



The Holy See

MEETING WITH DIOCESAN CLERGY OF AOSTA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Parish Church at Introd (Aosta Valley)

Monday, 25 July 2005

Your Excellency,

Dear Brothers,

I would first like to express my joy and gratitude for this opportunity to meet you. As Pope, one risks being somewhat distant from real, everyday life and especially from the priests who work on the front line in so many parishes in this very Valley, and now, as His Excellency said, with the lack of vocations, also in particularly demanding conditions of physical commitment.

It is therefore a grace for me to be able to meet the priests and presbyterate of this Valley in this beautiful church. And I would like to say "thank you" for coming; for you too, it is the vacation period.

To see you gathered together and thus to see myself united with you, being close to the priests who work day after day for the Lord as sowers of the Word, is a comfort and joy to me.

Last week, two or three times, it seems to me, we heard this Parable of the Sower, which was formerly a parable of consolation in a situation different from ours but in a certain sense also similar.

The Lord's work had begun with great enthusiasm. The sick were visibly cured, everyone listened joyfully to the statement: "The Kingdom of God is at hand". It really seemed that the changing of the world and the coming of the Kingdom of God would be approaching; that at last, the sorrow of the People of God would be changed into joy. People were expecting a messenger of God whom

they supposed would take the helm of history in his hand. But they then saw that the sick were indeed cured, devils were expelled, the Gospel was proclaimed, but the world stayed as it was. Nothing changed. The Romans still dominated it. Life was difficult every day, despite these signs, these beautiful words. Thus, their enthusiasm was extinguished, and in the end, as we know from the sixth chapter of John, disciples also abandoned this Preacher who was preaching but did not change the world.

"What is this message? What does this Prophet of God bring?", everyone finally wondered. The Lord talks of the sower who sowed in the field of the world and the seed seemed like his Word, like those healings, a really tiny thing in comparison with historical and political reality. Just as the seed is tiny and can be ignored, so can the Word.

Yet, he says, the future is present in the seed because the seed carries within it the bread of the future, the life of the future. The seed appears to be almost nothing, yet the seed is the presence of the future, it is a promise already present today. And so, with this parable, he is saying: "We are living in the period of the sowing, the Word of God seems but a word, almost nothing. But take heart, this Word carries life within it! And it bears fruit!". The Parable also says that much of the seed did not bear fruit because it fell on the path, on patches of rock and so forth. But the part that fell on the rich soil bore a yield of thirty- or sixty- or a hundredfold.

This enables us to understand that we too must be courageous, even if the Word of God, the Kingdom of God, seems to have no historical or political importance. In the end, on Palm Sunday Jesus summed up, as it were, all of these teachings on the seed of the word: If the grain of wheat does not fall into the ground and die it remains single, if it falls into the earth and dies it produces an abundance of fruit. In this way he made people realize that he himself was the grain of wheat that fell into the earth and died. In the Crucifixion, everything seems to have failed, but precisely in this way, falling into the earth and dying, on the Way of the Cross, it bore fruit for each epoch, for every epoch. Here we have both the Christological interpretation, according to which Christ himself is the seed, he is the Kingdom present, and the Eucharistic dimension: this grain of wheat falls into the earth and thus the new Bread grows, the Bread of future life, the Blessed Eucharist that nourishes us and is open to the divine mysteries for new life.

It seems to me that in the Church's history, these questions that truly torment us are constantly cropping up in various forms: what should we do? People seem to have no need of us, everything we do seems pointless. Yet we learn from the Word of the Lord that this seed alone transforms the earth ever anew and opens it to true life.

I would like, as far as I can, to respond briefly to your words, Your Excellency; but I would also like to say that the Pope is not an oracle, he is infallible on the rarest of occasions, as we know. I therefore share with you these questions, these queries. I also suffer. However, let us, on the one hand, suffer all together for these problems, and let us also suffer in transforming the problems; for

suffering itself is the way to transformation, and without suffering nothing is transformed.

This is also what the Parable of the Grain of Wheat that fell into the earth means: only in a process of suffering transformation does the fruit mature and the solution become clear. And if we did not suffer, the apparent ineffectiveness of our preaching would be a sign of the lack of faith, of true commitment. We must take these difficulties of our time to heart and transform them, suffering with Christ, and thereby transform ourselves. And to the extent to which we ourselves are transformed, we will also be able to respond to the question asked above, we will also be able to see the presence of the Kingdom of God and to make others see it.

