



# The Holy See

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## ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO TEACHERS AND STUDENTS OF THE PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITIES IN ROME

Vatican Basilica

Thursday, 11 December 2008

*Your Eminences,  
Hon. Madam Minister and Distinguished Authorities,  
Venerable Brothers,  
Distinguished Rectors and Professors,  
Dear Students,*

The approach of Holy Christmas offers me the ever appreciated opportunity to meet the university world of Rome. I cordially greet Cardinal Agostino Vallini, my Vicar for the Diocese of Rome, and Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, whose presence takes us back in our minds and hearts to the unforgettable experience of [World Youth Day last July](#). The passage of the icon of *Mary Sedes Sapientiae* from the Romanian to the Australian Delegation reminds us that this immense "network" of young people throughout the world is always active and on the move. I thank the Rector of La Sapienza University of Rome and the student who has greeted me on behalf of all. I am also grateful to the Minister of Education, Universities and Research for her presence, as I wish this sector, so important for the life of your country, every success. I extend a special greeting to the Israeli and Palestinian students who are studying in Rome thanks to the grants made available by the Lazio Region and the Universities of Rome, as well as to the three Rectors who took part yesterday in the meeting on the theme: "From Jerusalem to Rome to build a new humanism".

Dear friends, this year's programme prepared for you university students by the Diocese of Rome is appropriately combined with the Pauline Year. The 2,000th anniversary of the birth of the Apostle to the Gentiles is helping the whole Church to rediscover her fundamental missionary

vocation and, at the same time, to draw amply from the inexhaustible theological and spiritual treasure of St Paul's Letters. As you know, week by week I myself am developing a series of Catecheses on this topic. I am convinced that for you too, both personally and as a community, as well as in the university apostolate, the encounter with the figure and message of St Paul is a very enriching opportunity. For this reason I shall shortly be presenting to you a copy of the Letter to the Romans, the greatest expression of Pauline thought and a sign of his special consideration for the Church of Rome, or to use the words of greeting with which the Epistle begins for "all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints" (Rm 1: 7).

The Letter to the Romans as some of the lecturers present here know well is certainly one of the most important cultural texts of all time. Yet it is and remains mainly a living message for the living Church and, as such, as a message precisely for today, I place it in your hands this evening. May this writing, which sprang from the Apostle's heart, become a substantial nourishment for your faith, bringing you to believe more and better and also to think about yourselves in order to arrive at a faith "thought through" and, at the same time, to live this faith, putting it into practice in accordance with the truth of Christ's commandment. Only in this way does the faith one professes become "credible" also to others, who are won over by the eloquent witness of deeds. Let Paul speak to you, Christian teachers and students of contemporary Rome, and enable you to share in his own first-hand experience: that the Gospel of Jesus Christ "is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Rm 1: 16).

The Christian proclamation that was revolutionary in Paul's historical and cultural context was strong enough to break down "the dividing wall" that separated Jews from the Gentiles (cf. Eph 2: 14; Rm 10: 12). It has kept an ever current newness that can demolish other walls that are repeatedly erected in every context and in every epoch. The source of this strength lies in the Spirit of Christ, to whom Paul consciously refers. To the Christians of Corinth he declares in his preaching that he does not rely on "plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power" (1 Cor 2: 4). And what was the core of his proclamation? It was the newness of the salvation that Christ brought to humanity: through his death and Resurrection salvation is offered to all men and women without distinction.

It is offered, not imposed. Salvation is a gift that always asks to be accepted personally. This, dear young people, is the essential content of Baptism which this year is proposed to you as a Sacrament to be rediscovered and, for some of you, to receive or to strengthen by a free and conscious choice. Precisely in the Letter to the Romans, in chapter six, we find a great expression of the meaning of Christian Baptism. "Do you not know", St Paul writes, "that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rm 6: 3). As you can easily imagine, this is a very profound idea that contains the whole theology of the Paschal Mystery: Christ's death, through God's power, is a source of life, an inexhaustible source of renewal in the Holy Spirit. Being "baptized in Christ" means being spiritually immersed in that death which is the act of God's infinite and universal love, capable of redeeming every person and every creature

from the slavery of sin and death. Indeed St Paul continues: "We were buried therefore with him by Baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (*ibid.*, v. 4).

In his Letter to the Romans the Apostle communicates to us his full joy in this mystery when he writes: "who shall separate us from the love of Christ?... For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rm 8: 35, 38-39). And this same love is that in which the new life of the Christian consists. Here too, St Paul makes an impressive synthesis that stems, as always, from his personal experience: "He who loves his neighbour", he writes, "has fulfilled the Law.... therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rm 13: 8, 10).

Dear friends, this is what I wanted to impart to you this evening. It is a message of faith of course, but at the same time is a truth that illuminates the mind, enlarging it to reach the horizons of God; it is a truth that directs real life because the Gospel is the way that leads to the fullness of life. This way has already been trodden by Jesus, indeed, he himself is the Way who came to us from the Father so that we might reach the Father through him. This is the mystery of Advent and of Christmas. May the Virgin Mary and St Paul help you to adore this Way and to make him your own with profound faith and deep joy. I thank you all for your presence. With a view to the upcoming Christmas Celebrations, I express to each one my cordial greetings, which I gladly extend to your families and your loved ones. Happy Christmas!

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