



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO AUSTRIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 850th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE SHRINE OF MARIAZELL

VISIT TO HEILIGENKREUZ ABBEY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Sunday, 9 September 2007

*Most Reverend Father Abbot,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Cistercian Monks of Heiligenkreuz,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Consecrated Life,
Distinguished Guests and Friends of the Monastery and the Academy,
Ladies and Gentlemen!*

On my pilgrimage to the *Magna Mater Austriae*, I am pleased to visit this Abbey of Heiligenkreuz, which is not only an important stop on the *Via Sacra* leading to Mariazell, but the oldest continuously active Cistercian monastery in the world. I wished to come to this place so rich in history in order to draw attention to the fundamental directive of Saint Benedict, according to whose *Rule* Cistercians also live. Quite simply, Benedict insisted that “nothing be put before the divine Office”.^[1]

For this reason, in a monastery of Benedictine spirit, the praise of God, which the monks sing as a solemn choral prayer, always has priority. Monks are certainly – thank God! – not the only people who pray; others also pray: children, the young and the old, men and women, the married and the single – all Christians pray, or at least, they should!

In the life of monks, however, prayer takes on a particular importance: it is the heart of their calling. Their vocation is to be men of prayer. In the patristic period the monastic life was likened to the life of the angels. It was considered the essential mark of the angels that they are worshippers. Their very life is worship. This should hold true also for monks. Monks pray first and foremost not for any specific intention, but simply because God is worthy of being praised. “*Confitemini Domino, quoniam bonus!* – Praise the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy is eternal!”: so we are urged by a number of Psalms (e.g. *Ps* 106:1). Such prayer for its own sake, intended as pure divine service, is rightly called *officium*. It is “service” par excellence, the “sacred service” of monks. It is offered to the triune God who, above all else, is worthy “to receive glory, honour and power” (*Rev* 4:11), because he wondrously created the world and even more wondrously renewed it.

At the same time, the *officium* of consecrated persons is also a sacred service to men and women, a testimony offered to them. All people have deep within their hearts, whether they know it or not, a yearning for definitive fulfilment, for supreme happiness, and thus, ultimately, for God. A monastery, in which the community gathers several times a day for the praise of God, testifies to the fact that this primordial human longing does not go unfulfilled: God the Creator has not placed us in a fearful darkness where, groping our way in despair, we seek some ultimate meaning (cf. *Acts* 17:27); God has not abandoned us in a desert void, bereft of meaning, where in the end only death awaits us. No! God has shone forth in our darkness with his light, with his Son Jesus Christ. In him, God has entered our world in all his “fullness” (cf. *Col* 1:19); in him all truth, the truth for which we yearn, has its source and summit.^[2]

Our light, our truth, our goal, our fulfilment, our life – all this is not a religious doctrine but a person: *Jesus Christ*. Over and above any ability of our own to seek and to desire God, we ourselves were already sought and desired, and indeed, found and redeemed by him! The gaze of people of every time and nation, of all the philosophies, religions and cultures, ultimately encounters the wide open eyes of the crucified and risen Son of God; his open heart is the fullness of love. The eyes of Christ are the eyes of a loving God. The image of the Crucified Lord above the altar, whose romanesque original is found in the Cathedral of Sarzano, shows that this gaze is turned to every man and woman. The Lord, in truth, looks into the hearts of each of us.

The core of monasticism is worship – living like the angels. But since monks are people of flesh and blood on this earth, Saint Benedict added to the central command: “*pray*”, a second command: “*work*”. In the mind of Saint Benedict, and Saint Bernard as well, part of monastic life, along with prayer, is work: the cultivation of the land in accordance with the Creator’s will. Thus in every age monks, setting out from their gaze upon God, have made the earth live-giving and lovely. Their protection and renewal of creation derived precisely from their looking to God. In the rhythm of the *ora et labora*, the community of consecrated persons bears witness to the God who, in Jesus Christ, looks upon us, while human beings and the world, as God looks upon them, become good.

