



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO PORTUGAL ON THE OCCASION OF THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE BEATIFICATION OF JACINTA AND FRANCISCO,
YOUNG SHEPHERDS OF FÁTIMA

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Av. dos Aliados Square, Porto
Friday, 14 May 2010

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“It is written in the book of Psalms, ... ‘His office let another take’. One of these men, then [...] must become a witness with us to his resurrection” (Acts 1:20-22). These were the words of Peter, as he read and interpreted the word of God in the midst of his brethren gathered in the Upper Room following Jesus’ ascension to heaven. The one who was chosen was Matthias, who had been a witness to the public life of Jesus and his victory over death, and had remained faithful to him to the end, despite the fact that many abandoned him. The “disproportion” between the forces on the field, which we find so alarming today, astounded those who saw and heard Christ two thousand years ago. It was only he, from the shore of the Lake of Galilee right up to the squares of Jerusalem, alone or almost alone at the decisive moments: he, in union with the Father; he, in the power of the Spirit. Yet it came about, in the end, that from the same love that created the world, the newness of the Kingdom sprang up like a small seed which rises from the ground, like a ray of light which breaks into the darkness, like the dawn of a unending day: it is Christ Risen. And he appeared to his friends, showing them the need for the Cross in order to attain the resurrection.

On that day Peter was looking for a witness to all this. Two were presented, and heaven chose “Matthias, and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26). Today we celebrate his

glorious memory in this “undefeated city”, which festively welcomes the Successor of Peter. I give thanks to God that I have been able come here and meet you around the altar. I offer a cordial greeting to you, my brethren and friends of the city and the Diocese of Oporto, to those who have come from the ecclesiastical province of Northern Portugal and from nearby Spain, and to all those physically or spiritually present at this liturgical assembly. I greet the Bishop of Oporto, Dom Manuel Clemente, who greatly desired this visit of mine, welcomed me with great affection, and voiced your sentiments at the beginning of this Eucharist. I greet his predecessors, his brother Bishops, all the priests, women and men religious, and the lay faithful, and in particular those actively involved in the Diocesan Mission, and, more concretely, in the preparations for my visit. I know that you have been able to count on the practical cooperation of the Mayor of Oporto and the public authorities, many of whom honour me by their presence; I wish to take advantage of this opportunity to greet them and to express to them, and to all whom they represent and serve, my best wishes for the good of all.

“One of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection,” said Peter. His Successor now repeats to each of you: My brothers and sisters, you need to become witnesses with me to the resurrection of Jesus. In effect, if you do not become his witnesses in your daily lives, who will do so in your place? Christians are, in the Church and with the Church, missionaries of Christ sent into the world. This is the indispensable mission of every ecclesial community: to receive from God and to offer to the world the Risen Christ, so that every situation of weakness and of death may be transformed, through the Holy Spirit, into an opportunity for growth and life. To this end, in every Eucharistic celebration, we will listen more attentively to the word of Christ and devoutly taste the bread of his presence. This will make us witnesses, and, even more, bearers of the Risen Jesus in the world, bringing him to the various sectors of society and to all those who live and work there, spreading that “life in abundance” (cf. Jn 10:10) which he has won for us by his cross and resurrection, and which satisfies the most authentic yearnings of the human heart.

We impose nothing, yet we propose ceaselessly, as Peter recommends in one of his Letters: “In your hearts, reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). And everyone, in the end, asks this of us, even those who seem not to. From personal and communal experience, we know well that it is Jesus whom everyone awaits. In fact, the most profound expectations of the world and the great certainties of the Gospel meet in the ineluctable mission which is ours, for “without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is. In the face of the enormous problems surrounding the development of peoples, which almost make us yield to discouragement, we find solace in the sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ, who teaches us: ‘Apart from me you can do nothing’ (Jn 15:5) and who encourages us: ‘I am with you always, to the close of the age’ (Mt 28:20)” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 78).

Yet even though this certainty consoles and calms us, it does not exempt us from going forth to others. We must overcome the temptation to restrict ourselves to what we already have, or think

we have, safely in our possession: it would be sure death in terms of the Church's presence in the world; the Church, for that matter, can only be missionary, in the outward movement of the Spirit. From its origins, the Christian people has clearly recognized the importance of communicating the Good News of Jesus to those who did not yet know him. In recent years the anthropological, cultural, social and religious framework of humanity has changed; today the Church is called to face new challenges and is ready to dialogue with different cultures and religions, in the search for ways of building, along with all people of good will, the peaceful coexistence of peoples. The field of the mission *ad gentes* appears much broader today, and no longer to be defined on the basis of geographic considerations alone; in effect, not only non-Christian peoples and those who are far distant await us, but so do social and cultural milieux, and above all human hearts, which are the real goal of the missionary activity of the People of God.

This is the mandate whose faithful fulfilment "must follow the road Christ himself walked, a way of poverty and obedience, of service and of self-sacrifice even unto death, a death from which he emerged victorious by his resurrection" (*Ad Gentes*, 5). Yes! We are called to serve the humanity of our own time, trusting in Jesus alone, letting ourselves be enlightened by his word: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15:16). How much time we have lost, how much work has been set back, on account of our lack of attention to this point! Everything is to be defined starting with Christ, as far as the origins and effectiveness of mission is concerned: we receive mission always from Christ, who has made known to us what he has heard from his Father, and we are appointed to mission through the Spirit, in the Church. Like the Church herself, which is the work of Christ and his Spirit, it is a question of renewing the face of the earth starting from God, God always and alone.

Dear brothers and sisters of Oporto, lift up your eyes to the One whom you have chosen as the patroness of your city, Our Lady of Vandoma. The angel of the Annunciation greeted Mary as "full of grace", signifying with this expression that her heart and her life were totally open to God and, as such, completely permeated by his grace. May Our Lady help you to make yourselves a free and total "Yes" to the grace of God, so that you can be renewed and thus renew humanity by the light and the joy of the Holy Spirit.