



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE FATHERS AND BROTHERS OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS***

*Vatican Basilica
Saturday, 22 April 2006*

Dear Fathers and Brothers of the Society of Jesus,

I meet you with great joy in this historical Basilica of St Peter's after the Holy Mass celebrated for you by Cardinal Angelo Sodano, my Secretary of State, on the occasion of combined jubilees of the Ignatian Family. I address my cordial greeting to you all.

I greet in the first place the Superior General, Fr Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, and thank him for his courteous words expressing your common sentiments to me. I greet the Cardinals with the Bishops and priests and all those who have desired to participate in this event.

Together with the Fathers and Brothers, I also greet the friends of the Society of Jesus present here, and among them, the many men and women religious, members of the Communities of Christian Life and of the Apostolate of Prayer, the students and alumnae with their families from Rome, from Italy and from Stonyhurst in England, the teachers and students of the academic institutions and the many collaborators.

Your visit today gives me the opportunity to thank the Lord with you for having granted your Society the gift of men of extraordinary holiness and exceptional apostolic zeal, such as St Ignatius of Loyola, St Francis Xavier and Bl. Peter Faber. For you they are the Fathers and Founders: it is therefore appropriate that in this centenary year you commemorate them with gratitude and look to them as enlightened and reliable guides on your spiritual journey and in your apostolic activities.

St Ignatius of Loyola was first and foremost a man of God who in his life put God, his greatest

glory and his greatest service, first. He was a profoundly prayerful man for whom the daily celebration of the Eucharist was the heart and crowning point of his day.

Thus, he left his followers a precious spiritual legacy that must not be lost or forgotten. Precisely because he was a man of God, St Ignatius was a faithful servant of the Church, in which he saw and venerated the Bride of the Lord and the Mother of Christians. And the special vow of obedience to the Pope, which he himself describes as "our first and principal foundation" (*MI*, Series III, I., p. 162), was born from his desire to serve the Church in the most beneficial way possible.

This ecclesial characteristic, so specific to the Society of Jesus, lives on in you and in your apostolic activities, dear Jesuits, so that you may faithfully meet the urgent needs of the Church today.

Among these, it is important in my opinion to point out your cultural commitment in the areas of theology and philosophy in which the Society of Jesus has traditionally been present, as well as the dialogue with modern culture, which, if it boasts on the one hand of the marvellous progress in the scientific field, remains heavily marked by positivist and materialist scientism.

Naturally, the effort to promote a culture inspired by Gospel values in cordial collaboration with the other ecclesial realities demands an intense spiritual and cultural training. For this very reason, St Ignatius wanted young Jesuits to be formed for many years in spiritual life and in study. It is good that this tradition be maintained and reinforced, also given the growing complexity and vastness of modern culture.

Another of his great concerns was the Christian education and cultural formation of young people: hence, the impetus he gave to the foundation of "colleges", which after his death spread in Europe and throughout the world. Continue, dear Jesuits, this important apostolate, keeping the spirit of your Founder unchanged.

In speaking of St Ignatius, I cannot overlook the fact that the fifth centenary of St Francis Xavier's birth was celebrated last 7 April. Not only is their history interwoven through long years in Paris and Rome, but a single aspiration - one might say, a single passion - stirred and sustained them, even in their different human situations: the passion for working for the ever greater glory of God-the-Trinity and for the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ to the peoples who did not know him.

St Francis Xavier, whom my Predecessor Pius XI, of venerable memory, proclaimed the "Patron of Catholic Missions", saw as his own mission "opening new ways of access" to the Gospel "in the immense Continent of Asia". His apostolate in the Orient lasted barely 10 years, but in the four and half centuries that the Society of Jesus has existed it has proven wonderfully fruitful, for his example inspired a multitude of missionary vocations among young Jesuits and he remains a

reference point for the continuation of missionary activity in the great countries of the Asian Continent.

If St Francis Xavier worked in the countries of the Orient, his confrere and friend since the years in Paris, Bl. Peter Faber, a Savoiard who was born on 13 April 1506, worked in the European countries where the Christian faithful aspired to a true reform of the Church.

He was a modest, sensitive man with a profound inner life. He was endowed with the gift of making friends with people from every walk of life and consequently attracted many young men to the Society.

Bl. Faber spent his short life in various European countries, especially Germany, where, at the order of Paul III, he took part in the Diets of Worms, Ratisbon and Speyer and in conversations with the leaders of the Reformation. He consequently had an exceptional opportunity to practise the special vow of obedience to the Pope "regarding the missions" and became a model to follow for all future Jesuits.

Dear Fathers and Brothers of the Society, today you look with special devotion at the Blessed Virgin Mary, remembering that on 22 April 1541, St Ignatius and his first companions made their solemn vows before the image of Mary in the Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls.

May Mary continue to watch over the Society of Jesus so that every member may carry in his person the "image" of the Crucified Christ, in order to share in his Resurrection. I assure you of my remembrance in prayer for this, as I willingly impart my Blessing to each of you present here and to your entire spiritual family, which I also extend to all the other Religious and consecrated persons who are present at this Audience.

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