



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE ECCLESIAL CONVENTION  
OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME***

*Basilica of Saint John Lateran  
Monday, 5 June 2006*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am pleased to be with you once again to introduce with my Reflection our Diocesan Convention, which is dedicated to a theme of great beauty and paramount pastoral importance: the joy that derives from faith and its relationship with the education of the new generations.

Thus, in a perspective that more directly concerns the young, we are returning to and further developing the subject we began discussing a year ago on the occasion of the previous Diocesan Convention. We then focused on the role of the family and of the Christian community in the formation of the person and the transmission of faith.

I greet each one of you with affection, Bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious and lay people engaged in witnessing to our faith. In particular, I greet you young people who are planning to combine the process of your personal formation with taking on ecclesial and missionary responsibility for other young people and children. I warmly thank the Cardinal Vicar for his words on behalf of you all.

With this Convention and with the pastoral year that will be inspired by its content, the Diocese of Rome is journeying on through the long period that began 10 years ago now with the City Mission desired by John Paul II, my beloved Predecessor.

Actually, its goal is still the same: to revive the faith in our communities and seek to reawaken or inspire it in all the individuals and families of this great city, where the faith was preached and the Church already established by the first generation of Christians, and the Apostles Peter and Paul

in particular.

In the past three years you have focused your attention especially on the family in order to consolidate this fundamental human reality with the Gospel truth - today, unfortunately, seriously undermined and threatened - and to help it carry out its indispensable mission in the Church and in society.

The priority we are now giving to the education in the faith of the new generations does not mean that we are abandoning our commitment to the family, which is primarily responsible for education. Rather, we are responding to the widespread concern of many believing families, who fear, in today's social and cultural context, that they might not succeed in passing on to their children the precious heritage of the faith.

In fact, discovering the beauty and joy of faith is a path that every new generation must take on its own, for all that we have that is most our own and most intimate is staked on faith: our heart, our mind, our freedom, in a deeply personal relationship with the Lord at work within us.

Just as radically, however, faith is a community act and attitude; it is the "we believe" of the Church.

Thus, the joy of faith is a joy shared: as the Apostle John says: "that which we have seen and heard [the Word of life] we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us.... And we are writing this that our joy may be complete" (1 Jn 3: 4).

Consequently, educating the new generations in the faith is an important and fundamental task that involves the entire Christian community.

Dear brothers and sisters, today you have experienced how various aspects of this educational task have become very difficult, but for this very reason it is even more important and especially urgent.

Indeed, it is possible to identify two basic lines of our current secularized society that are clearly interdependent. They impel people to move away from the Christian proclamation and cannot but have an effect on those whose inclinations and choices of life are developing.

One of these is agnosticism, which derives from the reduction of human intelligence to a mere practical mechanism that tends to stifle the religious sense engraved in the depths of our nature. The other is the process of relativization and uprooting, which corrodes the most sacred bonds and most worthy affections of the human being, with the result that people are debilitated and our reciprocal relations rendered precarious and unstable.

It is in this very situation that all of us, and especially our children, adolescents and young people, need to live faith as joy and to savour that profound tranquillity to which the encounter with the

Lord gives rise.

In the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, I wrote: "We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (n. 1).

The source of Christian joy is the certainty of being loved by God, loved personally by our Creator, by the One who holds the entire universe in his hands and loves each one of us and the whole great human family with a passionate and faithful love, a love greater than our infidelities and sins, a love which forgives.

This love "is so great that it turns God against himself", as appears definitively in the mystery of the Cross: "So great is God's love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 10).

Dear brothers and sisters, this certitude and this joy of being loved by God must be conveyed in some palpable and practical way to each one of us, and especially to the young generations who are entering the world of faith. In other words: Jesus said he was the "Way" that leads to the Father, as well as the "Truth" and the "Life" (cf. Jn 14: 5-7).

