



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 23rd PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY**

Consistory Hall

Saturday, 15 November 2008

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to meet all of you today, Members and Consultors of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, as you meet in Plenary Assembly. I greet Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko and Bishop Josef Clemens, President and Secretary of the Dicastery, and together with them the other Bishops present. I extend a special welcome to the lay faithful coming from diverse apostolic experiences and various social and cultural contexts. The theme chosen for your Assembly "20 years from *Christifideles laici*: remembrance, development, new challenges and work" directly introduces us to the service that your Dicastery is called to offer to the Church for the good of the lay faithful of the entire world.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* defined the *magna charta* for Catholic laity of our time is the mature fruit of the reflections and of the exchange of experiences and proposals and of the reflections of the 7th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which took place in the month of October in 1987 on the theme "Vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world". It involved an organic revisiting of the Second Vatican Council's teachings in regard to lay people: the dignity of the baptized, the vocation to holiness, belonging to the ecclesial communion, participation in the building of the Christian community and the Church's mission, witness in all social contexts and commitment to service of the person for the individual's integral development and for the common good of society themes present above all in the Constitutions *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*, as well as in the Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem*.

While taking up again the teachings of the Council, *Christifideles laici* orients the discernment, examination and orientation of lay efforts within the Church faced with the social changes of these years. In many different Churches lay participation has grown thanks to pastoral, diocesan and parish councils revealing itself to be very positive insofar as it is animated by an authentic *sensus Ecclesiae*. The clear awareness of the Church's charismatic dimension has brought about an appreciation and esteemed the more simple charisms that Divine Providence bestows on individuals as well as those that bring great spiritual, educational and missionary fecundity. Not by chance does the Document recognize and encourage the "new era of group endeavours of the lay faithful". It is a sign of the "richness and the versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community" (n. 29), which indicate the ecclesial "criteria" necessary on one side for the discernment of Pastors and on the other side for growth of the life of lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities. In this respect I would like to thank the Pontifical Council for the Laity in a very special way, for the work completed during the last decades to welcome, accompany, discern, recognize and encourage these ecclesial realities, favouring the knowledge of their Catholic identity, helping them to insert themselves more fully into the great tradition and the living fabric of the Church, and promoting their missionary development.

To speak of Catholic laity means to refer to the countless baptized persons working in multiple and various circumstances to grow as disciples and witnesses of the Lord and to rediscover and experience the beauty in the truth and joy of being Christians. The current cultural and social condition renders still more urgent this apostolic action to generously share in the treasure of grace and holiness, of charity, doctrine, culture and works, from which the stream of Catholic tradition flows. The new generations are not only the preferred audience of this transmission and sharing but also those whose hearts await truth and happiness in order to be able to give Christian witness, as happens already in an admirable way. I myself have been witness to it in Sydney at the recent World Youth Day. And therefore I encourage the Pontifical Council for the Laity to continue the work of this providential global youth pilgrimage in the name of Christ, and to work at the promotion of youth ministry and their authentic education everywhere.

I also know of your commitment regarding issues of special importance, such as that of the dignity and participation of women in the life of the Church and of society. I have already had the opportunity to appreciate the Convention you sponsored 20 years from the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* on the theme "Woman and Man, the *Humanum* in its Entirety". Man and woman, equal in dignity, are called to enrich themselves mutually in communion and collaboration, not only in matrimony and in the family, but also in society and all of its dimensions. Christian women are asked to be knowledgeable of and courageous in facing their demanding work, for which, however, they do not lack the support of a distinct tendency towards holiness, of a special acuteness in the discernment of our time's cultural currents, and of the particular passion for human care that characterizes them. Enough cannot be said for how much the Church recognizes, appreciates and values women's participation in her mission of service to the spreading of the Gospel.

Allow me, dear friends, a last reflection regarding the secular nature that is characteristic of the lay faithful. The world within the scheme of family life, its working and social life is a theological place, an environment and a means in which and through which to realize their vocation and mission (cf. *Christifideles laici*, 15-17). Every milieu, circumstance and activity in which we engage that can become resplendent with the unity of faith and life is entrusted to the responsibility of lay faithful, moved by the desire to communicate the gift of encounter with Christ and the certainty of the human person's dignity. It is their duty to take up the witness of charity especially with the most poor, suffering and needy just as it is to assume every Christian task aimed to construct conditions of ever greater justice and peace within human coexistence, thus opening new horizons to the Gospel! Therefore I ask the Pontifical Council for the Laity to follow with diligent pastoral care the formation, witness and collaboration of lay faithful in the most varied situations, in which the authentic nature of human life in society is at risk. In a particular way, I confirm the necessity and urgency of the evangelical formation and pastoral accompaniment of a new generation of Catholics working in politics, that they be coherent with the professed faith, that they have moral firmness, the capacity of educated judgment, professional competence and passion for service to the common good.

Work in the Lord's large vineyard needs *Christifideles laici* who, like the Most Holy Virgin Mary, speak and live the "*fiat*" to God's plan in their life. With this prospective, I thank you, then, for your precious contribution to such a noble cause and I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you and those dear to you.

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