



## The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO THE COMMUNITY  
OF THE PONTIFICAL ETHIOPIAN COLLEGE IN THE VATICAN**

*Hall of the Popes*

*Saturday, 29 January 2011*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I am glad to welcome you on the happy occasion of the 150th anniversary of the birth in Heaven of St Justin De Jacobis. I cordially greet each one of you, dear priests and seminarians of the Pontifical Ethiopian College, whom Divine Providence has brought to live beside the tomb of the Apostle Peter, a sign of the ancient and profound ties of communion that bind the Church which is in Ethiopia and in Eritrea with the Apostolic See.

I offer a special greeting to the Rector, Fr Teclezghi Bahta, whom I thank for his courteous words introducing our meeting, explaining the various important circumstances that led to it. I welcome you today with special affection and, together with you, I am pleased to remember the communities you come from.

I would now like to reflect on the luminous figure of St Justin De Jacobis, whose important anniversary you celebrated last 31 July. A praiseworthy son of St Vincent de Paul, St Justin lived exemplarily, “making himself all things to all people”, especially in service to the Abyssinian people. At the age of 38 he was sent by Cardinal Franzoni, the then Prefect of Propaganda Fide, as a missionary to Tigray, Ethiopia. He worked first in Adua and then in Guala, where he immediately thought of forming Ethiopian priests, and founded a seminary called “College of the Immaculate Virgin”. In his zealous ministry he worked tirelessly to ensure that this portion of the People of God might rediscover the original fervour of faith, sown by the first evangelizer, St Frumentius (*cf. PL 21, 473-80*). With farsightedness Justin perceived that attention to the cultural context must be a privileged path on which the Lord’s grace would form new generations of Christians. Learning the local language and encouraging the age-old liturgical tradition of the Rite

of those communities, his approach was effectively ecumenical. For more than 20 years his generous priestly, then episcopal ministry benefited all those he met and loved, as living members of the people entrusted to his care.

Because of his enthusiasm for education, especially for forming priests, he may rightly be considered your College's Patron; indeed, this praiseworthy Institution still accepts priests and candidates to the priesthood today, supporting them in their commitment to theological, spiritual and pastoral training.

On returning to your original communities or accompanying your compatriots who have emigrated, may you be able to inspire in each one love for God and for the Church, following the example of St Justin De Jacobis. He crowned his fruitful contribution to the religious and civil life of the Abyssinian peoples with the gift of his life, silently given back to God after much suffering and persecution. He was beatified by Venerable Pius XII on 25 June 1939 and canonized by the Servant of God Paul VI on 26 October 1975.

Dear priests and seminarians, the way of holiness is marked out for you too! Christ continues to be present in the world and to reveal himself through those who, like St Justin De Jacobis, allow themselves to be enlivened by his Spirit. The [Second Vatican Council](#) reminds us of this, saying, among other things: "God shows to men, in a vivid way, his presence and his face in the lives of those companions of ours in the human condition who are more perfectly transformed into the image of Christ (*cf.* 2 Cor 3:18), He speaks to us in them and offers us a sign of this Kingdom" (Dogmatic Constitution [Lumen Gentium](#), n. 50).

Christ, the eternal Priest of the New Covenant, who with his special vocation to the priestly ministry has "conquered" our life, does not suppress the characteristic qualities of the person; on the contrary, he uplifts them, he ennobles them and, making them his own, calls them to serve his mystery and his work. God also needs each one of us so that "in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7).

Despite the individual character of each one's vocation we are not separated from each other, on the contrary we are in solidarity, in communion within a single spiritual body. We are called to form the total Christ, a unity recapitulated in the Lord, enlivened by his Spirit to become his "pleroma" and to enrich the canticle of praise that he raises to the Father.

Christ is inseparable from the Church which is his Body. It is in the Church that Christ most closely gathers round him the baptized and, nourishing them with his own Body and his Blood, makes them partakers in his own glorious life (*cf.* [Lumen Gentium](#), n. 48).

Holiness is therefore placed in the very heart of the ecclesial mystery and is the vocation to which we are all called. The Saints are not external ornaments that adorn the Church but are like the

blossom of a tree that reveals the inexhaustible vitality of the sap that rises in it. It is thus beautiful to contemplate the Church, ascending towards the fullness of the *Vir perfectus* in continuous, demanding and gradual maturation, dynamically impelled towards complete fulfilment in Christ.

Dear priests and seminarians of the Pontifical Ethiopian College, live with joy and dedication this important period of your formation in the shadow of the dome of St Peter's. May you walk with determination on the path of holiness. You are a sign of hope, especially for the Church in your native countries. I am sure that the experience of communion you have lived here in Rome will help you also to make a precious contribution to the growth and peaceful coexistence of your beloved nations.

I accompany your progress with my prayers and, through the intercession of St Justin De Jacobis and of the Virgin Mary, I impart to you with affection the Apostolic Blessing that I gladly extend to the Sisters of Maria Bambina, to the Personnel of the House and to all your loved ones.