Thus, the question is: how can our children and young people, practically and existentially, find in him this path of salvation and joy? This is precisely the great mission for which the Church exists - as the family of God and the company of friends into which we are already integrated with Baptism as tiny children -, in which our faith and joy and the certainty of being loved by the Lord must grow.

It is therefore indispensable - and this is the task entrusted to Christian families, priests, catechists and educators, to young people themselves among their peers and to our parishes, associations and movements, and lastly to the entire diocesan community - that the new generations experience the Church as a company of friends who are truly dependable and close in all life's moments and circumstances, whether joyful and gratifying or arduous and obscure; as a company that will never fail us, not even in death, for it carries within it the promise of eternity.

Dear children and young people of Rome, I would like to ask you in turn to entrust yourselves to the Church and to love and trust her, because in her the Lord is present and because she seeks nothing but your true good.

Anyone who knows he is loved is in turn prompted to love. It is the Lord himself, who loved us first, who asks us to place at the centre of our lives love for him and for the people he has loved. It is especially adolescents and young people, who feel within them the pressing call to love, who need to be freed from the widespread prejudice that Christianity, with its commandments and

prohibitions, sets too many obstacles in the path of the joy of love and, in particular, prevents people from fully enjoying the happiness that men and women find in their love for one another. On the contrary, Christian faith and ethics do not wish to stifle love but to make it healthy, strong and truly free: this is the exact meaning of the Ten Commandments, which are not a series of "noes" but a great "yes" to love and to life.

Human love, in fact, needs to be purified, to mature and also to surpass itself if it is to be able to become fully human, to be the beginning of true and lasting joy, to respond, that is, to the question of eternity which it bears within it and which it cannot renounce without betraying itself.

This is the principal reason why love between a man and a woman is only completely fulfilled in marriage.

In all educational work, in the formation of the person and of the Christian, we must not shelve the important issue of love through fear or embarrassment: were we to do so, we would present a disembodied Christianity that could not seriously interest the young person who is opening himself or herself to life.

Yet we must also introduce this young person to the integral dimension of Christian love, where love for God and love for man are indissolubly united, and where love of neighbour is a particularly concrete commitment.

Christians cannot be satisfied with words or deceptive ideologies but must go to meet the needs of their brethren, truly offering themselves without being content with some sporadic good deed. Proposing to children a practical experience of service to their needier neighbour is therefore part of an authentic and complete education in the faith.

Together with the need to love, the desire for truth is inherent in the human being's very nature. Therefore, in the education of the new generations, the question of the truth can certainly not be avoided: on the contrary, it must have a central position.

By asking the question about the truth, we are in fact broadening the horizon of our rationality, we are beginning to free reason from those excessively narrow boundaries that confine it when we consider as rational only what can be the object of experimentation or calculation.

It is here that the encounter between reason and faith takes place. In fact, through faith we accept the gift that God makes of himself in revealing himself to us, creatures made in his image. We welcome and accept that Truth which our minds cannot fully comprehend or possess but which, for this very reason, extends the horizon of our knowledge and enables us to arrive at the Mystery in which we are immersed, and to find in God the definitive meaning of our lives.

Dear friends, we know well that it is not easy to agree to overcome the limits of our reason in this

way. Faith, therefore, which is a very personal human act, remains a choice of our freedom which can also be rejected.

Here, however, a second dimension of faith comes to light, the entrustment of oneself to a person, not just any person but Jesus Christ, and to the Father who sent him.

Believing means creating a very personal bond with our Creator and Redeemer, by virtue of the Holy Spirit who works in our hearts, and making this bond the foundation of our whole lives.

Indeed, Jesus Christ "is the Personified Truth who attracts the world to himself.... Every other truth is a fragment of the Truth that he is, and refers to him" ([\*Address to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 10 February 2006\*](#); *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 22 February 2006, p. 3).

Thus, he fills our hearts, enlarging and overwhelming them with joy, extending our minds toward unexplored horizons, offering our freedom its crucial reference point, uplifting it from the narrowness of selfishness and making it capable of authentic love.

