



# The Holy See

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***DIALOGUE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
WITH THE CHILDREN OF  
THE PONTIFICAL SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CHILDHOOD***

*Paolo VI Hall  
Saturday, 30 May 2009*

***First Question:***

*My name is Anna Filippone, I am 12 years old, I am an altar girl and come from Calabria, Diocese of Oppido Mamertina-Palmi. Pope Benedict, my friend Giovanni has an Italian father and an Ecuadorian mother and is very happy. Do you think that one day the different cultures will be able to live together without quarrelling in Jesus' name?*

I have gathered that you all would like to know how we, from the time we were children, have managed to help one another. I must say that I spent my elementary school years in a small town of 400 inhabitants, very far from the big city centres. Therefore we were a bit ingenuous, and in this small town there were, on the one hand, very rich farmers and also others who were less rich but still well-off, and on the other, poor workers, artisans. Our family had moved from another town to this one just a little before I began going to elementary school, thus we were in a way foreigners to them, as even our dialect was different. So, there was a wide range of social situations present in this school, but a beautiful communion prevailed among us. They taught me their dialect, which was new to me. We worked well together. Although, naturally enough, we would argue sometimes but afterwards we would make up and forget what had happened.

I think this is significant. Sometimes in life it seems inevitable to argue; but the art of reconciling with each other remains important forgiving, beginning anew and not letting bitterness linger in the soul. With gratitude I remember how everyone co-operated: each one helped the other and we moved ahead together on our path. We were all Catholic, and this was naturally a great help. In this way we learned together to understand the Bible, beginning with the Creation and continuing

to the sacrifice of Jesus upon the Cross, and then also of the beginnings of the Church. We learned the Catechism together, we learned how to pray together, we prepared together for our First Reconciliation, for First Communion: that was a splendid day. We understood that Jesus himself came among us and that he is not a distant God: he enters into my own life, my own soul. And if the same Jesus enters into each one of us, then we are brothers, sisters and friends and therefore we must behave as such.

For us, both this preparation for First Reconciliation as the purification of our consciences, of our lives, as well as that for First Communion as a real meeting with Jesus who comes to me, who comes to each one of us, were factors that contributed to the formation of our community. They helped us to move ahead together, to learn together to forgive each other when necessary. We also put on little plays: it is important to collaborate, to pay attention to each other. Then when I was about eight or nine years old I became an altar boy. At that time there were not yet altar girls, but the girls read much better than we did. Therefore they read the readings during the liturgy while we filled the role of altar servers. During that period there were still many Latin texts to learn, and so each one had to make a special effort. As I said, we were not saints. We had our arguments, but there was still a beautiful communion, in which the distinctions between rich and poor, between the more and the less intelligent did not matter. It was communion with Jesus in the journey of common faith and common responsibility, in our games, in our shared work. We found the way to live together, to be friends, although I have not been in that town since 1937 that is, more than 70 years ago we have remained friends. Thus we have learned to accept one another, to carry one another's burdens.

I find this significant: despite our weaknesses we accept each other and with Jesus Christ, with the Church, we find a path of peace together and learn to live in the best way.

***Second Question:***

*My name is Letizia and I wanted to ask you a question. Dear Pope Benedict xvi, what did the motto: "Children help children" mean for you when you were a boy? Did you ever imagine you would become Pope?*

To tell the truth, I would never have thought of becoming Pope, because, as I have already said, I was a fairly ingenuous boy in a small town far from the city centres, in a forgotten province. We were glad to be in this area and we did not think of other things. Naturally we came to know, venerate and love the Pope Pius xi at the time but for us he was a very august figure, almost in another world: our spiritual Father, but nevertheless a reality much superior to all of us. And I must say that still today I have difficulty understanding how the Lord could have thought of me, destined me for this ministry. But I accept it from his hands, even if it is something surprising and that seems to me to be far beyond my strength. But the Lord helps me.

***Third Question:***

*Dear Pope Benedict, my name is Alessandro. I wanted to ask you: you are the principal missionary; how can we children help you to proclaim the Gospel?*

I would say that the first way is this: to collaborate with the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood. That way you are part of a large family, which takes the Gospel to the world. That way you belong to a large network. In it we see how the family of diverse peoples is represented. You are all in this big family: each one has his part and together you are missionaries, bearers of the missionary work of the Church. You have a beautiful plan, laid out by your spokesperson: to listen, pray, understand, share, sympathize. These are the essential elements that combined are truly a way to be missionaries, to encourage the growth of the Church into the future and the presence of the Gospel in the world. I would like to emphasize some of these points.

First of all, pray. Prayer is a reality: God listens to us and, when we pray, God enters into our lives, he becomes present among us, works among us. Praying is a very important thing that can change the world, because it makes the power of God present. And it is important to help each other by praying: to pray together in the liturgy, to pray together in the family. And here I would say that it is important to begin the day with a small prayer and also to end the day with a small prayer: to remember our parents in prayer. Pray before lunch, before dinner and during Sunday's shared Celebration. A Sunday without Mass, the great communal prayer of the Church, is not truly a Sunday: it lacks the very heart of Sunday and so also the light for the week. And you can also help others especially those who do not pray at home or do not know about prayer by teaching others to pray: praying with them and in this way introducing others to communion with God.

Next, listen that is, learn what Jesus really says. In addition, get to know the Sacred Scriptures, the Bible. In the story of Jesus we learn as the Cardinal said the Face of God, we learn what God is like. It is important to know Jesus deeply, personally. That way he enters into our life and, through our life, enters into the world.

Also, share, do not want things only for yourselves, but rather for everyone; divide things with others. And if we see that another is perhaps in need, that he or she is less gifted, we must help that person and so make God's love present without too many words, in our own personal world, which is part of the bigger world. And in this way we become a family together, in which each one has respect for the other: tolerating the other's differences, accepting also those who are disagreeable, not allowing anyone to be marginalized, but instead helping others to integrate into the community. All of this simply means living in this big family of the Church, in this big missionary family. To live out essential points such as sharing, knowledge of Jesus, prayer, reciprocal listening and solidarity is missionary work, because it helps to make the Gospel a reality in our world.

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