



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MÜNCHEN, ALTÖTTING AND REGENSBURG
(SEPTEMBER 9-14, 2006)

**MEETING WITH PRIESTS AND
PERMANENT DEACONS OF BAVARIA**

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER

*Cathedral of St Mary and St Corbinian, Freising
Thursday, 14 September 2006*

*Dear Brothers in the episcopal and priestly ministry,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

This moment fills me with joy and gratitude - gratitude for all that I have been able to experience and receive during this pastoral visit to Bavaria. I have sensed so much warmth, so much faith, so much joy in God. All this has affected me profoundly and will stay with me as a source of renewed vigour. I am also grateful to be able at last to return to Freising Cathedral and to see it in its new splendour. My thanks go to Cardinal Wetter, to the other two Bavarian Bishops, to all who have cooperated in this task, and ultimately to divine Providence which has made this admirable restoration possible. Now that I am back in this Cathedral many memories come to me as I see before me my old companions, and also the young priests who are handing on the message, the torch of the faith. Memories of my ordination, of which Cardinal Wetter has spoken, come to mind. Here I lay prostrate, enveloped by the litany of all the saints, by the intercession of all the saints. I realized that on this path we are not alone, that the great multitude of saints walk with us, and the living saints, the faithful of today and tomorrow, sustain us and walk with us. Then came the laying on of hands, and finally Cardinal Faulhaber proclaimed to us: "*Iam non dico vos servos sed amicos*" - "I do not call you servants, but friends"; at that moment, I experienced my priestly ordination as an initiation into the community of Jesus' friends, called to be with him and to

proclaim his message.

I am also reminded of the priests and deacons that I myself have ordained here. They are now dedicated to the service of the Gospel and for many years, decades even, they have been handing on the message, and they continue to do so. Naturally, I also recall the processions of Saint Corbinian. It was the custom then to open the reliquary. As the Bishop's place was behind the urn, I had a direct view of the saint's skull. I saw myself taking part in the procession of centuries walking the way of the faith. In this great "procession of time", I could see that we too can walk along, moving with it into the future. This became clear as the procession passed through the nearby cloister where so many children were gathered, and I would trace the sign of the cross on their foreheads. Today we are still living the same experience; we are in the great procession, in the pilgrimage of the Gospel. We can be both pilgrims and guides. By following those who have walked in the footsteps of Christ, we too are following him, and so we enter into the light.

Let us now come to the homily, in which I wish to make just two points. The first relates to the Gospel we have just heard, a passage which we all have heard so often, which we have interpreted and meditated in our hearts. "The harvest is plentiful" says the Lord. In saying that it "is plentiful", he is not simply referring to that particular moment and to those pathways of Palestine on which he journeyed during his earthly life: his words are valid for today. They mean that in people's hearts a harvest is growing; they mean, to put it another way, that deep within, people are waiting for God, waiting for a directive full of light to show the way forward, waiting for a message that is more than just words, hoping, waiting for that love which, beyond the present instant, will welcome and sustain us for eternity. The harvest is plentiful, and labourers are needed in every generation. The other part of the quotation: "the labourers are few", is also true, if in a different sense, for every generation.

"Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers". This means that the harvest is ready, but God wishes to enlist helpers to bring it into the storehouse. God needs them. He needs people to say: yes, I am ready to become your harvest labourer; I am ready to offer help so that this harvest which is ripening in people's hearts may truly be brought into the storehouses of eternity and become an enduring, divine communion of joy and love. "Pray the Lord of the harvest" also means that we cannot simply "produce" vocations; they must come from God. This is not like other professions, we cannot simply recruit people by using the right kind of publicity or the correct type of strategy. The call which comes from the heart of God must always find its way into the heart of man. And yet, precisely so that it may reach into hearts, our cooperation is needed. To pray the Lord of the harvest means above all to ask him for this, to stir his heart and say: "Please do this! Rouse labourers! Enkindle in them enthusiasm and joy for the Gospel! Make them understand that this is a treasure greater than any other, and that whoever has discovered it, must hand it on!"

We stir the heart of God. But our prayer to God does not consist of words alone; the words must

lead to action so that from our praying heart a spark of our joy in God and in the Gospel may arise, enkindling in the hearts of others a readiness to say “yes”. As people of prayer, filled with his light, we reach out to others and bring them into our prayer and into the presence of God, who will not fail to do his part. In this sense we must continue to pray the Lord of the harvest, to stir his heart, and together with God touch the hearts of others through our prayer. And he, according to his purpose, will bring to maturity their “yes”, their readiness to respond; the constancy, in other words, through all this world’s perplexity, through the heat of the day and the darkness of the night, to persevere faithfully in his service. Hence they will know that their efforts, however arduous, are noble and worthwhile because they lead to what is essential, they ensure that people receive what they hope for: God’s light and God’s love.

The second point I wish to make is a practical matter. The number of priests has declined even if at the present moment we are able to cope, because we have young priests and old priests, and there are young men on their way towards the priesthood. And yet the burdens have increased. To be looking after two, three, or four parishes at the same time, in addition to all the new tasks that have emerged, can lead to discouragement. Often I ask myself, or rather each of us asks himself and his brethren: how are we going to cope? Is this not a profession that consumes us, that no longer brings us joy since we see that whatever we do is never enough? We are overburdened!