Monks are not the only ones who pray the *officium*; from the monastic tradition the Church has derived the obligation for all religious, and also for priests and deacons, to recite the Breviary. Here too, it is appropriate for men and women religious, priests and deacons – and naturally Bishops as well – to come before God in their daily “official” prayer with hymns and psalms, with thanksgiving and pure petition.

Dear brother priests and deacons, dear brothers and sisters in the consecrated life! I realize that discipline is needed, and sometimes great effort as well, in order to recite the Breviary faithfully; but through this *officium* we also receive many riches: how many times, in doing so, have we seen our weariness and despondency melt away! When God is faithfully praised and worshipped, his blessings are unailing. In Austria, people rightly say: “Everything depends on God’s blessing!”.

Your primary service to this world must therefore be your prayer and the celebration of the divine Office. The interior disposition of each priest, and of each consecrated person, must be that of “putting nothing before the divine Office”. The beauty of this inner attitude will find expression in the beauty of the liturgy, so that wherever we join in singing, praising, exalting and worshipping God, a little bit of heaven will become present on earth. Truly it would not be presumptuous to say that, in a liturgy completely centred on God, we can see, in its rituals and chant, an image of eternity. Otherwise, how could our forefathers, hundreds of years ago, have built a sacred edifice as solemn as this? Here the architecture itself draws all our senses upwards, towards “what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined: what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9). In all our efforts on behalf of the liturgy, the determining factor must always be our looking to God. We stand before God – he speaks to us and we speak to him. Whenever in our thinking we are only concerned about making the liturgy attractive, interesting and beautiful, the battle is already lost. Either it is *Opus Dei*, with God as its specific subject, or it is not. In the light of this, I ask you to celebrate the sacred liturgy with your gaze fixed on God within the communion of saints, the living Church of every time and place, so that it will truly be an expression of the sublime beauty of the God who has called men and women to be his friends!

The soul of prayer, ultimately, is the Holy Spirit. Whenever we pray, it is he who “helps us in our weakness, interceding for us with sighs too deep for words” (Rom 8:26). Trusting in these words of the Apostle Paul, I assure you, dear brothers and sisters, that prayer will produce in you the same effect which once led to the custom of calling priests and consecrated persons simply “spirituals” (*Geistliche*). Bishop Sailer of Regensburg once said that priests should be first and foremost spiritual persons. I would like to see a revival of the word “*Geistliche*”. More importantly, though, the content of that word should become a part of our lives: namely, that in following the Lord, we become, by the power of the Spirit, “spiritual” men and women.

Austria (*Österreich*) is, in an old play on words, truly *Klösterreich*: a realm of monasteries and a land rich in monasteries. Your ancient abbeys whose origins and traditions date back many centuries are places where “God is put first”. Dear friends, make this priority given to God very

apparent to people! As a spiritual oasis, a monastery reminds today's world of the most important, and indeed, in the end, the only decisive thing: that there is an ultimate reason why life is worth living: God and his unfathomable love.

And I ask you, dear members of the faithful: see your abbeys and monasteries for what they are and always wish to be: not mere strongholds of culture and tradition, or even simple business enterprises. Structure, organization and finances are necessary in the Church too, but they are not what is essential. A monastery is above all this: a place of spiritual power. Coming to one of your monasteries here in Austria, we have the same impression as when, after a strenuous hike in the Alps, we finally find refreshment at a clear mountain spring... Take advantage of these springs of God's closeness in your country; treasure the religious communities, the monasteries and abbeys; and make use of the spiritual service that consecrated persons are willing to offer you!

