



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PILGRIMS FROM VARIOUS DIOCESES OF ROMAGNA
IN NORTHEAST ITALY***

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 7 October 2006*

Dear Pilgrims from Romagna,

I am glad to offer you my most cordial welcome. I greet you all with affection, starting with Archbishop Giuseppe Verucchi of Ravenna-Cervia, whom I thank for his courteous words on your behalf.

With him, I greet the Bishops of Faenza-Modigliana, Forlì-Bertinoro, Imola, Cesena-Sarsina and Rimini, and Archbishop Luigi Amaducci, Archbishop emeritus of Ravenna-Cervia. I address a special respectful greeting to the dear Cardinals Ersilio Tonini and Pio Laghi who have desired to join us at our meeting, one of the "strong moments" of your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles.

My affectionate thought then goes as well to those of you present here, to everyone in your respective Dioceses who has joined us in spirit, with a special remembrance for the children and young people, for families, lonely people and all who are going through a difficult time. To each one I assure my spiritual closeness in prayer.

Dear brothers and sisters, you have come in particularly large numbers today to commemorate with gratitude the Pastoral Visit that my Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, made in May 20 years ago to your beloved Land.

You have prepared for this meeting with an important period of prayer, guided by the words of venerable Cardinal Tonini who will preside at the solemn Eucharistic Concelebration scheduled to

take place in St Peter's Basilica this afternoon.

Your decision to take up for this providential occasion the Addresses delivered by beloved John Paul II during his unforgettable Apostolic Pilgrimage to Romagna gives me great pleasure.

His words have lived on, impressed in your hearts and minds. Thus, the revisitation of his precious teaching is a special opportunity for your fine, lively diocesan communities. It spurs you to reflect on and to deepen the affective and effective communion among all members of the respective particular Churches; it is an invitation to walk united with your Pastors and the Successor of Peter; it is an encouragement for the members of your Dioceses to continue their common evangelizing mission with renewed dynamism, witnessing to the Gospel of hope in our time.

It has only been possible to carry out this demanding missionary mandate thanks to God's support and to the convinced and courageous appreciation of the spiritual heritage which the population of Romagna has safeguarded and defended down the ages.

John Paul II wished to emphasize this. He recognized it as "a human and Christian community full of active fervour... a community conscious of its role in society at the present moment in history; a community of Christians which, according to the traditions of the Catholics of Romagna, wishes to keep united the solidity of the faith and the courage of bearing witness in society, the adherence to the Ecclesial Community and the loyalty to the civil society" (*Youth Rally, Ravenna Racecourse, 11 May 1986, n. 2; L'Osservatore Romano English edition [ORE], 16 June, p. 14*).

May my Venerable Predecessor's words be an incentive to you not to let yourselves be discouraged by the difficulties that your Region too is encountering in our time. Indeed, 20 years after that important event, in Romagna as elsewhere, challenges and problems abound for those who desire to live their own faith consistently, striving to combine it with life's daily demands.

I am thinking of the crises threatening so many families, of the growing need for priestly and religious vocations in the face of the disturbing decrease in the number of priests and their advancing age; I am thinking of the many snares of the consumerist and secularized society that endeavours to seduce an ever increasing number of people, inducing them gradually to detach themselves from the values of faith in family and in civil and political life.

These challenges should be faced without losing heart, looking confidently at the many causes of hope which thanks be to God are not absent. There are, for example, many people eager to give meaning and a solid value to their own existence, men and women involved in a strong and sincere search for religion.

In this regard, what John Paul II said to the young people on that occasion is still timely - and today, dear brothers and sisters, I repeat it to you: "This is the moment to live in fullness the joy of

being Christians. Bear witness to this joy before the world. Christ is walking with you, the Risen One, over whom death has no more power, because he has defeated it once for all. May Christ, who is eternally young, be your support and guide today, tomorrow and always!" (*ORE, ibid.*, n. 9, p. 15).

Witness to the joy of being Christians: may this be your unanimous commitment. To this end, pursue - indeed, intensify - ecclesial communion, and be generous protagonists of the evangelizing mission entrusted to you by the Lord, treasuring the guidance that originated in the memorable Visit 20 years ago and strengthened by the grace of today's pilgrimage.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom we venerate today under the title of Our Lady of the Rosary, continue to go with you and guide you on your spiritual and pastoral journey. For my part, I assure you of my remembrance to the Lord and I bless you wholeheartedly, together with your families, your parish and religious communities and all your loved ones.

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