



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE PONTIFICAL ROMAN MAJOR SEMINARY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF TRUST

"LECTIO DIVINA" OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Seminary Chapel
Wednesday, 15 February 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

Your Eminence,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Seminarians,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On the day of Our Lady of Trust, it gives me great joy to see my seminarians, the seminarians of Rome, on their way towards the priesthood and thus to see the Church of the future, the Church which is ever alive.

Today we have heard a text — we hear it and we meditate upon it — from the Letter to the Romans: Paul speaks to the Romans and therefore speaks to us, because he is speaking to Romans of all the epochs. This Letter is not only St Paul's greatest, but it is also extraordinary because of its doctrinal and spiritual weight. And it is extraordinary because it is a letter written to a community he had neither founded nor even visited. He writes to announce his visit and express his desire to visit Rome, and he announces in advance the essential content of his *kerygma*; in this way he prepares the City for his visit. He writes to this community, with which he is not personally acquainted, because he is the Apostle to the Gentiles — of the transmission of the Gospel of the Jews to the Gentiles — and Rome is the capital of the Gentiles and hence the centre, and the destination of his message too.

The Gospel had to arrive here, so that it might really reach the pagan world. It was to arrive, but in a different way from that which he had imagined. Paul was to arrive in chains for Christ, and even in chains he would feel free to proclaim the Gospel.

In the first chapter of the Letter to the Romans, Paul also says: your faith, the faith of the Church of Rome, is proclaimed in all the world (cf. 1:8). What is memorable about the faith of this Church is that it is proclaimed throughout the world, and we can reflect on the situation today. Today too, a lot is said about the Church of Rome, many things, but let us hope that people are also talking about our faith, about the exemplary faith of this Church, and let us pray the Lord that we may ensure that they do not say many things but speak of the faith of the Church of Rome.

The text that was read (Rom 12:1-2), is the beginning of the fourth and last part of the Letter to the Romans and begins with the word “I appeal to you” (v. 1). It is usually said that it is a question of the moral part that follows the dogmatic part, but in St Paul’s thought and also in his language things cannot be divided in this manner: this word “appeal”, in Greek *parakalo*, contains within it the word *paraklesis* — *parakletos*, it has a depth that goes far beyond morality; it is a term that certainly implies reproof, but also consolation, care for others, fatherly and indeed motherly tenderness; this word “mercy” — in Greek *oiktirmon* and in Hebrew *rachamim*, maternal womb — expresses the compassion, kindness and tenderness of a mother. And if Paul is making an appeal, all this is implicit: he speaks from the heart, he speaks with the tenderness of a father’s love and it is not only he who speaks. Paul says: “by the mercies of God” (v. 1): he makes himself an instrument of God’s words, an instrument of Christ’s words; Christ speaks to us with this tenderness, with this fatherly love, with this care for us. And so too he does not only appeal to our morality and our will, but also to the Grace that is in us, an appeal to us to let Grace act. It is, as it were, an action in which the Grace given at Baptism becomes active within us, it must be active within us; thus Grace, the gift of God, and our cooperation go hand in hand.

What is Paul appealing for in this regard? “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (v. 1). “Present your bodies”: he speaks of the liturgy, he speaks of God, of the priority of God but he does not speak of the liturgy as a ceremony, he speaks of the liturgy as life. We ourselves, our body; we in our body and as a body must be liturgy. This is the newness of the New Testament, and we shall see it again later: Christ offers himself and thereby replaces all the other sacrifices. And he wants “to draw” us into the communion of his Body. Our body, with his, becomes God’s glory, becomes liturgy. Hence this term “present” — in Greek *parastesai* — is not only an allegory; allegorically our life would also be a liturgy but, on the contrary, the true liturgy is that of our body, of our being in the Body of Christ, just as Christ himself made the liturgy of the world, the cosmic liturgy, which strives to draw all people to itself.

“In your body, present your body”: these words indicate man in his totality, indivisible — in the end — between soul and body, spirit and body; in the body we are ourselves and the body enlivened by the soul, the body itself, must be the realization of our worship. And we think — perhaps, I

would say, each one of us should then reflect on these words — that our daily life in our body, in the small things, must be inspired, profuse, immersed in the divine reality, it must become action together with God. This does not mean that we must always be thinking of God, but that we must really be penetrated by the reality of God so that our whole life — and not only a few thoughts — may be a liturgy, may be adoration.

Then Paul tells us: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (v. 1): the Greek term is *logike latreia* and it then appears in the Roman Canon, in the First Eucharistic Prayer, “*rationabile obsequium*”. It is a new definition of worship but is prepared for both in the Old Testament and in Greek philosophy; they are two rivers — so to speak — that flow towards this point and converge in the new liturgy of Christians and of Christ. In the Old Testament: from the outset they understood that God did not need bulls, rams, and such things. In Psalm 50[49], God says: Do you think I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? I have no need of these things, I do not like them. I do not drink and eat these things. They are not a sacrifice for me. Sacrifice is praise of God, if you come to me it is thanksgiving to God (cf. vv. 13-15, 23). Thus the Old Testament route leads towards a point in which these external things, symbols and substitutions, disappear and man himself becomes praise of God.

The same happens in the world of Greek philosophy. Here too one understands increasingly that it is not possible to glorify God with these things — animals or offerings — but that only the “*logos*” of man, his reason having become the glory of God is really worship, and the idea is that man must come out of himself and unite with the “*Logos*”, with the great Reason of the world and thus truly be worship. However, here there is something missing: man, according to this philosophy, must — so to speak — leave his body, he must be spiritualized; only the spirit would be adoration. Christianity, on the contrary, is not simply spiritualization or moralization: it is incarnation, that is, Christ is the “*Logos*” he is the incarnate Word and he gathers all of us so that in him and with him, in his Body, as members of this Body, we really become a glorification of God.

