



The Holy See

ECCLESIAL CONVENTION

OF THE DIOCESE OF ROME ON THE THEME:

"JESUS HAS RISEN: EDUCATING FOR HOPE IN PRAYER,
ACTION AND SUFFERING"

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Basilica of Saint John Lateran

Monday, 9 June 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is the fourth time that I have the joy of being with you for the Convention; every year it brings together the multiple live forces of the Diocese of Rome to give continuity to, and to point out, shared goals for our pastoral activity. I address an affectionate and cordial welcome to each one of you, Bishops, priests, deacons, religious, consecrated men and women and the lay people of parish communities, ecclesial associations and movements, families, youth and people involved in various capacities in formative and educational work. I cordially thank the Cardinal Vicar for his words on behalf of you all.

After dedicating special attention to the family for three years, we have now focused for two years on the topic of the education of the new generations. It is a theme that involves the family first of all but also very directly concerns the Church, schools and society as a whole. Thus we seek to respond to that "educational emergency" which, for everyone, is a great and unavoidable challenge. The goal we have set ourselves for the coming pastoral year on which we shall be reflecting at this Convention once again refers to education, in the perspective of theological hope nourished by faith and trust in God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ as man's true friend. "Jesus is risen: educating for hope in prayer, action and suffering" will therefore be our theme this evening. Jesus raised from the dead is truly the faultless foundation that supports our faith and hope. He has been from the outset, since the time of the Apostles who were direct witnesses of his Resurrection and proclaimed him to the world at the cost of their lives. He is today and always

will be. As the Apostle Paul wrote in chapter 15 of his First Letter to the Corinthians, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (v. 14), "if our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are the most unfortunate of all people" (v. 19). I repeat to you what I said on 19 October 2006 at the Ecclesial Convention in Verona: "The Resurrection of Christ is a fact that occurred in history, of which the Apostles were witnesses and certainly not its inventors. At the same time, it was not simply a return to our earthly life. "Instead, it is the greatest "mutation" that ever occurred, the decisive "jump" towards a profoundly new dimension of life, the entry into a decidedly different order that regards above all Jesus of Nazareth, but with him also us, the whole human family, history and the entire universe" (Address to the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention, Verona, Italy, 19 Oct. 2006).

In the light of Jesus risen from the dead we can thus understand the true dimensions of the Christian faith, as "a life-changing and life-sustaining hope" (Encyclical Spe Salvi, n. 10), setting us free from those misinterpretations and false alternatives that have restricted and weakened the breath of our hope down the centuries. In practice, the hope of those who believe in the God who raised Jesus from the dead aspires with its whole being to that happiness and full and total joy which we call eternal life, but for this very reason it clothes, enlivens and transforms our daily existence on earth, gives a direction and enduring significance to our small hopes and the efforts we make to change, and makes the world in which we live less unjust. Of course, Christian hope likewise concerns each one of us personally, the eternal salvation of our self and our life in this world. However, it is also a community hope, a hope for the Church and for the entire human family, that is, it is "always essentially also hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for me too" (*ibid.*, n. 48).

In contemporary society and culture, and thus also in our beloved city of Rome, it is not easy to live under the banner of Christian hope. On the one hand, distrust, disappointment and resignation frequently prevail. Not only do they contradict the "great hope" of faith, but also the "little hopes" that generally comfort us in our efforts to attain the goals of daily life. In other words, we have the feeling that for Italy, as for Europe, the best years are now behind us and a precarious and uncertain future awaits the new generations. On the other hand, the expectations of great innovations and improvements are focused on science and technology, hence on human efforts and discoveries, as though solutions to our problems could come from them alone. It would be nonsensical to deny or to minimize the enormous contribution made by science and technology to transforming the world and our actual standard of living but it would be equally short-sighted to ignore that their progress puts into the hands of men and women abysmal possibilities for evil and that, nonetheless, it is not science and technology that give our lives meaning and teach us to distinguish good from evil.

Therefore, as I wrote in Spe Salvi, it is not science but love that redeems man and this also means the earthly and worldly aspects (cf. n. 26).

Thus we approach the deepest and most crucial cause of the weakness of hope in the world we

live in. Ultimately this cause is no different from that which the Apostle Paul pointed out to the Christians of Ephesus when he reminded them that before encountering Christ they had "no hope and [were] without God in the world" (Eph 2: 12). Our civilization and culture, which encountered Christ 2,000 years ago, would be unrecognizable without his presence, especially here in Rome. Yet, it tends all too often to put God in parentheses, to organize personal and social life without him and even to claim that it is impossible to know anything about God and even go so far as to deny his existence. However, when God is left aside none of the things that truly matter to us can find a permanent place; all our great and small hopes are founded on emptiness. Thus, to "educate for hope", as we propose to do at this Convention and throughout the coming pastoral year, it is first necessary to open our hearts, our minds and our entire lives to God, to be his credible witnesses among our brothers and sisters.

