



The Holy See

AT THE CLOSE OF THE PAPAL SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Redemptoris Mater Chapel

Saturday, 11 March 2006

*Your Eminence,
Dear Confreres,*

At the end of these days of grace it is right and beautiful for the Pope to say: "Thank you! Thank you first and foremost to the Lord, who has granted us this physical and spiritual break, and also thank you to you, Your Eminence, for guiding us in St Mark's footsteps on the road to Jerusalem with Jesus.

At the outset, you immediately made us understand the profound ecclesial nature of this "sacramentum exercitii". You made us realize that it was not a question of an individual or private retreat. With the "sacramentum exercitii" we express our solidarity with the Church in the common sacramental "exercitum", and thus respond to our responsibility as Pastors.

We cannot bring to the world the Good News which is Christ himself in person if we ourselves are not deeply united with Christ, if we do not know him profoundly, personally, if we do not live on his Words.

Together with the ecclesiastical and ecclesial nature of these Exercises, you have also shown us their Christological dimension. You have made us attentive to the inner Teacher; you have helped us to listen to the Teacher who speaks with us and within us; you have helped us to respond to and speak with the Lord, listening to his words. You have led us on this "catechumenal" journey which is the Gospel according to Mark, on a common pilgrimage together with the disciples bound for Jerusalem.

You have also restored to us the certainty that in our Barque, despite all the storms of history, is Christ. You have taught us to see anew on the suffering face of Christ, on the face crowned with thorns, the glory of the Risen One.

We are grateful to you for this, Your Eminence, and we can journey on towards Easter, together with Christ and the disciples, with new strength and new joy.

In all these days, my gaze has necessarily focused on this depiction of the Annunciation of Mary. What fascinated me is this: the Archangel Gabriel holds a scroll in his hand, which I believe is the symbol of Scripture, of the Word of God. And Mary is kneeling within the scroll; that is, she lives her whole life in the Word of God. It is as though she were steeped in the Word. Thus, all her thoughts, her will and her actions are imbued with and formed by the Word.

Since she herself dwells in the Word, she can also become the new "Dwelling Place" of the Word in the world.

Silently, with these points alone, Your Eminence, you have guided us on a Marian path. This Marian route calls us to be integrated into the Word of God, to place our lives within the Word of God and thereby let our being be imbued with this Word, so that we may be witnesses in our time of the living Word, of Christ himself.

Thus, with new courage and new joy, we journey on towards Easter, towards the celebration of the Mystery of Christ that is always more than a celebration or rite: it is Presence and Truth. And let us pray the Lord to help us return to him and thus also to be guides and pastors of the flock entrusted to our care.

Thank you, Your Eminence!

Thank you, dear Confreres!

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