



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO BRESCIA AND CONCESIO

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Paul VI Square - Brescia, Italy

Sunday, 8 November 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I have great joy in being able to break the Bread of the Word of God and of the Eucharist with you here, in the heart of the Diocese of Brescia, where the Servant of God Giovanni Battista Montini, Pope Paul VI was born and educated in his youth. I greet you all with affection and thank you for your warm welcome! In particular I thank Bishop Luciano Monari, for his words to me at the beginning of the celebration and with him I greet the Cardinals, Bishops, priests and deacons, the men and women religious and all the pastoral workers. I thank the Mayor for his words and his gift, and the other civil and military Authorities. I address a special thought to the sick who have gathered in the Cathedral.

At the heart of the Liturgy of the Word this Sunday the 32nd in Ordinary Time we find the figure of the poor widow or, more precisely, we find her gesture when she dropped her last coins into the collection box of the Temple treasury. Thanks to Jesus' attentive look it has become the proverbial "widow's mite" and indeed is synonymous with the generosity of those who give unsparingly the little they possess. However, I would like first of all to emphasize the importance of the atmosphere in which this Gospel episode takes place, that is, the Temple of Jerusalem, the religious centre of the People of Israel and the heart of its whole life. The Temple was the place of public and solemn worship, but also of pilgrimage, of the traditional rites and of rabbinical disputations such as those recorded in the Gospel between Jesus and the rabbis of that time in which, however, Jesus teaches with unique authority as the Son of God. He judges the scribes severely as we have heard because of their hypocrisy: indeed, while they display great piety they

are exploiting the poor, imposing obligations that they themselves do not observe. Indeed, Jesus shows his affection for the Temple as a house of prayer but for this very reason wishes to cleanse it from improper practices; actually he wants to reveal its deepest meaning which is linked to the fulfilment of his own Mystery, the Mystery of his death and Resurrection, in which he himself becomes the new and definitive Temple, the place where God and man, the Creator and his creature, meet.

The episode of the widow's mite fits into this context and leads us, through Jesus' gaze itself, to focus our attention on a transient but crucial detail: the action of the widow, who is very poor and yet puts two coins into the collection box of the Temple treasury. Jesus is saying to us too, just as he said to his disciples that day: Pay attention! Take note of what this widow has done, because her act contains a great teaching; in fact, it expresses the fundamental characteristic of those who are the "living stones" of this new Temple, namely the total gift of themselves to the Lord and to their neighbour; the widow of the Gospel, and likewise the widow in the Old Testament, gives everything, gives herself, putting herself in God's hands for others. This is the everlasting meaning of the poor widow's offering which Jesus praises; for she has given more than the rich, who offer part of what is superfluous to them, whereas she gave all that she had to live on (cf. *Mk 12: 44*), hence she gave herself.

Dear friends, starting with this Gospel icon I would like to meditate briefly on the mystery of the Church, the living Temple of God, and thereby pay homage to the memory of the great Pope [Paul VI](#) who dedicated his entire life to the Church. The Church is a real spiritual organism that prolongs in space and time the sacrifice of the Son of God, an apparently insignificant sacrifice in comparison with the dimensions of the world and of history but in God's eyes crucial. As the *Letter to the Hebrews* says and also the text we have just heard Jesus' sacrifice offered "once" sufficed for God to save the whole world (cf. *Heb 9: 26, 28*), because all the Love of the Son of God made man is condensed in that single oblation, just as all the widow's love for God and for her brethren is concentrated in this woman's action; nothing is lacking and there is nothing to add. The Church, which is ceaselessly born from the Eucharist, from Jesus' gift of self, is the continuation of this gift, this superabundance which is expressed in poverty, in the all that is offered in the fragment. It is Christ's Body that is given entirely, a body broken and shared in constant adherence to the will of its Head.

I am glad that guided by your Bishop's Pastoral Letter you are examining in depth the Eucharistic nature of the Church, this Church which the Servant of God [Paul VI](#) loved passionately and sought with all his might to make understood and loved. Let us reread his *Pensiero alla morte*, the part where, in the last section, he speaks of the Church. "I could say", he writes, "that I have always loved her... and that it seems to me I have lived for her and for nothing else; but I would like the Church to know it". These are the accents of a palpitating heart and he continues: "Lastly, I would like to understand her fully, in her history, in her divine plan, in her final destiny, in her complex, total and unitary composition, in her human and imperfect consistence, in her adversities and her

sufferings, in her weakness and in the wretchedness of so many of her children, in her less sympathetic aspects and in her eternal aspiration to fidelity, love, perfection and charity. The Mystical Body of Christ". "I would like", the Pope continues, "to embrace, greet her and love her in every being of whom she is made up, in every Bishop and priest who serves and guides her, in every soul who lives and illustrates her; I would like to bless her". Moreover, his last words were to her, as to the bride of his whole life: "And what shall I say to the Church, to whom I owe everything and whom was mine? May God's Blessings be upon you; may you be aware of your nature and your mission; may you have a sense of humanity's true and profound needs; and walk in poverty, in other words free, strong and in love with Christ".