At our previous Diocesan Conventions we have already considered the causes of the current educational crisis and the proposals that can help to overcome it. Moreover, in recent months, also with my [Letter on the urgent task of education](#), we have sought to involve the whole city, especially families and schools, in this joint undertaking. It is not necessary here, therefore, to return to these aspects. Rather, let us see how we can really teach ourselves to hope, turning our attention to certain "places" where this can be learned practically and exercised effectively and which I identified in [Spe Salvi](#). Among these places, prayer has priority. In prayer we open ourselves to the One who is the origin and foundation of our hope. The prayerful person is never totally alone for God is the One who in every situation and in any trial is always able to listen to and help him/her. Through perseverance in prayer the Lord broadens our desires and expands our mind, rendering us better able to receive him within ourselves. The correct way to pray is, therefore, a process of inner purification. We must open ourselves to God's gaze, to God himself so that, in the light of God's Face, lies and hypocrisy fall away. This manner of exposing oneself in prayer to God's Face is really a purification that renews us, sets us free and opens us not only to God but also to our brothers and sisters. Hence, it is the opposite of escaping from our responsibilities toward our neighbour. On the contrary, it is through prayer that we learn to keep the world open to God and to become ministers of hope for others. It is in speaking with God that we see the whole community of the Church, a human community, as all our brethren, and thus we learn responsibility for others and also the hope that God will help us on our way. Teaching prayer, learning "the art of prayer" from the lips of the divine Teacher, like the first disciples who asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk 11: 1), is thus an essential task. By learning to pray we learn to live and on our journey we must pray ever better with the Church and with the Lord in order to live in a better way. As the beloved Servant of God John Paul II reminded us in his Apostolic Letter [Novo Millennio Ineunte](#): "Our Christian communities must become *genuine "schools' of prayer*, where the encounter with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly "falls in love" (n. 33): thus Christian hope will grow within us. And love of God and neighbour will grow with hope.

I wrote in the Encyclical *Spe Salvi*: "All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action" (n. 35). As disciples of Jesus, let us therefore participate joyfully in the effort to make the face of this city of ours more beautiful, more human and fraternal in order to revive its hope and the joy of belonging to it together. Dear brothers and sisters, it is precisely the acute and widespread awareness of the evils and problems that exist in Rome which is reawakening the will to make a concerted effort to rectify them: it is our duty to make our own specific contribution, starting with the crucial structure that consists of education and the person's formation, but also constructively facing the many other concrete problems that often make the lives of this city's inhabitants stressful. We will seek in particular to promote a more family-friendly culture and a social organization that is ready to welcome life, as well as appreciate the elderly who are so numerous in Rome's population. We will work to respond to primary needs such as employment and housing, especially for young people. We will share the commitment to make our city safer and more "liveable", but we will also strive to make it so for everyone, in particular for the poorest people, so that immigrants who come among us, with the intention of finding a living space and who respect our laws, may not be excluded.

I do not need to enter further into these problems with which you are familiar because you live them daily. Rather, I wish to emphasize the attitude and approach with which those who put their hope in God first work and commit themselves. Their primary attitude is humility; they do not claim to be successful always or to be able to solve every problem by their own efforts. Yet it is also, and for the same reason, an attitude of great trust, tenacity and courage: in fact, believers know that despite all the difficulties and failures, their life, work and history overall are protected through the indestructible power of God's love; that consequently they are never fruitless or meaningless. In this perspective we can understand more easily that Christian hope also lives in suffering, indeed, that suffering itself educates and fortifies our hope in a special way. Certainly we must "do whatever we can to reduce suffering: to avoid as far as possible the suffering of the innocent; to soothe pain; to give assistance in overcoming mental suffering" (*Spe Salvi*, n. 36). Great progress has effectively been made, particularly in the struggle against physical pain. Yet we cannot entirely eliminate the world's suffering because we are powerless to dry its sources: the finiteness of our being and the power of evil and sin. Indeed, the suffering of the innocent and mental imbalances are, unfortunately, tending to increase in the world. Actually, human experience, today and always, and especially the experience of the Saints and martyrs, confirms the great Christian truth that it is not escape from suffering that cures the human being but rather the ability to accept tribulation and mature through it, finding meaning therein through union with Christ. For each one of us and for the society in which we live the measure of our humanity is defined in our relationship with suffering and with people who are suffering. Christian faith deserves the historical merit of having inspired in men and women, in a new way and with new depth, the capacity for sharing also inwardly the suffering of others, hence one is not alone in suffering, and also to suffer for love of goodness, truth and justice: all this is far beyond our own strength but becomes possible on the basis of God's com-compassion through his love of humanity in Christ's Passion.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us teach ourselves every day the hope that matures in suffering. We are called to do so in the first place when we are personally afflicted by a serious illness or some other harsh trial. We will grow equally in hope through concrete help and daily closeness to the suffering of our neighbours and of our relatives, and of every person who is our brother because we draw near with a loving attitude. Furthermore, let us learn to offer to God, rich in mercy, the small efforts of our daily existence, inserting them humbly into the great "com-passion" of Jesus, in that treasure of compassion of which the human race stands in need. The hope of believers in Christ cannot, in any case, stop at this world, but is intrinsically oriented to full and eternal communion with the Lord. Therefore, toward the end of [my Encyclical](#) I reflected on God's Judgment as a place in which to learn and exercise hope. I thus sought once again to make in some way familiar and comprehensible to humanity and to the culture of our time the salvation that is promised to us in the world beyond death, even if we cannot have a true and proper experience of that world here below. To restore its true dimensions and crucial motivation to education in hope, all of us, starting with priests and catechists, must put back at the centre of the proposal of faith this great truth whose "first fruits" are in Jesus Christ raised from the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15: 20-23).

Dear brothers and sisters, I end this reflection by thanking each one of you for the generosity and dedication with which you work in the Lord's vineyard and I ask you always to preserve within you, to nourish and strengthen the great gift of Christian hope first of all with prayer. I ask this especially of you young people who are called to make this gift your own in freedom and in responsibility, thereby to reinvigorate the future of our beloved city. I entrust each one of you and the whole Church of Rome to Mary Most Holy, Star of Hope. My prayers, my affection and my Blessing accompany you at this Convention and in the pastoral year that awaits us.

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