



## The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO THE COMMUNITIES  
OF THE PONTIFICAL REGIONAL SEMINARIES  
OF THE MARCHES, APULIA AND ABRUZZI-MOLISE (ITALY)**

*Clementine Hall*

*Saturday, 29 November 2008*

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,*

*Dear Friends of the Regional Seminaries of the Marches, Apulia and Abruzzi-Molise,*

I am particularly pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the centenary of the foundation of your respective Regional Seminaries that were established as a result of the encouragement of [Pope St Pius X](#), who urged the Italian Bishops, especially those of the central and southern part of the Peninsula, to consider congregating Seminaries in order to provide more effectively for the formation of candidates to the priesthood. I greet you all with affection, starting with Archbishops Edoardo Menichelli, Carlo Ghidelli and Francesco Cacucci, whom I thank for the words with which they have interpreted your common sentiments. I greet the rectors, the formation staff, the professors and the students and all who live and work daily in your institutions. On this important occasion, I would like to join you in praising the Lord, who in this century has accompanied with his grace the lives of many priests who have trained at these important educational institutions. Many of them are involved today in the various sectors of your local Churches, in the mission *ad gentes* and in other services to the universal Church; some have been called to hold offices that entail great ecclesial responsibility.

I would now like to address you in particular, dear Seminarians, who are preparing to be workers in the Lord's vineyard. As the recent [Assembly of the Synod of Bishops](#) recalled, among the prioritized tasks of the presbyterate is that of scattering the Word of God in the field of the world in large handfuls. Like the seed in the Gospel parable, it actually seems very small but once it has sprouted it grows into a great shrub and bears abundant fruit (cf. Mt 13: 31-32). The Word of God that you will be called to sow in large handfuls and that bears within it eternal life is Christ himself,

the only one who can change the human heart and renew the world. But we might well ask ourselves: does contemporary man still feel the need for Christ and for his message of salvation?

In today's social context a certain culture seems to be showing us the face of a self-sufficient humanity desirous of accomplishing its own projects by itself, which chooses to be the sole author of its own destiny and consequently considers that God's presence is irrelevant; it therefore excludes him de facto from its choices and decisions. In a climate at times marked by a rationalism closed in on itself, that considers the practical sciences the only form of knowledge, the rest becomes completely subjective and consequently the religious experience also risks being perceived as a subjective choice, neither essential nor crucial for life. Today, of course, for these and other reasons, it has certainly become more difficult to believe, always more difficult to accept the Truth that is Christ, always more difficult to spend one's life for the cause of the Gospel. However, as the news reports daily, contemporary man often seems lost and worried about his future, in search of certainties and longing for reliable reference points. Moreover, as in every epoch, people in the third millennium need God and sometimes seek him even without realizing it. The task of Christians, and especially of priests, is to take in this deep yearning of the human heart and to offer to all, with the means and in the manner required by the needs of the times, the unchanging and therefore always alive and actual Word of eternal life that is Christ, Hope of the world.

With a view to this important mission that you will be called to carry out in the Church, the seminary years assume great value. This is a period designed for formation and discernment; years in which priority must be the constant pursuit of a personal relationship with Jesus, an intimate experience of his love that is acquired first of all through prayer and through contact with the Sacred Scriptures, read, interpreted and meditated upon in the faith of the ecclesial community. In this Pauline Year, how can I fail to propose the Apostle Paul to you as a model to inspire you in your preparation for the apostolic ministry? His extraordinary experience on the road to Damascus transformed him from a persecutor of Christians to a witness of the Lord's Resurrection, ready to lay down his life for the Gospel. He had been a faithful observer of all the prescriptions of the Torah and the Jewish traditions but after his encounter with Jesus, he writes in his Letter to the Philippians, "whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ". "For his sake", he added, "I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him" (cf. 3: 7-9). Conversion did not eliminate what was good and true in his life but permitted him to interpret the wisdom and truth of the law and of the prophets in a new way and thus be enabled to converse with all, after the example of the divine Teacher.

In imitation of St Paul, dear Seminarians, never tire of encountering Christ in listening, in reading and in studying Sacred Scripture, in prayer and in personal meditation, in the liturgy and in every other daily activity. Your role is important in this regard, dear formators, called to be witnesses for your pupils, even before being teachers of evangelical life. Because of their own typical characteristics, Regional Seminaries can be privileged places for the formation of seminarians in

diocesan spirituality, engraving this formation in the broader ecclesial and regional context with wisdom and balance. May your institutions also be "homes" that welcome vocations in order to impress an even greater impetus upon vocations ministry, taking special care of the world of youth and teaching them the great evangelical and missionary ideals.

Dear friends, as I thank you for your visit, I invoke upon each one of you the motherly protection of the Virgin Mother of Christ, whom the Advent liturgy presents to us as the model of one who watches while awaiting the glorious return of her divine Son. I confidently entrust you to her. Have frequent recourse to her intercession so that she may help you to keep alert and watchful. For my part, I assure you of my affection and my daily prayers, while I warmly bless you all.

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