



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO CYPRUS

(JUNE 4-6, 2010)

**HOLY MASS ON THE OCCASION OF THE PUBLICATION
OF THE *INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS*
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OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Eleftheria Sports Centre Eleftheria - Nicosia

Sunday, 6 June 2010

(Video)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I greet with joy the Patriarchs and Bishops of the various ecclesial communities of the Middle East who have come to Cyprus for this occasion, and I thank especially the Most Reverend Youssef Soueif, Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus, for the words that he addressed to me at the start of Mass.

Let me also say how glad I am to have this opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist in the company of so many of the faithful of Cyprus, a land blessed by the apostolic labours of Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas. I greet all of you most warmly and I thank you for your hospitality and for the generous welcome you have given me. I extend a particular greeting to the Filipino, Sri Lankan and other immigrant communities who form such a significant grouping within the Catholic population of this island. I pray that your presence here will enrich the life and worship of the parishes to which you belong, and that you in turn will draw much spiritual sustenance from the ancient Christian heritage of the land that you have made your home.

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Lord's Body and Blood. *Corpus Christi*, the name given to this feast in the West, is used in the Church's tradition to designate three distinct realities: the physical body of Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, his eucharistic body, the bread of heaven which nourishes us in this great sacrament, and his ecclesial body, the Church. By reflecting on these different aspects of the *Corpus Christi*, we come to a deeper understanding of the mystery of communion which binds together those who belong to the Church. All who feed on the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist are "brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit" (*Eucharistic Prayer II*) to form God's one holy people. Just as the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, so too the same Holy Spirit is at work in every celebration of Mass for a twofold purpose: to sanctify the gifts of bread and wine, that they may become the body and blood of Christ, and to fill all who are nourished by these holy gifts, that they may become one body, one spirit in Christ.

St Augustine expresses this process magnificently (cf. *Sermon 272*). He reminds us that bread is not made from a single grain of wheat but from a multitude of grains. Before all these grains become a loaf of bread they must be ground. Here he is alluding to the exorcism to which catechumens had to submit prior to their Baptism. Each one of us who belongs to the Church needs to emerge from the closed world of his or her own individuality and to accept the "companionship" of others who "share the bread" with us. We must no longer think of "me" but, rather, of "us". This is the reason why, every day, we pray "Our Father" for our daily bread. Breaking down the barriers between ourselves and our neighbours is the prerequisite for entering the divine life to which we are called. We need to be liberated from all that encloses and isolates us: fear and defiance in our relations with others, greed and selfishness, unwillingness to expose ourselves to the risk of vulnerability to which we are susceptible when we open ourselves to love.

Once the grains of wheat have been ground, they are kneaded into dough and baked. Here St Augustine is referring to immersion in the waters of Baptism followed by the sacramental gift of the Holy Spirit which kindles the fire of God's love in the hearts of the faithful. This process that unites and transforms the separate grains into a single loaf conveys to us an evocative image of the unifying action of the Holy Spirit on the members of the Church, eminently achieved through the celebration of the Eucharist. Those who take part in this important sacrament become the ecclesial Body of Christ, while they are nourished by his Body in the Eucharist. "Be what you can see", St Augustine said, encouraging them, "and accept what you are".

These strong words invite us to respond generously to the appeal to "be Christ" for those around us. We are now his Body on earth. To paraphrase a famous remark attributed to St Teresa of Avila, we are the eyes with which his compassion looks at those in need, we are the hands he holds out to bless and to heal, we are the feet he uses to go and do good and we are the lips through which his Gospel is proclaimed. However, it is important to realize that when we participate in his salvation in this way we do no more than pay tribute to the memory of a dead hero by prolonging what he has done: on the contrary, Christ is alive within us, his Body, the

Church, his priestly People. By nourishing ourselves with him in the Eucharist and by receiving the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we truly form the Body of Christ that we have received, we are truly in communion with him and with each other and genuinely become his instruments, bearing witness to him before the world. "Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (Acts 4: 32). In the first Christian community, nourished at the Lord's Table, we see the effects of the Holy Spirit's unifying action. They shared their goods in common, all material attachment being overcome by love for the brethren. They found equitable solutions to their differences, as we see for example in the resolution of the dispute between Hellenists and Hebrews over the daily distribution (cf. Acts 6: 1-6). As one observer commented at a later date: "See how these Christians love one another, and how they are ready to die for one another" (Tertullian, *Apology*, 39). Yet their love was by no means limited to their fellow believers. They never saw themselves as exclusive, privileged beneficiaries of divine favour, but rather as messengers, sent to bring the good news of salvation in Christ to the ends of the earth. And so it was that the message entrusted to the Apostles by the Risen Lord was spread throughout the Middle East, and outwards from there across the whole of the world.

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Αγαπητοί εν Χριστώ αδελφοί και αγαπητές αδελφές, σήμερα είμαστε καλεσμένοι σαν ένα σωμα και μιά ψυχή να εξετάσουμε σε βάθος την κοινωνία μας με τον Κυριον και με τον πλησίον και να τον μαρτυρήσουμε μπροστά σε ολο τον κόσμο. [\[1\]](#)

We are called to overcome our differences, to bring peace and reconciliation where there is conflict, to offer the world a message of hope. We are called to reach out to those in need, generously sharing our earthly goods with those less fortunate than ourselves. And we are called to proclaim unceasingly the death and resurrection of the Lord, until he comes. Through him, with him and in him, in the unity that is the Holy Spirit's gift to the Church, let us give honour and glory to God our heavenly Father in the company of all the angels and saints who sing his praises for ever. Amen.

[1] Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we are called, just as they were, to be of one heart and one soul, to deepen our communion with the Lord and with one another, and to bear witness to him before the world.

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