role in affirming that concept of man which left its mark on Europe’s history, drawing strength from Christian values. In recent times too, the ideal heritage of your city has been expressed by some of its most distinguished figures through university research and in other institutions where they have elaborated the very concept of *civitas*, realized in terms of the Christian ideal among people of our time. Within the context of the Church in Italy, committed to education in this decade, we must ask — especially in this Region where the Renaissance was born — what vision of man are we proposing to the new generations? The Word of God, that we have heard, is a powerful invitation to live God’s love for everyone, and, among its distinctive values, the culture of this land includes solidarity, attention to the weakest, respect for the dignity of each person. Your capacity to welcome those who have come here recently in search of freedom and work, is well known. To show solidarity with the poor is to recognize the plan of God the Creator, who made us all one single family.

Of course, your Province has also been severely hit by the economic crisis. The complexity of the problems makes it difficult to find quick and effective solutions to emerge from the present situation which especially affects the underprivileged and greatly worries young people. Since far-off times, attention to others has motivated the Church to show concrete signs of solidarity with those in need, sharing resources, promoting simpler lifestyles, going against an ephemeral culture which has disappointed many and brought about a profound spiritual crisis. May this diocesan Church, be enriched by the shining witness of the *Poverello* of Assisi, continue to be caring and attentive towards those in need, and may it its instruction succeed in overcoming the purely materialistic ideologies that often mark our age and end up clouding our sense of solidarity and charity.

Witnessing to the love of God by paying attention to the weakest is tied to the defence of human life, from its conception to its natural end. In your Region, ensuring everyone dignity, health and fundamental rights, is justly considered an indispensable good. The defence of the family, through a just legislation able to protect the underprivileged, is always an important factor to ensure a strong social fabric and offers hope for the future. Just as in the Middle Ages, the Statutes of your cities became instruments which ensured inalienable rights to many, may they continue that task today, promoting a City with an ever more human face. The Church offers her contribution to this task so that the love of God may always be accompanied by love of neighbour.

Dear brothers and sisters, continue serving God and man according to Jesus’ teaching, the

shining example of your Saints and the tradition of your people. May the maternal protection of Our Lady of Consolation, whom you love and venerate, accompany and sustain you in this task. Amen.

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