What response can be given? Obviously I cannot offer infallible remedies: nevertheless I wish to suggest some basic guidelines. I take the first one from the *Letter to the Philippians* (cf. 2:5-8), where Saint Paul says to all, especially of course to those who work in God’s field: “have in yourselves the mind of Christ Jesus”. His mind was such that, faced with the destiny of humanity, he could hardly bear to remain in glory, but had to stoop down and do the incredible, take upon himself the utter poverty of a human life even to the point of suffering on the Cross. This is the mind of Jesus Christ: feeling impelled to bring to humanity the light of the Father, to help us by forming the Kingdom of God with us and in us. And the mind of Jesus Christ also deeply roots him in all-pervading communion with the Father. An external indication of this, as it were, is that the Evangelists repeatedly recount that he withdraws to the mountain alone, to pray. His activity flows from his profound union with the Father, and precisely because of this, he has to go out and visit all the towns and villages proclaiming the Kingdom of God, announcing that it is present in our midst. He has to inaugurate the Kingdom among us so that, through us, it can transform the world; he has to ensure that God’s will is done on earth as it is in Heaven and that Heaven comes down upon earth. These two aspects belong to the mind of Christ Jesus. On the one hand we must know God from within, know Christ from within, and be with him; only in this way will we discover the “treasure”. On the other hand we must also go out towards others. We cannot simply keep the “treasure” to ourselves; we must hand it on.

I would like to be more specific with regard to this basic guideline with its two aspects. It is necessary to combine zeal with humility, with an awareness of our limitations. On the one hand there has to be zeal: if we truly encounter Christ again and again, we cannot keep him to

ourselves. We feel impelled to go out to the poor, the elderly, the weak, to children and young people, to those in their prime. We feel impelled to be “heralds”, apostles of Christ. Yet our zeal, lest it become empty and begin to wear us down, must be combined with humility, with moderation, with the acceptance of our limits. So many things should be done, yet I see that I am not capable of doing them. This is true, I imagine, for many pastors, and it is also true for the Pope, who ought to do so many things! My strength is simply not enough. In this way I learn to do what I can and I leave the rest to God and to my assistants, saying: “Ultimately you must do this work, Lord, because the Church is yours. You give me only the energy I have. I give it to you, since it comes from you; everything else I place in your hands.” I believe that the humility which prompts us to say: “my energy goes no further, I leave you, Lord, to do the rest” is crucial. And then trust is needed: he will give me the assistants I need, and they will do what I am unable to do.

To take this idea a step further, the combination of zeal and humility also means combining all aspects of service with our inner life. We can serve others and give to others only if we personally also receive, if we do not empty ourselves. That is why the Church offers us free spaces, which on the one hand allow us to “breathe in” and “breathe out” anew, and on the other hand become the source and centre of our service. In the first place there is the daily celebration of Holy Mass. We must never do this merely out of routine, as “something that I have to do”, but rather “from within”! Let us identify with the words and actions, and with the event that is really present there! If we celebrate Mass prayerfully, if our saying “this is my body” is born from our communion with Jesus Christ who has laid his hands upon us and authorized us to speak with his own “I”, if we celebrate the Eucharist with intimate participation in faith and prayer, then it is not simply an external duty; then the *ars celebrandi* comes naturally, because it consists in celebrating from the Lord’s perspective and in communion with him, and hence in the way that best serves the people. Then we ourselves are constantly enriched and at the same time, we hand on to others something more than what is ours, that is to say: the Lord’s presence.

The other free space to which the Church, so to speak, obliges us, and in so doing liberates us, is the Liturgy of the Hours. Let us aim to recite it as a true prayer, a prayer in communion with the Israel of the Old and New Testaments, a prayer in communion with all who pray throughout history, a prayer in communion with Jesus Christ, a prayer that arises from the deepest “I”, from the deepest subject of these prayers. In this way we draw into our prayer those others who lack the time or the energy or the capacity to pray. As people of prayer, we represent others when we pray and in so doing, we fulfil a pastoral ministry of the first order. This is not withdrawing into the private sphere, it is a pastoral priority, it is a pastoral activity in which our own priesthood is renewed, and we are once again filled by Christ. We include others in the communion of the praying Church and at the same time, we allow the power of prayer, the presence of Jesus Christ, to flow into this world.

The motto of these days has been: “those who believe are never alone”. These words apply and must apply especially to priests, to each one of us. They apply in two senses: a priest is never

alone because Jesus Christ is always with him. He is with us, let us also be with him! But they must apply in another sense too. He who becomes a priest enters into a presbyterate, a community of priests together with their Bishop. He is a priest in this communion with his confrères. Let us commit ourselves to live this out, not only as a theological and juridical precept, but as a practical experience for each of us. Let us offer this communion to one another, let us offer it especially to those that we know are suffering from loneliness, those that we know are troubled by questions and problems, and perhaps by doubts and uncertainties! Let us offer this communion to each other, and so experience our communion with Jesus Christ ever anew, more fully and more joyfully, through being with the other, through being with others! Amen.

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