What can be added to such lofty and intense words? I would just like to underline this last vision of the Church "poor and free" which evokes the Gospel figure of the widow. If it is to succeed in speaking to contemporary humanity the ecclesial community must be like this. Giovanni Battista Montini had particularly at heart the Church's encounter and dialogue with the humanity of our time in all the seasons of his life, from the early years of his priesthood until the Pontificate. He dedicated all his energy to serving a Church which would conform as closely as possible to his Lord Jesus Christ so that in encountering her contemporary men and women might encounter him, Christ, because their need for him is absolute. This was the basic desire of the [Second Vatican Council](#) with which [Paul VI](#)'s reflection on the Church corresponds. He wanted to expound programmatically on some of her salient points in his first Encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* of 6 August 1964, at a time when the conciliar Constitutions [Lumen gentium](#) and [Gaudium et spes](#) had not yet been written.

With that [first Encyclical](#) the Pontiff sought to explain to all the Church's importance for humanity's salvation and, at the same time, the need to establish a relationship based on mutual knowledge and love between the ecclesial community and society (cf. *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, 2, p. 199, n. 164). "Conscience", "renewal", "dialogue"; these were the three words that [Paul VI](#) chose to express his principal "policies", as he himself describes them at the beginning of his Petrine ministry, and all three concern the Church. First of all comes the need for her to increase her self-awareness: of her origins, nature, mission and final destiny; secondly, comes her need to renew herself, to cleanse herself by looking at her model, Christ. Lastly there is the problem of establishing relations with the modern world (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 203-205, nn. 166-168). Dear friends and I am addressing in a special way my Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood how can we fail to see concerning the Church, the need for her in the plan of salvation and her relationship with the world that is still absolutely central today? And, indeed, that the developments of secularization and globalization have made it even more essential, in the confrontation on the one hand with the disregard for God and on the other with the non-Christian religions? Pope Montini's reflection on the Church is more timely than ever; and even more valuable is his exemplary love for her, inseparable from his love for Christ. "The mystery of the Church", we read once again in the Encyclical [Ecclesiam suam](#), "is not to be confined to the realms of speculative theology. It must be lived, so that the faithful may have a kind of intuitive experience of it, even before they come to

understand it clearly" (*ibid.*, n. 37). This presupposes a robust inner life which, the Pope continues, is thus "the richest source of the Church's spiritual strength. It is the means, peculiarly its own, whereby the Church receives the sunlight of Christ's Spirit. It is the Church's natural and necessary way of expressing her religious and social activity, her surest defence and the cause of her constant renewal of strength amid the difficulties of the secular world" (cf. *ibid.*, n. 38). It is precisely the Christian who is open, the Church open to the world, that need a robust inner life.

Dear friends what an invaluable gift for the Church the lesson of the Servant of God [Paul VI](#) is! And how exciting it is, every time, to learn from him! It is a lesson that concerns all and involves all in accordance with the various gifts and ministries with which the action of the Holy Spirit has enriched the People of God. In this [Year for Priests](#) I would like to stress how this lesson concerns and involves priests in particular, for whom Pope Montini always reserved special affection and concern. In his Encyclical on priestly celibacy he wrote: "'Laid hold of by Christ' unto the complete abandonment of one's entire self to him, the priest takes on a closer likeness to Christ, even in the love with which the eternal Priest has loved the Church his Body and offered himself entirely for her sake.... In fact "the consecrated celibacy of the sacred ministers manifests the virginal love of Christ for the Church and above all the virginal and supernatural fecundity of this marriage" (*Sacerdotalis caelibatus*, n. 26). I dedicate the great Pope's words to the many priests of the Diocese of Brescia, well represented here, as well as to the young men in formation at the Seminary. And I would also like to recall the words that [Paul VI](#) addressed to the students at the Lombard Seminary on 7 December 1968, when the difficulties of the post-conciliar period had to contend with the ferment in the world of youth: "So many", he said, "expect of the Pope sensational work, energetic and decisive interventions. The Pope does not consider he should follow any other line than that of trust in Jesus Christ, whose concern for his Church is greater than for anyone else. It will be he who rides out the storm.... This expectation is neither sterile nor inert; rather, it is attentive watching in prayer. This is the condition Jesus chose for us so that he might fully carry out his work. The Pope too needs the help of prayer" (*Insegnamenti VI*, [1968], 1189). Dear Brothers and Sisters, may the priestly example of the Servant of God Giovanni Battista Montini always guide you, and may St Arcangelo Tadini whom I have just venerated during my brief stop at Botticino intercede for you.

While I greet and encourage the priests, I cannot forget, especially here in Brescia, the lay faithful in this region who have shown extraordinary vitality in their faith and actions, in the various fields of the associated apostolate and of social commitment. In the *Insegnamenti* of [Paul VI](#), dear friends of Brescia, you can find ever precious instructions for facing the challenges of the present time including, above all, the financial crisis, immigration and the education of youth. At the same time, Pope Montini did not miss an opportunity to underline the primacy of the contemplative dimension, in other words the primacy of God in human experience and therefore never tired of promoting the consecrated life in the variety of its aspects. He deeply loved the many-faceted beauty of the Church, recognizing in it the infinite beauty of God which shines on Christ's Face.

Let us pray that the brightness of divine beauty may be resplendent in all our communities and that the Church may be a luminous sign of hope for humanity in the third millennium. May Mary, whom at the end of the Second Vatican Council, Paul VI wished to proclaim Mother of the Church, obtain this grace for us. Amen!

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