



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE COMMUNITY
OF THE PONTIFICAL SPANISH COLLEGE OF ROME***

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 10 May 2012*

Dear Cardinals,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear Mr Rector, Superiors, religious, students of the Pontifical Spanish College of St Joseph in Rome,

It is a joy for me to receive you on the commemoration of the 50 years of the present headquarters of the Pontifical Spanish College of St Joseph, and especially on the liturgical Memorial of St John of Ávila, Patron of the Spanish diocesan clergy, whom I shall soon declare Doctor of the universal Church. I greet Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco Varela, Archbishop of Madrid and President of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, whom I thank for his kind words, as well as the Archbishops, members of the Patronage, the Rector, the formators, the women Religious and you, dear students.

This event marks an important stage in the already impressive itinerary of this College, which began at the end of the 19th century, when Bl. Manuel Domingo y Sol, Founder of the Brotherhood of Diocesan Worker Priests, set out to create a College in Rome, with the blessing of Leo XIII, my Venerable Predecessor and the support of the Spanish Episcopate.

Thousands of seminarians and priests have graduated from your College, who have served the Church in Spain with profound love and fidelity to their mission. The specific formation of priests is always one of the main priorities of the Church. On being sent to Rome to further your priestly studies you must think above all, not so much of your own personal good, but of the service to the holy people of God, who need pastors who dedicate themselves to the beautiful service of the

sanctification of the faithful with a high standard of training and competence.

But remember that the priest renews his life and draws strength for his ministry from contemplation of the Divine Word and intense dialogue with the Lord. He is aware that he will be unable to take Christ to his brethren or to meet him in the poor and the sick, if he does not first discover him in fervent and constant prayer. It is necessary to nourish a personal relationship with the One, whom one then proclaims, celebrates and communicates. Herein lies the foundation of priestly spirituality, until one becomes a transparent sign and living witness of the Good Shepherd. The itinerary of priestly formation is also a school of missionary communion: with the Successor of Peter, with one's Bishop, in the presbyterate itself, and always at the service of the particular and the universal Church.

Dear priests, may the life and doctrine of the Holy Teacher John of Ávila illumine and support your stay at the Pontifical Spanish College of St Joseph. His profound knowledge of Sacred Scripture, of the Holy Fathers, of the Councils, of the liturgical sources and of healthy theology, together with his faithful and filial love of the Church, made him an authentic innovator at a difficult time in the history of the Church. Precisely because of this, "he was a clear-sighted and ardent spirit. To denunciation of evils and suggestions for canonical remedies, he added a schooling of intense spirituality" (Paul VI, *Homily during the Canonization Mass of John of Ávila*, 31 May 1970; *L'Osservatore Romano* [English edition], 11 June 1970).

The main teaching of the Apostle of Andalusia is the mystery of Christ, Priest and Good Shepherd, lived in harmony with the Lord's sentiments, in imitation of St Paul (cf. Phil 2:5). "The priest must see himself in this priestly model to conform himself to him in his aspirations and prayer" (*Treatise on the Priesthood*, 10). The priesthood essentially requires his help and friendship: "This communication of the Lord with the priest... is the relationship of friends", says the Saint (*ibid.*, n. 9).

Hence, encouraged by the virtues and the example of St John of Ávila, I invite you to carry out your priestly ministry with the same apostolic zeal that characterized him, with the same austerity of life, as well as with the same filial affection that he nourished for the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of priests.

Under the beloved name of "*Mater clementissima*", countless students have entrusted to her their vocation, their studies, their most noble efforts and projects, as well as their sadness and concerns. Do not fail to invoke her every day or tire of repeating her name with devotion. Listen to St John of Ávila, when he exhorted priests to imitate her: "Let us look at ourselves, Fathers, from head to toe, soul and body, and we will see that we resemble the Most Holy Virgin Mary, who with her words drew God to her womb... And the priest attracts him with the words of consecration" (*Treatise on the Priesthood*, 10). The Mother of Christ is the model of that love that leads to giving one's life for the Kingdom of God, without expecting anything in return.

May the community of the Pontifical Spanish College in Rome, under the protection of Our Lady, be able to continue to fulfil its objectives of the deepening and actualization of ecclesiastical studies, in the climate of profound presbyterial communion and high scientific rigor that distinguishes it, in view of realizing, henceforth, the profound brotherhood requested by the Second Vatican Council “in virtue of their sacred ordination and of their common mission” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 28). Thus pastors will be formed who reflect the life of the Triune God-Love, who will serve their brothers with rectitude of intention and total dedication, promoting the unity of the Church and the good of the whole of human society.

With these sentiments, I impart to you a special Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to your relatives, to your communities of origin and to all those who collaborate in your formative journey during your stay in Rome. Thank you very much.