



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO PALERMO

MEETING WITH BISHOPS, PRIESTS, MEN AND WOMEN RELIGIOUS AND SEMINARIANS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, Palermo
Sunday, 3 October 2010*

(Video)

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

On my Pastoral Visit to your region a Meeting with you could not be omitted. Thank you for your welcome! I liked the parallel the Archbishop drew between the beauty of the Cathedral and that of the building of "living stones", which you are. Yes, in this brief but intense moment with you I can admire the face of the Church in the variety of her gifts; and, as Successor of Peter, I have the joy of strengthening you in the one faith and in the profound communion that the Lord Jesus Christ bought for us. I express my gratitude to Archbishop Paolo Romeo and I extend it to the Auxiliary Bishop. I address my most cordial greeting to you, dear priests of this Archdiocese and of all the Dioceses in Sicily, to you, dear deacons and seminarians, and to you, men and women religious and consecrated lay people, and with it I would like to reach out to all the confreres and sisters of Sicily, and in a special way to those who are sick or very elderly.

Eucharistic adoration, which we have had the grace and joy to share, has revealed to us and permitted us to feel the profound meaning of what we are: a member of the body of Christ which is the Church. Prostrate before Jesus, here with you, I asked him to inflame your hearts with his love, so that you may be conformed to him and imitate him in the most complete and generous gift of

yourselves to the Church and to your brethren.

Dear priests, I would like to address you first of all. I know that you work with zeal and intelligence, sparing no effort. The Lord Jesus, to whom you have consecrated your life, is with you! May you always be men of prayer, so as also to be teachers of prayer. May your days be marked by times of prayer during which, modelling yourselves on Jesus, you enter into a regenerating conversation with the Father. It is not easy to stay faithful to these daily appointments with the Lord, especially today when the pace of life has become frenetic and work is ever more absorbing. Yet we must convince ourselves: time for prayer is fundamental: in prayer, divine grace acts more effectively, making the ministry fruitful. We are pressed by so many things, but if we are not inwardly in communion with God we cannot give anything to others either. We must always set aside the necessary time "to be with him" (cf. Mk 3: 14).

Concerning priests, the Second Vatican Council says "However, it is in the Eucharistic cult or in the Eucharistic assembly of the faithful (synaxis) that they exercise in a supreme degree their sacred functions" (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 28). The Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian life. Dear brother priests, can we say that it is so for us, for our priestly life? What care do we devote to preparing ourselves for Holy Mass, to celebrating it, to remaining in adoration? Are our churches truly the "house of God", where his presence attracts people who, unfortunately, today often feel the absence of God?

The priest always finds, and in an unchangeable manner, the source of his own identity in Christ the Priest. He is not in the world to establish our status, according to the needs and concepts of social roles. The priest is marked by the seal of the Priesthood of Christ, to share in his role as the one Mediator and Redeemer. By virtue of this fundamental bond, the immense field of the service to souls, for their salvation in Christ and in the Church, opens to the priest. This service that must be wholly inspired by the love of Christ. God wants all human beings to be saved, he wants no one to be lost. The Holy Curé d'Ars said: "the priest must always be ready to respond to the needs of souls. He does not live for himself, he lives for you". The priest exists for the faithful: he encourages them and sustains them in the exercise of the common priesthood of the baptized, on their journey of faith, in cultivating hope and in living charity, the love of Christ. Dear priests, may you always give special attention to the world of youth. As Venerable John Paul II said in this land, open wide the doors of your parishes to young people, so that they may open the doors of their hearts to Christ. May they never find them closed!

The Priest cannot be distant from the daily concerns of the People of God; on the contrary he must be very close but as a priest, always with a view to salvation and of the Kingdom of God. He is the witness and steward of a life different from earthly life (cf. Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 3). He is the herald of a strong hope, a "trustworthy hope", the hope of Christ, by virtue of which we can face the present even though it may often be arduous (cf. Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, n. 1). It is essential for the Church that the priest's identity be safeguarded with its "vertical" dimension. The lives and

personality of St John Mary Vianney and of all the Saints of your land such as St Hannibal Mary di Francia, Bl. James Cusmano and Bl. Francis Spoto are a particularly enlightening and vigorous demonstration of this.

The Church of Palermo recently commemorated the anniversary of the barbarous assassination of Fr Giuseppe Puglisi, who belonged to this presbyterate, killed by the Mafia. His heart was on fire with authentic pastoral charity; in his zealous ministry he made a lot of room for the education of children and young people and at the same time strove to ensure that every Christian family might live its fundamental vocation as the first teacher of the faith to children. The same people entrusted to his pastoral care were able to quench their thirst with the spiritual riches of this good pastor, the cause of whose Beatification is under way. I urge you to keep alive the memory of his fruitful priestly witness, following his heroic example.

With great affection I also address you, who live consecration to God in Christ and in the Church in various forms and institutes. I reserve a special thought for the cloistered monks and nuns, whose service of prayer is so precious for the Ecclesial Community. Dear brothers and sisters, may you continue to follow Jesus without compromise, as the Gospel proposes, thereby witnessing radically to the beauty of being Christian. It is your particular task to keep alive in the baptized the awareness of the fundamental requirements of the Gospel. In fact, your very presence and your style give the Ecclesial Community a precious incentive to attain the "high standard" of the Christian vocation; indeed, we could say that your existence is as it were a form of preaching, very eloquent even though it is often silent. Yours, dear friends, is an ancient way of life yet ever new, despite the decrease in your number and forces. But have trust: our times are not those of God and of his providence. It is necessary to pray and to grow in personal and community holiness. Then the Lord will provide!

With special affection I greet you, dear seminarians, and I urge you to respond generously to the call of the Lord and the expectations of the People of God, growing in identification with Christ the High Priest, preparing yourselves for the mission with a solid human, spiritual, theological and cultural formation. The Seminary is particularly valuable for your future, because, by a full experience and patient work, it leads you to being pastors of souls and teachers of faith, ministers of the holy mysteries and messengers of Christ's charity. Live this time of grace with dedication and cherish in your hearts the joy and dynamism of the first moment of the call and of your "yes", when, responding to Christ's mysterious voice, you gave a decisive turning point to your lives. Be docile to the orders of your superiors and of those responsible for your growth in Christ, and learn from him love for every child of God and of the Church.

Dear brothers and sisters, as I thank you once again for your affection, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer so that you may continue with a fresh enthusiasm and with strong hope on the journey of faithful adherence to Christ and of generous service to the Church. May the Virgin Mary, our Mother, always help you; may St Rosalia and all the holy Patrons of this region of Sicily

protect you; and may the Apostolic Blessing that I warmly impart to you and to your communities accompany you.

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