The first point is a problem that exists throughout the Western world: the lack of vocations. In these past few weeks I have received *ad limina* visits from the Bishops of Sri Lanka and from the southern part of Africa. Vocations there are increasing; indeed, they are so numerous that it is proving impossible to build enough seminaries to accommodate all these young men who want to be priests.

Of course, this joy also carries with it a certain sadness, since at least a part of them comes in the hope of social advancement. By becoming priests, they become like tribal chiefs, they are naturally privileged, they have a different lifestyle, etc. Therefore, weeds and wheat grow together in this beautiful crop of vocations and the Bishops must be very careful in their discernment; they must not merely be content with having many future priests but must see which really are the true vocations, discerning between the weeds and the good wheat.

However, there is a certain enthusiasm of faith because they are in a specific period of history, that is, in the period in which it is clear that the traditional religions are no longer adequate. People are realizing, they are seeing that these traditional religions contain a promise within them but are waiting for something. They are awaiting a new response that purifies and, let us say, takes on all that is beautiful, setting it free from these inadequate and negative aspects. In this time of transition, in which their culture is truly reaching out to a new time in history, the two offerings - Christianity and Islam - are the possible historical responses.

Consequently, in a certain sense there is a springtime of the faith in those countries but, of course, in the context of rivalry between these two responses and also especially in the context of suffering because of the sects, who present themselves, as it were, as a Christian response that is better, easier and more accommodating. So it is that even in the history of a promise, in a springtime moment, the commitment of the one who must sow the Word with Christ and, as we say, build the Church, continues to be difficult.

The situation is different in the Western world, which is a world weary of its own culture. It is a world that has reached the time when there is no longer any evidence of the need for God, let alone Christ, and when it therefore seems that humans could build themselves on their own. In

this atmosphere of a rationalism closing in on itself and that regards the model of the sciences as the only model of knowledge, everything else is subjective. Christian life too, of course, becomes a choice that is subjective, hence, arbitrary and no longer the path of life. It therefore naturally becomes difficult to believe, and if it is difficult to believe it is even more difficult to offer one's life to the Lord to be his servant.

This is certainly a form of suffering which, I would say, fits into our time in history, and in which we generally see that the so-called "great" Churches seem to be dying. This is true particularly in Australia, also in Europe, but not so much in the United States.

On the other hand, the sects that present themselves with the certainty of a minimum of faith are growing, and the human being seeks certainty. Thus, the great Churches, especially the great traditional Protestant Churches, are truly finding themselves in a very deep crisis. The sects have the upper hand because they appear with a few simple certainties and say: "This suffices".

The plight of the Catholic Church is not as bad as that of the great Protestant Churches of history, but of course, she shares the problem of our historical period. I do not think that there is any system for making a rapid change. We must go on, we must go through this tunnel, this underpass, patiently, in the certainty that Christ is the answer and that in the end, his light will appear once more.

Thus, the first answer is patience, in the certainty that the world cannot live without God, the God of Revelation - and not just any God: we see how dangerous a cruel God, an untrue God can be - the God who showed us his Face in Jesus Christ. This Face of the One who suffered for us, this loving Face of the One who transforms the world in the manner of the grain of wheat that fell into the earth.

Therefore, we ourselves have this very deep certainty that Christ is the answer and that without the concrete God, the God with the Face of Christ, the world destroys itself; and there is growing evidence that a closed rationalism, which thinks that human beings can rebuild the world better on their own, is not true. On the contrary, without the restraint of the true God, human beings destroy themselves. We see this with our own eyes.

We ourselves must have a renewed certainty: he is the Truth; only by walking in his footsteps do we go in the right direction, and it is in this direction that we must walk and lead others.

The first point of my answer is: in all this suffering, not only should we keep our certainty that Christ really is the Face of God, but we should also deepen this certainty and the joy of knowing it and thus truly be ministers of the future of the world, of the future of every person. We should deepen this certainty in a personal relationship with the Lord because certainty can also grow with rational considerations. A sincere reflection that is also rationally convincing but becomes

personal, strong and demanding by virtue of a friendship lived personally, every day, with Christ, truly seems to me to be very important.