Finally, I have come also to visit the Academy, now the Pontifical Academy, which is 205 years old and which, in its new status, the Abbot has named after the present Successor of Peter. Important though it is that the discipline of theology be part of the *universitas* of knowledge through the presence of Catholic theological faculties in state universities, it is equally important that there should be academic institutions like your own, where there can be a deeper interplay between scientific theology and lived spirituality. God is never simply the "object" of theology; he is always its living "subject" as well. Christian theology, for that matter, is never a purely human discourse about God, but always, and inseparably, the *logos* and "logic" of God's self-revelation. For this reason scientific rationality and lived devotion are two necessarily complementary and interdependent aspects of study.

The father of the Cistercian Order, Saint Bernard, in his own day fought against the detachment of an objectivizing rationality from the main current of ecclesial spirituality. Our situation today, while different, nonetheless has notable similarities. In its desire to be recognized as a rigorously scientific discipline in the modern sense, theology can lose the life-breath given by faith. But just as a liturgy which no longer looks to God is already in its death throes, so too a theology which no longer draws its life-breath from faith ceases to be theology; it ends up as an array of more or less loosely connected disciplines. But where theology is practised "on bent knee", as Hans Urs von Balthasar^[3] urged, it will prove fruitful for the Church in Austria and beyond.

This fruitfulness is shown through fostering and forming those who have vocations to the priesthood or the religious life. Today, if such a vocation is to be sustained faithfully over a lifetime, there is a need for a formation capable of integrating faith and reason, heart and mind, life and thought. A life devoted to following Christ calls for an integration of one's entire personality. Neglect of the intellectual dimension can give rise all too easily to a kind of superficial piety nourished mostly by emotions and sentiments, which cannot be sustained over a lifetime. Neglect of the spiritual dimension, in turn, can create a rarified rationalism which, in its coldness and detachment, can never bring about an enthusiastic self-surrender to God. A life devoted to

following Christ cannot be built on such one-sided foundations; half-measures leave a person unhappy and, consequently, also spiritually barren. Each vocation to the religious life or to the priesthood is a treasure so precious that those responsible for it should do everything possible to ensure a formation which promotes both *fides et ratio* – faith and reason, heart and mind.

Saint Leopold of Austria – as we heard earlier - on the advice of his son, Blessed Otto of Freising, who was my predecessor in the episcopal see of Freising (his feast is celebrated today in Freising), founded your abbey in 1133, and called it *Unsere Liebe Frau zum Heiligen Kreuz* – Our Lady of Holy Cross. This monastery is dedicated to Our Lady not simply by tradition – like every Cistercian monastery –, but among you there burns the Marian flame of a Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard, who entered the monastery along with thirty of his companions, is a kind of patron saint of vocations. Perhaps it was because of his particular devotion to Our Lady that he exercised such a compelling and infectious influence on his many young contemporaries called by God. Where Mary is, there is the archetype of total self-giving and Christian discipleship. Where Mary is, there is the pentecostal breath of the Holy Spirit; there is new beginning and authentic renewal.

From this Marian sanctuary on the *Via Sacra*, I pray that all Austria's shrines will experience fruitfulness and further growth. Here, as at Mariazell, I would like, before leaving, to ask the Mother of God once more to intercede for all of Austria. In the words of Saint Bernard, I invite everyone to become a trusting child before Mary, even as the Son of God did. Saint Bernard says, and we say with him: "Look to the star of the sea, call upon Mary ... in danger, in distress, in doubt, think of Mary, call upon Mary. May her name never be far from your lips, or far from your heart ... If you follow her, you will not stray; if you pray to her, you will not despair; if you turn your thoughts to her, you will not err. If she holds you, you will not fall; if she protects you, you need not fear; if she is your guide, you will not tire; if she is gracious to you, you will surely reach your destination".^[4]

[1] *Regula Benedicti* 43,3.

[2] Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

[3] Cf. HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Theologie und Heiligkeit*, an essay written in 1948, in *Verbum Caro*. Schriften zur Theologie I, Einsiedeln, 1960, 195-224.

[4] BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *In laudibus Virginis Matris*, Homilia 2, 17.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana