



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO BISHOPS TAKING PART IN THE MEETING
ORGANIZED BY THE CONGREGATIONS
FOR BISHOPS AND FOR THE EASTERN CHURCHES**

*Hall of the Swiss, Apostolic Palace of Castel Gandolfo
Thursday, 20 September 2012*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

The pilgrimage to the Tomb of St Peter which you have made during these days of reflection on your episcopal ministry is of particular importance this year. We are, in fact, on the eve of the Year of Faith, the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and of the 13th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian faith”. These events, to which we must add the 20th anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, are an opportunity to reinforce the faith, of which, dear Confrères, you are teachers and heralds (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 25). I greet each one of you and I express my sincere gratitude for their courteous words to Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, and to Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches.

This gathering in Rome at the start of your episcopal ministry is a good opportunity to experience in a practical way communication and communion among you and, in the encounter with the Successor of Peter, to foster a sense of responsibility for the entire Church. As members of the College of Bishops, you must always have a special concern for the universal Church, in the first place by promoting and defending the unity of the faith. Jesus Christ desired to entrust the mission of proclaiming the Gospel first of all to the body of Pastors who must work together and with the Successor of Peter (cf. *ibid.*, n. 23), so that it may reach all people. This is particularly urgent in our time which requires you to be bold in inviting people of every state to encounter Christ and to consolidate their faith (cf. *Christus Dominus*, n. 12).

Your main concern should be to promote and sustain a “stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith” (Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, n. 7). In this too you are called to foster and nourish communion and collaboration among the different situations in your dioceses. Evangelization, indeed, is not a work of specialists, but of the entire People of God under the guidance of their Pastors. Every member of the faithful, in and with the ecclesial community, must feel responsible for proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel. Blessed John XXIII, opening the great assembly of Vatican II foresaw: “a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and a formation of the conscience” and for this, he added, “it is necessary that this doctrine be certain and immutable, which must be faithfully respected, that it must be deepened and presented in a way that responds to the needs of our time” (*Discourse at the Opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, 11 October 1962). We can say that the new evangelization started precisely with the Council, which Blessed John XXIII saw as a new Pentecost that would make the Church flourish in her interior richness and in the extension of her motherly mantle over every field of human activity (cf. *Address at the Close of the First Session of the Council*, 8 December 1962). The effects of this new Pentecost, despite the difficulties of the times, were extended reaching the life of the Church in every expression: from the institutional to the spiritual, from the participation of the lay faithful in the Church to the blossoming of charisms and holiness. In this regard we cannot but think of Blessed John XXIII himself and of Blessed John Paul II, of so many bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay people, who have made the face of the Church beautiful in our time.

This legacy has also been entrusted to your pastoral care. Draw from this patrimony of doctrine, of spirituality and of holiness to form your faithful in the faith, that their testimony may be more credible. At the same time, your episcopal service asks you to “account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15) to those in search of faith or of the ultimate meaning of life, in whom “grace works in an unseen way. Christ died for all men and the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine” (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22). I encourage you, therefore, to commit yourselves so that all, according to their different ages and conditions of life, may be presented systematically and organically with the essentials of the faith, in order to respond to the questions posed by our globalized and technological world. The words of the Servant of God Paul VI are still relevant. He affirms: “to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots)... always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 20). Fundamental for this purpose is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* — reliable norms for the teaching of the faith and the communion in the one creed. The reality in which we live demands that Christians have a solid formation!

The faith calls for credible witnesses, who trust in the Lord and entrust themselves to him to be “a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world” (Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, n. 15). The bishop, as the first witness of the faith, accompanies believers on their way, offering them the

example of a life lived in trusting abandonment to God. Therefore, in order to be an authoritative teacher and herald of the faith, he must live in the presence of the Lord, as a man of God. Indeed he cannot be at the service of men without first being a servant of God. Your personal commitment to holiness sees that you absorb the Word of God in prayer every day and nourishes you with the Eucharist, to draw from these two tables the life-line of your ministry. May love urge you to be close to your priests, with that fatherly love which knows how to sustain, encourage and forgive; they are your primary and invaluable collaborators in carrying God to people and people to God. Likewise, the love of the Good Shepherd will make you attentive to the poor and the suffering, supporting and consoling them, and guiding those who have lost the meaning of life. Be particularly close to families: to parents, helping them to be the first educators of the faith for their children; to children and young people, that they may build their life on the solid rock of friendship with Christ. Take special care of seminarians, be concerned for their human, spiritual and pastoral formation so that communities may have mature and joyous Pastors and reliable leaders in the faith.

Dear Brothers, the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace... the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness" (2 Tim 2:22-25). As I recall these words for me and for you, I warmly impart to each one of you my Apostolic Blessing, so that the Churches entrusted to you, impelled by the breath of the Holy Spirit, may grow in faith and proclaim it with new zeal on the paths of history.