



The Holy See

CONFERRAL OF HONORARY CITIZENSHIP OF FREISING - FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 16 January 2010

*Dear Mayor,
Your Eminence,
Dear Archbishop,
Dear Auxiliary Bishop,
Dear Citizens of Freising,
Dear Friends,*

It is a moving moment for me to have now legally become a citizen of Freising and thus belong in a new and deeply profound way to the City to which I feel I intimately belong. For this reason I can only say from the bottom of my heart "Vergelt's Gott" (may God reward you). My joy at this moment will stay with me.

In my life biography in the biography of my heart, if I may the City of Freising has played a very special role. In this City I received the formation that has marked my life ever since. Thus, in a certain way, Freising is always present in me and I in it. And as you noted, Mr Mayor the inclusion in my coat-of-arms of the Moor and Bear of Freising shows the whole world how closely I belong to it. Then the fact that I am also now legally a citizen of Freising, is the crowning point and I am profoundly glad.

On this occasion a whole horizon of images and memories wells up within me. You have mentioned some of them, dear Mr Mayor. I would like to take up certain points. To start with there is 3 January 1946. After a long wait, the time came at last when the Seminary of Freising could

open its doors to all who were returning home. Indeed, it was still a hospital for former prisoners-of-war, but we were then able to begin. That moment marked a turning point in our lives: being on the path to which we felt called. In today's context we lived in a very "old-fashioned" way without comforts. We were in dormitories, study halls and so forth, but we were happy and not only because we had at last escaped the wretchedness and threats of war and Nazi domination, but also because we were free and, especially, because we had set out on the path to which we felt called. We knew that Christ was stronger than the tyranny, than the power of the Nazi ideology and its mechanisms of oppression. We knew that time and the future belong to Christ and we knew that he had called us and that he needed us, that there was a need for us. We knew that the people of those changed times were waiting for us, they were waiting for priests to arrive with a new impetus of faith to build the house of the living God. On this occasion I must also raise a small hymn of praise to the old athenaeum to which I belonged, first as a student and then as a teacher. Some were very erudite, and some were even known internationally, but what, to my mind, was most important was that they were not only scholars but also teachers, people who not only offered the first-fruits of their specialization but were concerned to give the students the essential, the healthy bread they needed in order to receive faith from within. And it was important that we if I may now say we did not feel like individual experts but rather that we were part of a whole, that each one of us was working for theology as a whole; that our work had to make visible the logic of faith as unity and thereby increase our ability to account for our faith, as St Peter said (cf. 1 Pt 3: 15), so as to pass it on in a new epoch with new challenges.

The second image that I would like to mention is the day of my ordination to the priesthood. The Cathedral was always the centre of our life, just as at the seminary where we were one family. And it was Fr Höck who made us a real family. The Cathedral was the centre of it and for our entire life represented the unforgettable day of our priestly ordination. Three moments are particularly deeply impressed within me. First of all, lying stretched out on the ground during the litany of the saints. In lying prostrate on the ground, one becomes newly aware of all one's poverty and asks oneself: am I truly capable of it? And at the same time the names of all the saints of history and the entreaty of the faithful ring out: "Hear us; help them". In this way the awareness grows that, yes, I am weak and inadequate but I am not alone, there are others with me, the entire community of the saints is with me. They accompany me and thus I can make this journey and become a companion and guide for others. The second moment, the imposition of hands by the elderly, venerable Cardinal Faulhaber who laid his hands upon me, upon all of us, in a profound and intense manner and the knowledge that it was the Lord who was laying his hands upon me and saying: "you belong to me, you do not simply belong to yourself, I want you, you are at my service"; but also the awareness that this imposition of hands is a grace, that it does not only create obligations, but above all is a gift, that he is with me and that his love protects and accompanies me. Then there was also the old rite in which the power to forgive sins was conferred at a separate moment. It began when the Bishop, pronouncing the Lord's words, said: "No longer do I call you servants... but... friends". And I knew we knew that this is not only a quotation from John 15 but a timely word that the Lord is addressing to me now. He accepts me as a friend; I am in this friendly relationship; he has given

me his trust and I can work within this friendship and make others friends of Christ.

You have already alluded to the third image, Mr Mayor: I was able to pass a further unforgettable three and a half years with my parents at Lerchenfeldhof. Thus once again I could feel completely at home.

These last three and a half years with my parents were an immense gift to me and truly made Freising my home. I am thinking of the celebrations, of how we celebrated Christmas, Easter and Pentecost together; of our walks through the fields together, of how we would go to the woods to gather fir-tree branches and moss for the crib, and of our outings to the fields on the banks of the Isar. Thus Freising became a real homeland to us, and as a homeland it lives on in my heart.

Today Munich airport is located at the gates of Freising. Those who land or take off from there see the towers of Freising Cathedral, they see the *mons doctus*, and can perhaps understand a little of its past history and of its present. Freising has always had a sweeping view of the chain of the Alps. By means of the airport it has become, in a certain sense, also global and open to the world. And yet I want to say: the Cathedral with its towers points upwards to heights that are loftier by far and very different from those we reach in aeroplanes; the true heights, the heights of God from whom comes the love that gives us authentic humanity. Yet the Cathedral does not only indicate the loftiness of God who forms us and shows us the way, but also indicates an expanse, and this is not only because the Cathedral embraces centuries of faith and prayer, because it contains, so to speak, the whole community of saints, of all those who went before us who believed, prayed, suffered and rejoiced. It indicates, in general, the great host of all believers of all time. Thus it also shows a vastness which goes beyond globalization, because, in diversity, even in the different cultures and origins, it gives the strength of inner unity, in other words it gives that which can unite us: the unifying power of being loved by God. Thus for me Freising also continues to point out a path.

In closing, I would like once again to thank you for the great honour you have conferred on me, and to thank the band, which evokes here the true Bavarian culture. My desire my prayer is that the Lord may continue to bless this City and that Our Lady of the Cathedral of Freising may protect it, so that in the future too it may be a place of human life, faith and joy. Many thanks.

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