



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO RECENTLY APPOINTED BISHOPS
TAKING PART IN A CONGRESS
ORGANIZED BY THE CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS**

Hall of the Swiss, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Monday, 22 September 2008

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I am pleased to welcome you at the beginning of your episcopal ministry and I greet you with affection, conscious of the indivisible collegial ties that unite the Pope with the Bishops in the bond of unity, charity and peace. These days that you are spending in Rome to examine in-depth the tasks that await you and to renew the profession of your faith at the tomb of St Peter must also be a special experience of that collegial union which, "based on both episcopal ordination and hierarchical communion... affects the inmost being of each Bishop and belongs to the structure of the Church as willed by Jesus Christ" (Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, n. 8). May this experience of brotherhood, prayer and study at the See of Peter nourish in each one of you the sentiment of communion with the Pope and with your Brothers and open you to concern for the entire Church. I thank Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re for the kind words with which he has interpreted your sentiments. I address a special greeting to Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches while, through you, I send an affectionate greeting to all the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care.

Our Meeting is taking place during the Pauline Year and on the eve of the Twelfth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God: two significant events in the life of the Church that help us to shed light on certain aspects of the Bishop's spirituality and mission. I would like to reflect briefly on the figure of St Paul. He is a teacher and a model especially for Bishops! St Gregory the Great described him as "the greatest Pastor of all" (cf. Pastoral Rule, Book I, 8). As Bishops we must learn from the Apostle great love for Jesus Christ first of all. From the moment of his encounter with the divine Teacher on the road to Damascus, St Paul's whole life

was a process of inner and apostolic conformation to him, amidst persecution and suffering (cf. 2 Tm 3: 11). St Paul described himself as a man whom "Jesus Christ has made... his own" (cf. Phil 3: 12) to the point that he could say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2: 20); and, further: "I have been crucified with Christ... and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2: 20). Paul's love for Christ moves us by its intensity. It was a love so strong and so vivid that it caused him to say: "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil 3: 8). The great Apostle's example calls us Bishops to increase in lived holiness every day in order to have the same sentiments as Jesus Christ's (cf. Phil 2: 5). The Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* clearly states on the subject of the Bishop's spiritual commitment that he must be first and foremost a "man of God", for it is not possible to be a servant of others unless one is first a "servant of God" (cf. n. 13).

The Bishop's first spiritual and apostolic commitment must therefore be to progress on the path of evangelical perfection. With the Apostle Paul, he must in fact be convinced that "our sufficiency is from God, who has qualified us to be ministers of a new Covenant (2 Cor 3: 5-6). Among the means that help him to progress in spiritual life he should give priority to the Word of God that must have indisputable centrality in the Bishop's life and mission. The Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* recalls: "before being one who hands on the Word, the Bishop, together with his priests and indeed like every member of the faithful... must be a hearer of the word", and adds that "there can be no primacy of holiness without attentive listening to the Word of God, which is the guide and nourishment of all holiness" (n. 15). I therefore urge you, dear Bishops, to entrust yourselves every day to the Word of God, to be teachers of the faith and authentic educators of your faithful; not like those who haggle over his Word, but like those who speak of God with sincerity, prompted by him and beneath his gaze (cf. 2 Cor 2: 17).

Dear Bishops, to face the great challenge of the secularism proper to contemporary society it is vital that the Bishop meditate on the Word every day in prayer, so as to be an effective herald in proclaiming it, an authentic doctor in illustrating and defending it, and an enlightened teacher in passing it on. With the approach of the beginning of the upcoming General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, I commend you to the power of the Word of the Lord, so that you may be faithful to the promises you made before God and the Church on the day of your Episcopal Ordination, persevering in the fulfilment of the ministry entrusted to you, faithful in preserving the purity and integrality of the deposit of the faith and rooted in ecclesial communion together with the entire episcopal Order. We must always be aware that the Word of God guarantees the divine presence in each one of us, in accordance with the Lord's words: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14: 23).

When you received the mitre on the day of your episcopal ordination, you were told: "May the splendour of holiness shine forth in you". With his teaching and his personal testimony, the Apostle

Paul exhorts us to grow in virtue before God and men. On the path that leads him to perfection, the Bishop must be inspired by the characteristic traits of the Good Shepherd, so that in his face and in his action the faithful may discern the human and Christian virtues that must distinguish every Bishop (*Pastores Gregis*, n. 18). As you advance on the path to holiness, you will express that indispensable moral authoritativeness and prudent wisdom that are asked of those who are placed at the head of God's family. Today this authority is more necessary than ever. Your ministry will be pastorally fruitful only if it rests on the holiness of your life; the Bishop's authority, *Pastores Gregis* affirms, is born from his witness, without which it will be difficult for the faithful to see in their Bishop the active presence of Christ in his Church (cf. n. 43).

Together with your episcopal ordination and canonical mission, you were entrusted with your pastoral office, that is, the customary daily care of your dioceses. The Apostle Paul, in his famous words to Timothy, points out to you the way to be good and authoritative Pastors of your particular Churches. St Paul says to Timothy on the eve of his death: "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching... always be steady" (2 Tm 4: 2, 5). In the light of the Apostle's words, do not cease to offer "counsels, exhortations and example, but over and above that also... authority and sacred power" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 27), to help the flock entrusted to your care to advance in truth and holiness. This will be the most appropriate way to exercise to the full the fatherhood that is proper to the Bishop in his relations with his faithful. Take particular care of your priests, your first and irreplaceable collaborators in your ministry, as well as young people.

Be close to priests, paying careful attention to them. Spare no effort as you put every project into practice, including that of real communion of life pointed out by the Second Vatican Council, thanks to which priests are helped to grow in dedication to Christ and in fidelity to the priestly ministry. Try to encourage true priestly brotherhood, which contributes to overcoming loneliness and solitude, encouraging mutual support. It is important that all priests feel the fatherly closeness and friendship of the Bishop.

Then, in order to build the future of your particular Churches, be animators and guides of youth. The recent *World Youth Day held in Sydney* once again brought to light the fact that many young people are fascinated by the Gospel and willing to take on commitments within the Church. It is necessary for priests and educators to be able to pass on to the new generations, together with enthusiasm for the gift of life, love for Jesus Christ and for the Church. Among the young people, be especially concerned to encourage seminarians, in the knowledge that the seminary is the heart of the diocese. Do not fail to suggest to boys and young men the choice of a total gift of themselves to Christ in the priestly and religious life.

Heighten the awareness of families, parishes and educational institutes, so that they may help the new generations to seek and discover God's plan for their lives. As I remind you once again of St Paul's words to Timothy, "set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in

purity" (1 Tm 4: 12), and invoke God's help upon your episcopal ministry, I warmly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each one of you and to your dioceses.

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