



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO AQUILEIA AND VENICE

MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE WORLD OF CULTURE AND OF THE ECONOMY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Basilica of Saint Mary of Health - Venice

Third Sunday of Easter, 8 May 2011

(Video)

Dear Friends,

I am glad to greet you cordially as representatives of the worlds of culture, art and the economy of Venice and its territory. I thank you for coming and for your warmth. I express my gratitude to the Patriarch and to the Rector who, on behalf of the *Studium Generale Marcianum*, has conveyed your feelings and introduced our meeting, the last on my busy schedule which began yesterday in Aquileia. I would like to leave you several very concise ideas, which I hope will be useful to you for reflection and for your common commitment. I have drawn these ideas from three words which are evocative metaphors: three words linked to Venice and, in particular, to the place in which we are now: the first word is *aqua* [water], the second is *Salute* [health/salvation], the third is *Serenissima* [most serene].

Let us begin with water, as would appear logical in many respects. Water is an ambivalent symbol: of life, but also of death; as the peoples hit by flooding and seaquakes know well. But water is first and foremost an element essential to life. Venice is called the “City of Water”. And for you who live in Venice this condition is a double sign, both negative and positive. It entails much hardship and at the same time an extraordinary fascination. Venice being a “city of water” makes me think of a famous contemporary sociologist who has described our society as “liquid”, and thus the

European culture: to express its “fluidity”, its scant or perhaps lack of stability, its changeableness, the inconsistency which at times seems to characterize it. And here I would like to insert the first proposition: Venice, not as a “liquid” city — in the sense just mentioned — but as a city “of life and of beauty”. Of course, this is a choice but in history it is necessary to choose: men and women are free to interpret, to give a meaning to reality, and it is in this freedom itself that the great dignity of the human being consists.

In the context of a city, any city, the administrative, cultural and economic decisions depend, basically, on this fundamental orientation, which we may call “political” in the most noble, the loftiest sense of the term. It is a question of choosing between a “liquid” city, the homeland of a culture that appears ever more relative and transient, and a city that is constantly renewing its beauty by drawing on the beneficial sources of art, of knowledge and of the relations between people and peoples.

We come to the second word: “*Salute*”. We find ourselves at the “*Polo della Salute*” [the pole of health]: a new reality which nevertheless has ancient roots. Here, on the Punta della Dogana [Customs], one of the most famous of Venice’s churches stands. It is a work of Longhena, built as a vow to Our Lady for liberation from the plague of 1630: Santa Maria della Salute. Beside it the famous architect built the Convent of the Somascans, which subsequently became the Patriarchal Seminary. “*Unde origo, inde salus*”, reads the motto carved in the centre of the largest roundel in the Basilica, a phrase that indicates how closely linked to the Mother of God is the origin of the City of Venice which tradition claims was founded on 25 March 421, the day of the Annunciation. And it was through Mary’s intercession that health came, salvation from the plague. Yet reflecting on this motto we can also grasp another even deeper and broader meaning. From the Virgin of Nazareth came the One who gives us “salvation”. “*Salute*” is an all-encompassing, integral reality: it extends from “being well” which enables us to live serenely a day of study and work or of vacation, to the *salus animae*, on which our eternal destiny depends. God takes care of all this, excluding nothing. He takes care of our health in the full sense. Jesus demonstrates this in the Gospel: he healed the sick, suffering from every kind of illness, but he also freed those possessed by the devil. He forgave sins; he resurrected the dead. Jesus revealed that God loves life and wants to deliver it from every denial, even to the point of rescuing it from that radical denial which is spiritual evil, sin, a poisonous root that contaminates all things.

For this reason Jesus himself can be called man’s “Salvation”: *Salus nostra Dominus Jesus*. Jesus saves man by placing him once again in the salutary relationship with the Father in the grace of the Holy Spirit; immerses him in this pure and life-giving current which frees him from his physical, psychological and spiritual “paralyses”; heals him from hardness of heart and enables him to savour the possibility of truly finding himself, by losing himself for love of God and neighbour.

Unde origo, inde salus. This motto calls to mind a wealth of references; I limit myself to recalling one of them, the famous words of St Irenaeus: “*Gloria Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio*

Dei [est]” (*Adv. Haer.* IV, 20, 7) — which could be paraphrased: the glory of God is the full health of man and this consists in being in a profound relationship with God. We can also say it in terms dear to the new Blessed, John Paul ii: man is the way of the Church and the Redeemer of man is Christ.

Lastly the third word: “*Serenissima*”, the name of the Venetian Republic. This is a truly marvellous title, one might say utopian, in comparison with earthly reality; yet it is able to evoke not only the memories of past glories but also the driving ideals in the planning of today and of the future in this great region. In the full sense only the heavenly city is “most serene” the new Jerusalem, which appears at the end of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, as a marvellous vision (cf. Rev 21:1-22:5).

Yet Christianity conceives of this holy City, completely transfigured by God’s glory, as a destination that moves human hearts and spurs them onwards, that enlivens their demanding and patient work to improve the earthly city. What the Second Vatican Council says about this should always be remembered: “it profits man nothing if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself. Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 39).

We listen to these words in an epoch when the power of ideological utopias is exhausted and not only is optimism obscured but hope is also in crisis. We must not, therefore, forget that the Council Fathers who left us this teaching lived in the period of the two World Wars and totalitarianism. Their perspective was certainly not dictated by an easy optimism, but by Christian faith which enlivens hope at the same time great and patient, open to the future and attentive to the historical situations. In this same perspective the name “Most Serene” speaks to us of a civilization of peace founded on mutual respect, on reciprocal knowledge, on friendly relations.

Venice has a long history and a rich human, spiritual and artistic patrimony in order to be capable, today too, of making a precious contribution to helping people believe in a better future and in committing themselves to building it. However for this reason it must not be afraid of another symbolic element, contained in the coat of arms of San Marco: the Gospel. The Gospel is the greatest power for transformation in the world, but it is neither a utopia nor an ideology. The first Christian generations called it rather the “way”, that is, the way of living that Christ practised first and invites us to follow.

The “Most Serene” city may be reached in this way, which is the way of charity in truth, knowing well, as the Council again reminds us, that “this love is not something reserved for important matters, but must be exercised above all in the ordinary circumstances of daily life”, and that following Christ’s example “we must carry the cross, which the flesh and the world inflict on the

shoulders of all who seek after peace and justice” (n. 38).

These, dear friends are the ideas for reflection that I wished to share with you. It was a joy to me to end my Visit in your company. Once again I thank the Cardinal Patriarch, the Auxiliary Bishop and all the collaborators for their magnificent welcome. I greet the Jewish Community of Venice — which has ancient roots and is an important presence in the fabric of the city — with its President, Prof. Amos Luzzatto. And I also extend a thought to the Muslims who live in this city. From this most important place I address my cordial greeting to Venice, to the pilgrim Church here and to all the Dioceses of the Triveneto while I impart the Apostolic Blessing, as a pledge of my everlasting remembrance. Thank you for your attention.