Certainty, consequently, demands this personalization of our faith, of our friendship with the Lord, and thus new vocations also grow. We see it in the new generations after the great crisis of this cultural struggle unleashed in 1968, when the historical epoch of Christianity truly seemed to be over. We see that the promises of 1968 have not been kept and, let us say, the awareness that another way exists which is more complex because it requires this transformation of our hearts but is truer, and thus new vocations are also born. And we ourselves must also find the creativity to help young people to discover this way in the future, too. This was also evident in the dialogue with the African Bishops. Despite the number of priests, many are condemned to a terrible loneliness and many do not survive morally.

And it is therefore important to live in the reality of the presbyterate, of the community of priests who help one another, who are journeying on together with solidarity in their common faith. This also seems to me to be important, for if young people see priests who are very lonely, sad and tired, they will think: "If this is my future, then it is not for me". A real communion of life that shows young people: "Yes, this can be a future for me too, it is possible to live like this", must be created.

I have gone on too long. It seems to me that I have said something on the second point, even if only on part of it. It is true: to the people, especially world leaders, the Church appears as something antiquated and our proposals seem unnecessary. People behave as though they were able to and wanted to live without our words, and they always think they have no need of us. They do not seek our words.

This is true and causes us pain, but it is also part of this historical situation of a certain anthropological vision which claims that the human being must act as Karl Marx said: "The Church has had 1,800 years to show that it could change the world and has not done anything; we will now do it on our own".

This is a very widespread idea and is also supported by philosophers. Thus, we understand the impression of so many that it is possible to live without the Church, which appears as a vestige of the past. But it is becoming ever clearer that only moral values and strong convictions, and sacrifices, make it possible to live and to build the world. It is impossible to construct it in a mechanical way, as Karl Marx proposed, with the theories concerning capital and ownership, etc.

If there is no moral force in souls, if there is no readiness to suffer for these values, a better world is not built; indeed, on the contrary, the world deteriorates every day, selfishness dominates and destroys all. On perceiving this the question arises anew: but where does the strength come from that enables us to suffer for good too, to suffer for good that hurts me first, which has no immediate usefulness? Where are the resources, the sources? From where does the strength

come to preserve these values?

It can be seen that morality as such does not survive and is not effective unless it is deeply rooted in convictions that truly provide certainty and the strength to suffer for - at the same time, they are part of love - a love that grows in suffering and is the substance of life. In the end, in fact, love alone enables us to live, and love is always also suffering: it matures in suffering and provides the strength to suffer for good without taking oneself into account at the actual moment.

It seems to me that this awareness is growing because we are already seeing the effects of a condition in which the strength that comes from a love that is the substance of my life and gives me the power to carry on the struggle for good does not exist. Here too, of course, we are in need of patience, but also an active patience in the sense of making people understand: "You need this".

Even if they do not convert straightaway, at least they draw closer to the circle of those in the Church who possess this inner strength. The Church has always recognized this inwardly strong group that truly has the strength of faith and of persons who are, as it were, attached to one another, moving ahead, and so participate.

I am thinking of the Lord's Parable of the Mustard Seed which was so small and then became a tree so great that the birds of the sky build their nests in it. And I should say that these birds could be the people who are not yet converted but who at least perch on the tree of the Church. I have pondered on this: in the time of the Enlightenment, the time when faith was divided between Catholics and Protestants, people believed it was necessary to preserve the common moral values by giving them a firm foundation. They thought, "We must make the moral values independent of the religious denominations so that they can prevail *"etsi Deus non daretur"*".

Today, we are in an opposite situation; the situation has been reversed. There is no longer any proof of moral values. They become evident only if God exists. I have therefore suggested that lay people, the so-called laity, should think about whether the contrary might not be true for them today: We must live *"quasi Deus daretur"*, and even if we are not strong enough to believe, we must live on this hypothesis, otherwise the world will not function; and this, it seems to me, would be a first step to approaching faith. I also see in so many contacts that, thanks be to God, dialogue with at least part of the secular world is increasing.

The third point: the plight of priests who have become scarce, who must work in as many as three, four and at times even five parishes and are exhausted. I think that the Bishop, together with his priests, is trying to discover what the best solution might be. When I was Archbishop of Munich they created this type of service solely for the Liturgy of the Word without a priest in order, let us say, to keep the community present in its own church. And they said: "Every community should stay put and wherever there is no priest let us celebrate this Liturgy of the Word".

