



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO AQUILEIA AND VENICE

MEETING WITH THE PEOPLE OF AQUILEIA

GREETING OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Piazza Capitolo - Aquileia

Saturday, 7 May 2011

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I come to you with great joy, children and heirs of the illustrious Church of Aquileia as I begin my Visit here to the Churches of this region. I address my cordial greeting to you all, pastors and civil Authorities, faithful from the Dioceses of the Triveneto, as well as those from Slovenia, Croatia, Austria and Bavaria. I thank the Mayor of Aquileia for his courteous words.

The archaeological ruins and the wonderful remains of artwork that make Aquileia famous everywhere, prompt me at this moment to retrace the origins of this City that was founded in 181 and prospered down the ages. The Bishop-poet Paulinus sang: "beautiful, illustrious, adorned with splendid palaces, renowned for your city walls and even more for the innumerable crowds of your citizens. All the cities of the Venetian region were subject to you and made you their capital and metropolis; you flourished because of your clergy, you were resplendent because of your churches, which you dedicated to Christ" (*Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, in M.G.H., 1881, p. 142). Aquileia was born and developed at the height of the power of the Empire, it was a gateway between East and West, a garrison town, a place of economic and cultural exchanges.

But Aquileia's glory was something else! In fact, St Paul tells us that God did not chose what is noble and strong but what in the world's eyes is weak and foolish (cf. 1 Cor 1:27-28). The One

who came to enlighten the people with the light of the Truth had been born in the distant Province of Syria at the time of Caesar Augustus: Jesus, Son of Mary, the consubstantial and eternal Son of the Father, revealer of God's everlasting dominion over humankind, of his plan of communion for all the peoples. The One who, with his death on the Cross suffered at the hand of the Empire, was to establish the true kingdom of justice, love and peace, giving to all who received him "power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12).

The Good News of Christ's salvation arrived here from Jerusalem, through the Church of Alexandria. The seed of great hope arrived in this Roman region. Very soon, in the *Decima Regio* of the Empire, the Church of Aquileia became a community of martyrs, of heroic witnesses to faith in the Risen One, a seed of other disciples and of other communities. Aquileia's greatness, therefore, was not only due to its place as Italy's ninth city, but also to being a lively, exemplary Church, capable of authentic Gospel proclamation, maintained and nurtured for centuries, courageously disseminated in the surrounding regions. I therefore pay homage to this blessed land, sprinkled with the blood and sacrifices of so many witnesses, and I pray that the holy Martyrs of Aquileia bring forth in the Church, today too, courageous and faithful disciples of Christ who are devoted to him alone, hence convinced and convincing.

The freedom of worship granted to Christianity in the 4th century did no more than to extend the radius of action of the Church of Aquileia, extending it beyond the natural boundaries of *Venetia et Histria* as far as Raetia and Noricum, to the vast Danubian regions, to Pannonia and to Pannonia-Savia. In this way the metropolitan ecclesiastical Province of Aquileia was formed. Bishops of quite distant Churches offered Aquileia their obedience, accepted its profession of faith, gathered round it in the indissoluble bonds of ecclesial, liturgical and disciplinarian and even architectural communion. Aquileia was the vibrant heart of this Region, under the learned, fearless guidance of holy Pastors who defended it against the spreading Arianism.

Among all these pastors I recall Chromatius — on whom I reflected in the Catechesis of 5 December 2007 — a solicitous and active Bishop, like Augustine of Hippo, and like Ambrose of Milan, described by Jerome as "the holiest and most learned of Bishops". What made the Church which Chromatius loved and served great was her profession of faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true man. In commenting on the Gospel narrative of the woman who pours perfume first on Jesus' feet and then on his head, Chromatius says: "The feet of Christ indicate the mystery of his Incarnation which is why he deigned to be born of a virgin in these recent times; the head, on the other hand, indicates the glory of his divinity which proceeds from the Father before all the ages. This means that we must believe two things about Christ: that he is God, and that he is man, God begotten by the Father, a man born of a virgin.... We cannot otherwise be saved, unless we believe these two things about Christ" (Chromatius of Aquileia, *Catechesis to the People*, Città Nuova, 1989, p. 93).

Dear brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, heirs of the glorious Church of Aquileia, I am with

you today to admire this rich and ancient tradition, but, especially, to strengthen you in the profound faith of your forefathers: at this moment of history, may you rediscover, defend and profess this fundamental truth with spiritual warmth.

Indeed, it is only from Christ that humanity can receive hope and a future, only from him can it draw the significance and power of forgiveness, of justice, of peace. Always keep alive courageously the faith and deeds of your roots! May you be in your Churches and in society “like a choir of blessed”, as Jerome said of the clergy of Aquileia, through unity of faith, the study of the word, brotherly love, and in the joyful harmony of ecclesial witness in its many forms. I invite you to make yourselves ever new disciples of the Gospel, to express it in spiritual fervour, clarity of faith, sincere love and prompt sensitivity to the poor: may you shape your life in accordance with that “*sermo rusticus*”, of which Jerome continued to speak, referring to the evangelical quality of the Aquileian community.

Be diligent in approaching the “manger”, as Chromatius used to say, that is, the altar, where the food is Christ himself, the Bread of life, strength in persecution, nourishment that gives courage in every challenge and weakness, the food of courage and of Christian zeal. May the memory of the Holy Mother Church of Aquileia support you, spur you to new missionary goals in this troubled period of history, make you architects of unity and understanding among the people of your lands. May the Virgin Mary always protect you on your journey and may my my Blessing accompany you.

The Pope then greeted the people in their various languages beginning with the regional dialect of Friulan:

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord bless you and give you peace and prosperity! I greet the German-speaking faithful. May the ancient Christian roots of your lands bear abundant fruits in your communities. God bless you! I cordially greet the Slovenian faithful. God bless you and your families! Dear Croatian brothers and sisters, thank you for coming! In a month I shall go to Zagreb. God bless you.