



The Holy See

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

***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
DURING THE CELEBRATION OF FIRST VESPERS***

*Roman Major Seminary, Rome
Friday, 1st February 2008*

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

It is always a great joy for the Bishop to be at his Seminary and this evening I thank the Lord who has renewed this joy for me on the eve of the Feast of Our Lady of Trust, your heavenly Patroness. I cordially greet you all: the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishops, the Rector and the other Superiors and you yourselves, dear seminarians, with special affection. I am also pleased to greet the parents and friends of the community of the Roman Seminary who are present. We are gathered together for first solemn Vespers of this Marian Feast which is so dear to you. We have listened to some verses from St Paul's Letter to the Galatians in which he uses the expression "fullness of time" (cf. 4: 4). God alone can "fill the time" and make us experience the full meaning of our existence. God filled time with himself by sending his Only-Begotten Son, and in him he has made us his adoptive sons: sons in the Son. In Jesus and with Jesus, "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14: 6), we are now able to find exhaustive answers to the heart's deepest expectations. Once fear has been dispelled, trust in God, whom we even dare to call "*Abba! Father!*" (cf. Gal 4: 6), grows within us.

Dear seminarians, it is precisely because the gift of being adoptive sons of God had illuminated your lives that you were stirred by the desire to make others share in it too. This is why you are here, to develop your filial vocation and prepare yourselves for your future mission as apostles of Christ. It concerns a unified growth, that, while permitting you to savour the joy of life with God the

Father, it makes you feel so much more the urgent need to become messengers of the Gospel of his Son Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who makes you attentive to this profound reality and makes you love it. All this cannot fail to kindle immense trust in you, for the gift you have received is amazing, it fills you with wonder and profound joy. You can therefore understand the role that Mary also has in your lives, invoked in your Seminary by the beautiful title: "Our Lady of Trust". Like the "Son, born of woman" (cf. Gal 4: 4), of Mary, Mother of God, so your being sons of God means that you have her as Mother, as a true Mother.

Dear parents, you are probably the most surprised of all at what is happening in your sons. You probably imagined a different career for them than the mission for which they are now preparing. Who knows how often you find yourselves thinking about them: you think back to when they were children, then boys; to the times when they showed the first signs of their vocation or, in some cases on the contrary, to the years in which your son's life seemed remote from the Church. What happened? What meetings influenced their decisions? What inner enlightenment guided their footsteps? How could they then give up even promising prospects of life in order to choose to enter the Seminary? Let us look to Mary! The Gospel gives us to understand that she also asked herself many questions about her Son Jesus and pondered on him at length (cf. Lk 2: 19, 51).

It is inevitable that in a certain manner, the vocations of children become the vocations of their parents too. In seeking to understand your children and following them on their way, you too, dear fathers and dear mothers, very often find yourselves involved in a journey in which your faith is strengthened and renewed. You find yourselves sharing in the marvellous adventure of your sons. Indeed, even though it may seem that the priest's life does not attract most people's interest, it is in fact the most interesting and necessary adventure for the world, the adventure of showing, of making present, the fullness of life to which we all aspire. It is a very demanding adventure; and it could not be otherwise since the priest is called to imitate Jesus, who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20: 28).

Dear seminarians, these years of formation constitute an important time in which to prepare yourselves for the exalting mission to which the Lord calls you. Allow me to underline two aspects that mark your current experience. First of all, your seminary years involve a certain detachment from ordinary life, a certain "wilderness", so that the Lord can speak to your heart (cf. Hos 2: 14). Indeed, his voice is not loud but rather subdued, it is "a still small voice" (1 Kgs 19: 12). Thus, if the Lord's voice is to be heard, an atmosphere of silence is essential. For this reason the Seminary offers space and times for daily prayer; it takes great care of the liturgy, meditation on the Word of God and Eucharistic adoration. At the same time, it demands that you devote long hours to study: in praying and studying you can build within yourselves the man of God whom you must be and whom people expect a priest to be.

Then there is a second aspect of your life: during your seminary years, you live together; your formation for the priesthood also involves this community aspect which is of great importance. In

following Jesus, the Apostles were formed together. Your communion is not limited to the present time but also concerns the future: the pastoral action that awaits you must see you joining forces, as though in one body, in one *ordo*, that of priests who, together with the Bishop, care for the Christian community. May you love this "family life" which is an anticipation for you of that "sacramental brotherhood" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 8) which must characterize every diocesan priest.

All this reminds you that God calls you to be holy, that holiness is the secret of the true success of your priestly ministry. From this moment holiness must be the goal of your every choice and decision. Entrust this desire and this daily commitment to Mary, Mother of Trust! This most pacifying title corresponds to the invitation, repeated in the Gospel and addressed to the Virgin by the Angel and then so many other times by Jesus to his disciples: "Do not be afraid" (cf. Lk 1: 30). "Do not be afraid, for I am with you", says the Lord. In the icon of Our Lady of Trust, in which the Child points to the Mother, it seems that Jesus is adding, "Look at your Mother and do not fear". Dear seminarians, follow the Seminary curriculum with your minds open to truth, transparency and dialogue with those who guide you. This will enable you to respond in a very simple and humble way to the One who calls you, freeing yourselves from the risk of creating a strictly personal project. Dear parents and friends, accompany the seminarians with prayer and with your constant material and spiritual support. I also assure you all of my remembrance in prayer, as I joyfully impart the Apostolic Blessing to you.

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