The French found the Word suitable for these Sunday Assemblies "in the absence of a priest", but after a while they realized that this could go wrong because the meaning of the Sacrament is lost, a "Protestantization" occurs and, in the end, if it is only the Word, I can celebrate it myself in my own home.

I remember when I was a professor at Tübingen, there was the great exegete Kelemann - I do not know if you are familiar with his name -, a pupil of Bultmann, who was a great theologian. Although he was a convinced Protestant, he never went to church. He used to say: "I can also meditate at home on the Sacred Scriptures".

The French have transformed somewhat this formula of Sunday Assemblies "in the absence of a priest" into "awaiting the priest". That is, the priest must be expected, and I would say that the Liturgy of the Word should normally be an exception on Sundays, because the Lord wants to come corporally. Consequently, this must not be the solution.

Sunday was created because the Lord was raised and entered the community of the Apostles to be with them. And thus, they also understood that Saturday was no longer the liturgical day, but Sunday, on which the Lord wants to be with us physically again and again, and wants to nourish us with his Body, so that we ourselves may become his Body in the world.

We should find a way to offer many people of good will this possibility: for now I do not presume to give formulas. I always said in Munich, but I am unacquainted with the situation here which is bound to be a little different, that our people are incredibly mobile and flexible. The young travel 50 kilometres or more to go to a discothèque, why can they also not travel 50 kilometres to go to a common church? Yet, this is something very positive and practical and I do not dare to offer formulas. However, an effort should be made to give people this sentiment: "I need to be with the Church, to be with the living Church and with the Lord!".

This is how to convey this impression of importance, and if I consider it important, this also creates the premises for a solution. But I actually leave the question open, Your Excellency.

Several priests then spoke. The Holy Father answered their questions on the topics of the education of youth, the role of Catholic schools, and the consecrated life as follows:

These questions are very practical and it is far from easy to come up with equally practical answers.

First of all, I should like to thank you for having called our attention to the need to attract young people to the Church; they are easily attracted instead by other things, by a way of life that is rather remote from our convictions.

The ancient Church chose the way of creating alternative living communities, not necessarily with ruptures. I would say, therefore, that it is important that young people discover the beauty of faith, that it is beautiful to have a direction, that it is beautiful to have God as a friend who can truly tell us the essential things of life.

This intellectual factor must then be accompanied by an emotional and social factor, that is, by socialization in faith; because faith can only be fulfilled if it also has a body, and this involves human beings in their way of life. In the past, therefore, when faith was crucial to community life, teaching catechism, which continues to be important today, would have sufficed.

However, given that social life has drifted away from faith - since all too often even families do not offer a socialization of faith - we must offer ways for a socialization of faith so that faith will form communities, offer vital spaces and convince people through a way of thought, affection and lively friendship.

It seems to me that these dimensions ought to go together, for the human person has a body and is a social being. In this sense, for example, it is wonderful to see so many parish priests here who have come with groups of young people to spend their holidays together. In this way, young people share the joy of their holiday period and live it together with God and the Church, in the person of their parish priest or parochial vicar. It seems to me, in Italy too, that the Church today offers alternatives and possibilities for socialization in which young people can walk together with Christ and shape the Church. This is why they must be guided by intelligent answers to the questions of our time: Is there still a need for God? Is it still reasonable to believe in God? Is Christ merely a figure in the history of religion or is he truly the Face of God that we all need? Can we live to the full without knowing Christ?

It is necessary to understand that building life and the future also requires patience and suffering. Nor can the Cross be lacking in young peoples' lives, and getting them to understand this is far from easy. The mountaineer knows that he must face sacrifices and train if climbing is to be a beautiful experience; so too, the young person must understand that for the ascent to life's future it is essential to exercise an interior life.

Consequently, personalization and socialization are the two approaches that must penetrate the actual situations of today's challenges: the challenge of affection and the challenge of communion. Indeed, these two dimensions make it possible to open oneself to the future and also to teach that the sometimes difficult God of faith is also for my own good in the future.

With regard to Catholic schools I can say that many Bishops who have come on their *ad limina* visit have frequently stressed their importance. The Catholic school, in situations such as in Africa, becomes an indispensable means of cultural advancement for the first steps to literacy and for raising the cultural standard in which a new culture is formed. Thanks to the Catholic school, it is

also possible to confront the challenges of technology that strive for a pro-technological culture, destroying ancient forms of tribal life and their moral content.

