



The Holy See

MEETING WITH BISHOPS WHO PARTICIPATED
IN THE SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL
AND PRESIDENTS OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

Clementine Hall

Friday, 12 October 2012

Dear and Venerable Brothers,

We find ourselves together today, after the [solemn Celebration](#) that gathered us yesterday in St Peter's Square. The warm and brotherly greeting that I would like to give you now is born from the profound communion that only the Eucharistic celebration can create. In it the bonds that unite us as members of the College of Bishops united to the Successor of Peter is made visible, almost tangible.

In your faces, dear Patriarchs and Archbishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches, dear Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of the world, I see too the hundreds of Bishops who in every region of the earth are committed to proclaiming the Gospel and to serving the Church and humankind, in obedience to the mandate received from Christ. Today, however, in a special way I would like to address my greeting to you, dear Brothers who have been graced to participate as Fathers at the [Second Vatican Ecumenical Council](#). I thank Cardinal Arinze, who has conveyed your sentiments to me, and at this moment I have present in my prayers and in my affection the entire group — almost 70 — of Bishops still living who took part in the work of the Council. In answering the invitation to this commemoration, to which they were prevented from coming by advanced age or because of their health, many of them recalled those days with moving words assuring their spiritual union and offering up their suffering for this intention.

Many memories spring to mind, that each one of us has deeply engraved in his heart, of that very

lively, rich and fruitful period which was the Council. I do not want, therefore, to dwell too long, but — taking up a few elements of my homily yesterday — I would like to recall only how one word, pronounced by Blessed [John XXIII](#) in a systematic way, recurred again and again during the Council: the word *aggiornamento* [updating].

Fifty years from the opening of that solemn gathering of the Church some people may ask themselves whether that term was perhaps, from the very beginning, not entirely felicitous. The choice of words is something that can be debated for hours and opinions will always conflict, but I am convinced that the intuition that Blessed [John XXIII](#) summarized in that word was and remains exact. Christianity must not be considered as “something of the past”, nor must it be lived with our gaze ever turned back, because Jesus Christ is yesterday, today and forever (cf. Heb 13:8). Christianity is marked by the presence of the eternal God, who entered into time and is present in all times, because every time is brought forth from his creative power, from his eternal “today”.

This is why Christianity is always new. We must never look at it as though it were a tree, fully developed from the mustard seed of the Gospel, that grew, gave its fruit, and one fine day grows old as the sun sets on its life force. Christianity is a tree that is, so to speak, ever “timely”, ever young. And this trend, this *aggiornamento* does not mean a break with tradition, but expresses its ongoing vitality; it does not mean reducing the faith, debasing it to the fashion of the times, measured by what pleases us, by what pleases public opinion, but it is the contrary: exactly as the Council Fathers did, we must bring the “today” that we live to the standard of the Christian event, we must bring the “today” of our time to the “today” of God.

The Council was a time of grace in which the Holy Spirit taught us that the Church, in her journey through history, must always speak to the people of today. But this can only happen through the strength of those who are deeply rooted in God, who allow themselves to be guided by him and live out their faith with purity. It does not come from those who adapt themselves to the passing moment, from those who choose the easiest path. The Council was clear when in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium](#), n. 49, it stated that everyone in the Church is called to holiness according to the words of the Apostle Paul “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess 4:3): holiness reveals the true face of the Church, it ushers the eternal “today” of God into the “today” of our life, into the “today” of the people of our time.

Dear Brothers in the episcopate, memory of the past is precious, but it is never an end in itself. The [Year of Faith](#) that we inaugurated yesterday suggests the best way to remember and commemorate the Council: to focus on the heart of its message, which moreover is nothing other than the message of faith in Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the world, proclaimed to the men and women of our time. Today too what is important and essential is to bring the ray of God’s love to the hearts and lives of every man and every woman, and to bring every man and woman of every time and place to God. I warmly hope that each particular Church may find in the celebration of this Year the opportunity for the ever necessary return to the living source of the Gospel, to the

transforming encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. Thank you.

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