In educating the new generations, therefore, we must not have any fears about confronting the truth of the faith with the authentic conquests of human knowledge. Science is making very rapid progress today and all too often this is presented as being in contradiction to the affirmations of faith, causing confusion and making the acceptance of the Christian truth more difficult.

But Jesus Christ is and remains the Lord of all creation and of all history: "All things were created through him and for him... in him all things hold together" (Col 1: 16, 17).

Therefore, if the dialogue between faith and reason is conducted with sincerity and exactness, it offers a possibility of perceiving more effectively and more convincingly the reasonableness of faith in God - not just in any God but in that God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ -, and likewise of showing that every authentic human aspiration is fulfilled in Jesus Christ himself.

Dear young people of Rome, press forward, therefore, with trust and courage on the way of the search for the truth. And you, dear priests and educators, do not hesitate to promote a true and proper "pastoral care of the mind" - and more widely, of the person - that takes young peoples' questions seriously, both existential questions and those that arise from comparison with the forms of rationality widespread today, in order to help them find valid and pertinent Christian answers, and lastly, to make their own that decisive response which is Christ the Lord.

We have spoken of faith as an encounter with the One who is Truth and Love. We have also seen that this is an encounter which is both communitarian and personal, and must take place in all the dimensions of our lives through the exercise of our intelligence, the choices of freedom, the

service of love.

A privileged place exists, however, where this encounter takes place more directly. Here it is reinforced and deepened and thus can truly permeate and mark the whole of life: this space is prayer.

Dear young people, I am sure that many of you were present at the [World Youth Day](#) in Cologne. There, together, we prayed to the Lord, we adored him present in the Eucharist, we offered his Holy Sacrifice.

We meditated on that decisive act of love with which Jesus at the Last Supper anticipated his own death, accepted it in his inmost depths and transformed it into an action of love, into that unique revolution which can truly renew the world and liberate humanity, overcoming the power of sin and death. I ask you young people and all of you who are here, dear brothers and sisters, I ask the whole of the beloved Church of Rome, in particular consecrated souls especially in the cloistered monasteries, to be assiduous in prayer, spiritually united with Mary our Mother, to worship Christ alive in the Eucharist, to fall ever more deeply in love with him. He is our brother and our true friend, the Church's Bridegroom, the faithful and merciful God who loved us first.

Thus, you young people will be ready and willing to answer his call if he wants you entirely for himself in the priesthood or the consecrated life.

To the extent that we nourish ourselves on Christ and are in love with him, we feel within us the incentive to bring others to him: indeed, we cannot keep the joy of the faith to ourselves; we must pass it on.

This need becomes even stronger and more pressing in the context of that strange forgetfulness of God which has spread in vast areas of the world today and to a certain extent also exists here in Rome. This forgetfulness is giving rise to a lot of fleeting chatter, to many useless arguments, but also to great dissatisfaction and a sense of emptiness.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, in our humble service as witnesses and missionaries of the living God, we must be everywhere messengers of that hope which is born from the certitude of the faith: we will thus help our brethren and our fellow citizens to rediscover the meaning and joy of their own lives.

I know that you are working with dedication in the beloved contexts of pastoral care: I am delighted, and I thank the Lord with you.

In the first year of my Pontificate, I have been able in particular to experience and appreciate the liveliness of the Christian presence among the young people and university students of Rome, and

among the children receiving First Communion. I ask you to continue with trust, ever deepening your bond with the Lord, hence, making your apostolate more and more effective.

In this commitment, do not overlook any of life's dimensions, because Christ has come to save the whole of the person, in the intimacy of consciences as well as in the expressions of culture and social relations.

Dear brothers and sisters, I entrust these reflections to you with a friendly heart, as a contribution to your work during the evenings of the Convention and then during the coming Pastoral Year. May my affection and Blessing accompany you, today and in the future.  
Thank you for your attention!

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