Where we live the situation is different, but what I feel important is a general mental discipline that Christianity is not cut off from reality today, either.

As we said earlier, in the wake of the Enlightenment and of the "Second Enlightenment" in 1968, many thought that the historical time of the Church and faith was over and that they had entered a new epoch, when it would be possible to study these things as we study classical mythology. On the contrary, it is vital to make people understand that faith is permanently up-to-date and perfectly reasonable. Hence, an intellectual assertion is called for that makes the beauty and organic structure of the faith comprehensible.

This was one of the fundamental intentions of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which has now been condensed in the *Compendium*. We must not think of a pack of rules to be shouldered like a heavy backpack on our journey through life. In the end, faith is simple and rich: we believe that God exists, that God counts; but which God? A God with a face, a human face, a God who reconciles, who overcomes hatred and gives us the power of peace that no one else can give us. We must make people understand that Christianity is actually very simple and consequently very rich.

School is a cultural institution for intellectual and professional training: it is therefore necessary to make the organic and logical dimensions of the faith understood, in order to make known its important and essential elements for an understanding of what the Eucharist is, what happens on Sunday, and in Christian marriage. It is necessary, of course, to make people comprehend that nonetheless, the discipline of religion is not a purely intellectual and individualistic ideology, as perhaps happens in other disciplines: in mathematics, for example, I know how to do a specific calculation, but in the end other subjects have a practical tendency, a tendency to professionalism, to applicability in life. And so, it is necessary to understand that faith essentially creates assembly and unites.

It is precisely this essence of faith that liberates us from egoistic isolation and unites us in a great community, a very complete one - in parishes, in the Sunday gathering -, a universal community in which I become related to everyone in the world.

It is necessary to understand this Catholic dimension of the community that gathers in the parish church every Sunday. Thus, if, on the one hand, knowing the faith is one purpose, on the other, socializing in the Church or "ecclesializing" means being introduced into the great community of the Church, a living milieu, where I know that even in the important moments of my life - especially in suffering and in death - I am not alone.

Your Excellency said that many people do not seem to need us, but that the sick and the suffering do. And this should be understood from the outset: I will never again be lonely as long as I live. Faith redeems me from loneliness. I will always be supported by a community, but at the same time, I must support the community and, from the first, also teach responsibility for the sick, the lonely, the suffering, and thereby the gift that I make is reciprocated. So it is necessary to reawaken an awareness of this great gift in the person in whom is hidden the readiness to love and to give himself or herself, and thus guarantee that I too will have brothers and sisters to support me in difficult situations, when I am in need of a community that does not leave me stranded.

Regarding the importance of religious life, we know that the monastic and contemplative life are attractive in the face of the stress of this world. They appear like an oasis in which we can truly live. Here too, this is a romantic view: so the discernment of vocations is essential. However, it is the contemplative rather than the active Religious life which the historical situation endows with a certain attraction.

This is more visible in the male branch, where Religious and priests are to be seen carrying out an important apostolate in education, with the sick, etc. It is unfortunately less visible for female vocations where professionalism seems to make the religious vocation superfluous. There are qualified nurses and qualified school teachers, so that it no longer appears to be a religious vocation, and that specific activity will be difficult to resume once the chain of vocations is broken.

But we see more and more that the professionalism required in order to be a good nurse is not enough. The heart must be put into it. Love for the suffering person is necessary. This has a profound religious dimension. So does teaching. We now have new forms such as secular institutes, whose communities show by their lives that there is a way of life that is good for the person, but especially necessary for the religious community, for the faith and also for the human community. I therefore think that also by changing the form - many of our active female communities began in the 19th century with the specific social challenge of that period and today the challenges are a little different - the Church is making us understand that service to the suffering and the defence of life are vocations with a deep religious dimension and that there are forms [of Religious life] in which to live such vocations. So many new forms are springing up which make us hope that the Lord will grant the necessary vocations for the life of the Church and the world today.

Pope Benedict XVI then answered the chaplain of the local District Prison, which has 260 inmates of more than 30 different nationalities, as follows:

Thank you for your very important and moving words. Shortly before my departure, I had the opportunity to talk to Cardinal Martino, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who is working on a document on the problem of our detainees. These brothers and sisters suffer

and at times feel that their human rights are barely respected; they also feel despised and live in a condition in which Christ's presence is truly necessary. And Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, in anticipation of the Last Judgment, speaks explicitly of their plight: "I was... in prison and you did not come to comfort me", "I was... in prison and you came to visit me" (Mt 25: 43; 36).

