



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO SULMONA

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Garibaldi Square - Sulmona

Sunday, 4 July 2010

(Video)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am delighted to be with you today and to celebrate this solemn Eucharist with you and for you. I greet your Pastor, Bishop Angelo Spina: I thank him for his warm expressions of welcome on behalf of you all and for his gifts, which I truly appreciate as "signs", as he himself called them, of the affective and effective communion that binds the people of this beloved region of the Abruzzo to the Successor of Peter. I greet the Archbishops and Bishops present, the priests, the men and women religious and the Representatives of the Ecclesial Associations and Movements. I address a respectful thought to Hon. Mr Fabio Federico, the Mayor with gratitude for his courteous greeting and for the "signs", the gifts to the Government Representative and to the Civil and Military Authorities. I address special thanks to those who generously offered their cooperation in the organization of my Pastoral Visit. Dear brothers and sisters, I have come to share with you the joys and hopes, the efforts and tasks, the ideals and aspirations of this diocesan community. I know well that Sulmona is not exempt from difficulties, nor from problems and worries. I am thinking in particular of all the people who are living in precarious conditions because of the lack of work, uncertainty about the future, physical and moral suffering and, as the Bishop recalled, a sense of loss due to the earthquake of 6 April 2009. I want to reassure every one of my closeness and my remembrance in prayer, while I encourage you to persevere in witnessing to the human and Christian values so deeply rooted in the faith and history of this area and its population.

Dear friends, my Visit is taking place on the occasion of the special Jubilee Year proclaimed by the Bishops of Abruzzo and Molise to celebrate the 800th anniversary of St Peter Celestine's birth. In flying over your region I was able to contemplate the beauty of its landscape and, especially, to admire some of the places closely linked to the life of this outstanding figure: Monte Morrone, where Peter lived as a hermit for many years; the Hermitage of Sant'Onofrio, where, in 1294, he learned the news of his election as Supreme Pontiff at the Conclave held in Perugia; and the Abbey of Santo Spirito, whose main altar he consecrated after his coronation in the Basilica of Collemaggio in L'Aquila. I visited this Basilica myself in April last year, after the earthquake that devastated the region, to venerate the urn in which his remains are preserved and to lay upon it the pallium I received on the day of the inauguration of my Pontificate.

More than 800 years have passed since the birth of St Peter Celestine V, but he lives on in history on account of the well-known events of his Pontificate and, above all, his holiness. Indeed, holiness never loses its power of attraction, it does not fade into oblivion, it never goes out of fashion; on the contrary, with the passage of time it shines out ever more brightly, expressing man's perennial effort to reach God. I would like to draw from St Peter Celestine's life some lessons that also apply in our day.

From his youth Pietro Angelerio was a "seeker of God", a man who sought the answers to the great questions of our existence: Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I alive? For whom do I live? He set out in quest of truth and happiness, he went in search of God and in order to hear God's voice decided to detach himself from the world and live as a hermit. Thus silence became a characteristic feature of his daily life. And it was precisely in exterior but especially interior silence that he succeeded in perceiving God's voice, able to guide his life. Here there is a first important aspect for us: we live in a society in which it seems that every space, every moment must be "filled" with projects, activities and noise; there is often no time even to listen or to converse. Dear brothers and sisters, let us not fear to create silence, within and outside ourselves, if we wish to be able not only to become aware of God's voice but also to make out the voice of the person beside us, the voices of others.

However it is also important to emphasize a second element: Pietro Angelerio's discovery of God was not the result of his own efforts but was made possible by the Grace of God itself that prepared him. What he had, what he was, did not come from himself: it was given to him, it was Grace, and so it also entailed responsibility to God and to others. Although our life is very different from his, the same also applies for us: all that is essential in our existence was bestowed upon us without our contribution. The fact that I am alive does not depend on me. The fact that there were people who introduced me to life, who taught me what it means to love and to be loved, who handed down the faith to me and opened my eyes to God: all of this is Grace, it was not "done by me". We would not have been able to do anything on our own had we not been granted to do so: God always anticipates our needs and in every individual life there is a beauty and goodness that we can easily recognize as his grace, as a ray of the light of his goodness. For this reason we

must be attentive, we must always keep open our "inner eyes", the eyes of our heart. And if we learn to know God in his infinite goodness, then we shall be able to see in our lives with wonder, like the Saints, the signs of that God who is always close to us, who is always good to us, who says: "Have faith in me!".

In addition, in inner silence, in the perception of the Lord's presence, Peter of Morrone developed a vivid experience of the beauty of creation, the work of God's hands: he was able to grasp its profound meaning, he respected its signs and rhythms, he made use of it for what is essential to life.

I know that this local Church, like the other Churches in the Abruzzo and the Molise, is actively engaged in a campaign of sensitization to promote the common good and to safeguard creation: I encourage you in this effort and urge you all to feel responsible for your own future and the future of others, also respecting and caring for creation, the fruit and sign of God's Love.

In today's Second Reading from the Letter to the Galatians we heard a beautiful expression of St Paul that is also a perfect spiritual portrait of St Peter Celestine: "Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (6:14). The Cross was indeed the centre of his life. It gave him the strength to endure the harsh penances and to face the most demanding moments, from his youth to his last hour: he was always aware that from it salvation comes. The Cross also gave St Peter Celestine a clear awareness of sin that was always accompanied by an equally clear awareness of God's infinite mercy for his creature. Seeing the wide-open arms of his Crucified God, he felt himself to be carried through the boundless ocean of God's love. As a priest he experienced the beauty of being a steward of this mercy, absolving those who repented of sin and, when he was elected to the See of the Apostle Peter, he chose to grant a special Indulgence, known as "La "Perdonanza" [The Pardon]. I would like to urge priests to be clear and credible witnesses of the good news of reconciliation with God, helping contemporary men and women to recover the sense of sin and of God's forgiveness, in order to experience that superabundant joy of which the Prophet Isaiah spoke to us in the First Reading. (cf. Is 66:10-14).

Finally, one last element: Although St Peter lived as a hermit he was not "closed in on himself"; rather he was full of enthusiasm at bringing the Good News of the Gospel to his brethren. Moreover the secret of his pastoral fruitfulness lay, precisely, in "abiding" with the Lord, in prayer, as we were also reminded by today's Gospel passage: our top priority is always to pray to the Lord of the harvest (cf. Lk 10:2). And it is only after this invitation that Jesus outlines some of the essential duties of his disciples: the serene, clear and courageous proclamation of the Gospel message even in moments of persecution without giving in to the allure of fashion or those of violence or of domination; detachment from anxiety about things, money and dress trusting in the Father's Providence; attention and care, particularly for those sick in body and mind (cf. Lk10:5-9). These were also the characteristics of the brief and troubled Pontificate of Celestine V and are the characteristics of the Church's missionary activity in every epoch.

Dear brothers and sisters, I am here among you to strengthen you in the faith. I would like to exhort you, forcefully and with affection, to stay firm in the faith you have received, which gives meaning to life and gives the strength to love. May we be accompanied on this journey by the example and intercession of the Mother of God and of St Peter Celestine. Amen!

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