Let us keep this in mind: on the one hand of course, to emerge from these material things for a more spiritual conception of the worship of God, but on the other to arrive at the incarnation of the spirit, to arrive at the point in which our body is assumed into the Body of Christ and our praise of God is not purely words, purely activities, but the reality of our whole life. I think that we must reflect on this and pray to God to help us so that his spirit may take flesh in us too, and our flesh may become full of God’s Spirit.

We also find the same reality in the fourth chapter of St John’s Gospel where the Lord says to the Samaritan woman: in the future people will not worship on this mountain or that, with one rite or another; but they will worship in spirit and in truth (cf. Jn 4:21-23). To come out of these carnal rites is of course spiritualization, but this spirit, this truth, is not any kind of abstract spirit: the spirit is the Holy Spirit, and the truth is Christ. Worshipping in spirit and truth really means to enter through the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ, into the truth of being. And thus we become truth

and we become a glorification of God. Becoming truth in Christ demands our total involvement.

And then let us continue: “Holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). The second verse: after this fundamental definition of our life as the liturgy of God, the incarnation of the Word in us, every day, with Christ — the Incarnate Word — St Paul continues: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (v. 2). “Do not be conformed to this world”. There is the non-conformism of Christians who do not let themselves be conformed. This does not mean that we want to flee from the world, that the world does not interest us: on the contrary we want to transform ourselves and to let ourselves be transformed, thereby transforming the world. And we must bear in mind that in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel according to St John, the word “world” has two meanings and thus points to the problem and to the reality concerned. On one side is the “world” created by God, loved by God, to the point that he gives himself and his Son for this world; the world is a creature of God, God loves it and wants to give himself so that it may really be a creation and respond to his love. But there is also the other conception of the “world” *kosmos houtos*: the world that is in evil, that is in the power of evil, that reflects original sin. We see this power of evil today, for example, in two great powers which are useful and good in themselves but can easily be abused: the power of finance and the power of the media. Both are necessary, because they can be useful, but are so easy to abuse that they frequently convey the opposite of their true intentions.

We see that the world of finance can dominate the human being, that possessions and appearance dominate the world and enslave it. The world of finance is no longer an instrument to foster well-being, to foster human life, but becomes a power that oppresses it, that almost demands worship: “*Mammon*”, the real false divinity that dominates the world. To counter this conformism of submission to this power we must be non-conformist: “having” does not count, it is “being” that counts! Let us not submit to the former, let us use it as a means, but with the freedom of God’s children.

Then the other, the power of public opinion. Of course we need information, we need knowledge of world affairs, but then it can be a power of appearance; in the end, what is said counts more than the reality itself. An appearance is superimposed on reality, it becomes more important, and man no longer follows the truth of his being, but wishes above all to appear, to be in conformity with these realities. And Christian non-conformism is also against this: we do not always wish “to be conformed”, to be praised, we do not want appearances, but the truth, and this gives us freedom and true Christian freedom; in freeing ourselves from this need to please, to speak as the masses think we ought to, in order to have the freedom of truth and thus to recreate the world in such a way that it is not oppressed by opinion, by appearances which no longer allow the reality to emerge; the virtual world becomes more real, stronger, and the real world of God’s Creation is no longer seen. The non-conformism of the Christian redeems us, restores the truth to us. Let us pray the Lord that he help us to be free people in this non-conformism which is not against the world but is true love of the world.

And St Paul continues: “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (v. 2). Two very important words: “to transform”, from the Greek *metamorphon*, and “to renew”, in Greek *anakainosis*. Transforming ourselves, letting ourselves be transformed by the Lord into the form of the image of God, transforming ourselves every day anew, through his reality into the truth of our being. And “renewal”; this is the true novelty which does not subject us to opinions, to appearances, but to the Grace of God, to his revelation. Let us permit ourselves to be formed, to be molded, so that the image of God really appears in the human being.

“By the renewal”, St Paul says, in a way I find surprising, “of your mind”. Therefore this renewal, this transformation, begins with the renewal of thought. St Paul says “*o nous*”: our entire way of reasoning, reason itself must be renewed. Renewed not according to the usual categories but to renew means truly allowing ourselves to be illuminated by the Truth that speaks to us in the Word of God. And so, finally, to learn the new way of thinking, which is that way which does not obey power and possessing, appearances, etc., but obeys the truth of our being that dwells in our depths and that is given to us anew in Baptism.

“The renewal of your mind”; every day is a task proper to the process of studying theology, of preparing for the priesthood. Studying theology well, spiritually, thinking about it deeply, meditating on Scripture every day; this way of studying theology, listening to God himself who speaks to us is the way to the renewal of thought, to the transformation of our being and of the world. And lastly, “Let us do everything” according to Paul, “to be able to discern God’s will, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (cf. v. 2). Discerning God’s will: we can only learn this in a humble and obedient journey with the Word of God, with the Church, with the Sacraments, with meditation on Sacred Scripture. Knowing and discerning God’s will, all that is good. This is fundamental in our life.

Moreover on the day of Our Lady of Trust, we see in Our Lady the very reality of all this, the person who is really new, who is really transformed, who is really a living sacrifice. Our Lady sees the will of God, she lives in God’s will, she says “yes”, and this “yes” of Our Lady is the whole of her being and thus she shows us the way, she helps us.

Consequently on this day, let us pray to Our Lady who is the living icon of the new man. May she help us to transform, to let our being be transformed, to truly be new men, then later, if God wishes, to be Pastors of his Church. Many thanks.