I am grateful to you, therefore, for having mentioned the threats to human dignity in these circumstances, in order to learn that as priests we must also be brothers to the "least" and see in them the Lord who is waiting for us and is of the greatest importance. It is my intention, together with Cardinal Martino, to say a word in public on these particular situations that are a mandate for the Church, for the faith and for her love. Lastly, I am grateful that you said that it is not what you do that is so important but what you are in our priestly commitment. Without a doubt, we must do many things and not succumb to laziness, but all our work will only bear fruit if it is an expression of what we are.

If what we do shows that we are deeply united to Christ, that we are instruments of Christ, a mouthpiece through which Christ speaks, a hand through which Christ acts: we should be convinced and act with conviction only to the extent that this is truly the result and expression of what we are.

Another priest raised the topic of Communion for the faithful who are divorced and remarried. The Holy Father answered him as follows:

We all know that this is a particularly painful problem for people who live in situations in which they are excluded from Eucharistic Communion, and naturally for the priests who desire to help these people love the Church and love Christ. This is a problem.

None of us has a ready-made formula, also because situations always differ. I would say that those who were married in the Church for the sake of tradition but were not truly believers, and who later find themselves in a new and invalid marriage and subsequently convert, discover faith and feel excluded from the Sacrament, are in a particularly painful situation. This really is a cause of great suffering and when I was Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, I invited various Bishops' Conferences and experts to study this problem: a sacrament celebrated without faith. Whether, in fact, a moment of invalidity could be discovered here because the Sacrament was found to be lacking a fundamental dimension, I do not dare to say. I personally thought so, but from the discussions we had I realized that it is a highly-complex problem and ought to be studied further. But given these people's painful plight, it must be studied further.

I shall not attempt to give an answer now, but in any case two aspects are very important. The first: even if these people cannot go to sacramental Communion, they are not excluded from the love of the Church or from the love of Christ. A Eucharist without immediate sacramental Communion is not of course complete; it lacks an essential dimension. Nonetheless, it is also true

that taking part in the Eucharist without Eucharistic Communion is not the same as nothing; it still means being involved in the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. It is still participating in the great Sacrament in its spiritual and pneumatic dimensions, and also in its ecclesial dimension, although this is not strictly sacramental.

And since it is the Sacrament of Christ's passion, the suffering Christ embraces these people in a special way and communicates with them in another way differently, so that they may feel embraced by the Crucified Lord who fell to the ground and died and suffered for them and with them. Consequently, they must be made to understand that even if, unfortunately, a fundamental dimension is absent, they are not excluded from the great mystery of the Eucharist or from the love of Christ who is present in it. This seems to me important, just as it is important that the parish priest and the parish community make these people realize that on the one hand they must respect the indissolubility of the Sacrament, and on the other, that we love these people who are also suffering for us. Moreover, we must suffer with them, because they are bearing an important witness and because we know that the moment when one gives in "out of love", one wrongs the Sacrament itself and the indissolubility appears less and less true.

We know the problem, not only of the Protestant Communities but also of the Orthodox Churches, which are often presented as a model for the possibility of remarriage. But only the first marriage is sacramental: the Orthodox too recognize that the other marriages are not sacramental, they are reduced and redimensioned marriages and in a penitential situation; in a certain sense, the couple can go to Communion but in the awareness that this is a concession "by economy", as they say, through mercy which, nevertheless, does not remove the fact that their marriage is not a Sacrament. The other point is that in the Eastern Churches for these marriages they have conceded the possibility of divorce too lightly, and that the principle of indissolubility, the true sacramental character of the marriage, is therefore seriously injured.

On the one hand, therefore, is the good of the community and the good of the Sacrament that we must respect, and on the other, the suffering of the people we must alleviate.

The second point that we should teach and also make credible through our own lives is that suffering, in various forms, is a necessary part of our lives. I would call this a noble suffering. Once again, it is necessary to make it clear that pleasure is not everything. May Christianity give us joy, just as love gives joy. But love is always also a renunciation of self. The Lord himself has given us the formula of what love is: those who lose themselves find themselves; those who spare or save themselves are lost.

It is always an "Exodus", hence, painful. True joy is something different from pleasure; joy grows and continues to mature in suffering, in communion with the Cross of Christ. It is here alone that the true joy of faith is born, from which even they are not excluded if they learn to accept their suffering in communion with that of Christ.

The Holy Father answered the priests who asked him for clarification concerning the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism in special situations, and about the Compendium of the Catechism, as follows:

The first question is very difficult and I have already had an opportunity to work on it when I was Archbishop of Munich, because we had such cases.

Each individual case should first be clarified: if the obstacle to Baptism is such that it is impossible to administer it without wasting the Sacrament, or should the situation make it possible to say, even in a problematic context, "this person has truly converted, has a complete faith, wants to live the faith of the Church, desires to be baptized", I think that to issue a general formula would not correspond with the diversity of the real situations: we naturally endeavour to do our utmost to give Baptism to a person who asks for it with full faith, but let us say that the details must be examined in each individual case.

If a person proves to be truly converted and desires access to Baptism, the Church's desire must be to allow this person to be incorporated into the communion of Christ and of the Church, and to support him or her. The Church must be open as long as there are no obstacles that actually contradict Baptism. Therefore, the possibility should be sought and if the person is truly convinced and a wholehearted believer, then we are not in relativism.

The second point: We all know that in the cultural and intellectual situation of which we spoke at the start, catechesis has become far more difficult. On the one hand, it needs new contexts to be understood and contextualized, so that it may be evident that this is true and concerns the present and the future, and on the other, therefore, a necessary contextualization has been made in the Catechisms of the various Bishops' Conferences.

Besides, clear answers are necessary to make it possible to perceive what faith is and what the other contextualizations are: a simple way of making people understand. This sparked a "polemic" in the world of catechetics between catechism in the classic sense and the new instruments of catechesis. It is true on the one hand - I am now speaking only of my German experience - that many of these books did not reach their goal: they always prepared the ground but were so concerned with preparing the ground on which the person advances that in the end they did not arrive at the answer to be given. On the other, the classic catechisms appeared so formal that the true answer no longer touched the mind of the contemporary catechumen.

At last, we took on this multidimensional commitment: we compiled the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It provides, on the one hand, the necessary cultural contextualizations, but it also gives precise answers. We wrote it in the awareness that the journey from this *Catechism* to concrete catechesis would not be an easy one. But we understood that the linguistic, cultural and social situations are very different in the various countries, and even within the same country in different

social classes; hence, it is the task of the Bishop or of the Bishops' Conference and of the catechists themselves to undertake this final stage in the journey. Our position, therefore, was: "This is the reference point for everyone; what the Church believes can be seen here". Therefore, the Bishops' Conferences should create instruments that apply to the cultural situation and cover the ground that has yet to be covered. Ultimately, the catechist himself or herself must take the last steps, and perhaps the suitable means for these last steps too are offered to him or her.

After several years we had a meeting in which catechists from across the world told us that the *Catechism* was going well, that it was a necessary book which helped by conveying the beauty, organic approach and fullness of the faith, but that it needed to be summarized. The Holy Father John Paul II, having taken note of the vote of that meeting, charged a Commission to compile this *Compendium*, that is, a synthesis of the big *Catechism* to which it refers, extracting the essential. At first in the draft of the *Compendium*, we wanted to be even more concise, but in the end we realized that truly to convey the essential in our time, the necessary material that every catechist needed was what we had said. We also added prayers. And I think that it really is a very useful book that "sums up" everything contained in the big *Catechism*; in this regard, it seems to me that it corresponds in our day to the *Catechism* of Pius X.

The individual Bishops and Bishops' Conferences remain committed to helping priests and all catechists in their work with this book, as well as to acting as a bridge to a specific group, for the ways of speaking, thinking and understanding differ widely not only between Italy, France, Germany and Africa, but also within the same country it is received very differently. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Compendium*, containing the essence of the *Catechism*, therefore continue to be instruments for the universal Church.

Moreover, we are always in need of the work of the Bishops who, in contact with the priests and catechists, help find all the necessary instruments to facilitate this sowing of the Word.

Lastly, the Holy Father said to everyone present:

I would like to thank you for your questions that help me to consider the future, and especially for this experience of communion with a great presbyterate of a most beautiful Diocese. Thank you.

The meeting ended with the hymn, "Je te salue, Marie".

