



# The Holy See

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## VESPERS ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

### ***HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI***

*Basilica of "San Gregorio al Celio"*

*Saturday, 10 March 2012*

[\[Video\]](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)

*Your Grace,  
Dear Brother Bishops and Priests,  
Dear Monks and Nuns of Camaldoli,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

It gives me great joy to be here today in this Basilica of *San Gregorio al Celio* for Solemn Vespers on the liturgical commemoration of the death of Saint Gregory the Great. With you, dear Brothers and Sisters of the Camaldolese family, I thank God for the thousand years that have passed since the foundation of the Sacred Hermitage of Camaldoli by Saint Romuald. I am delighted to be joined on this occasion by His Grace Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury. To you, my dear Brother in Christ, and to each one of you, dear monks and nuns, and to everyone present, I extend cordial greetings.

We have listened to two passages from Saint Paul. The first, taken from the *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, is particularly appropriate for the current liturgical season of Lent. It contains the Apostle's exhortation to seize the favourable moment for receiving God's grace. The favourable moment is naturally when Jesus Christ came to reveal and to bestow upon us the love that God has for us, through his incarnation, passion, death and resurrection. The "day of salvation" is the same reality that Saint Paul in another place describes as the "fullness of time", the moment when

God took flesh and entered time in a completely unique way, filling it with his grace. It is for us, then, to accept this gift, which is Jesus himself: his person, his word, his Holy Spirit. Moreover, in the first reading, Saint Paul tells us about himself and his apostolate – how he strives to remain faithful to God in his ministry, so that it may be truly efficacious and may not prove instead a barrier to faith. These words make us think of Saint Gregory the Great, of the radiant witness that he offered the people of Rome and the whole Church by a blameless ministry full of zeal for the Gospel. Truly, what Saint Paul wrote of himself applies equally to Gregory: the grace of God in him has not been fruitless (cf. *1 Cor* 15:10). This, indeed, is the secret for the lives of every one of us: to welcome God's grace and to consent with all our heart and all our strength to its action. This is also the secret of true joy and profound peace.

The second reading was taken from the *Letter to the Colossians*. We heard those words – always so moving for their spiritual and pastoral inspiration – that the Apostle addressed to the members of that community in order to form them according to the Gospel, saying to them: “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (*Col* 3:17). “Be perfect”, the Master said to his disciples; and now the Apostle exhorts his listeners to live according to the high measure of Christian life that is holiness. He can do this because the brothers he is addressing are “chosen by God, holy and beloved”. Here too, at the root of everything, is the grace of God, the gift of the call, the mystery of the encounter with the living Jesus. But this grace demands a response from those who have been baptized: it requires the commitment to be re clothed in Christ's sentiments: tenderness, goodness, humility, meekness, magnanimity, mutual forgiveness, and above all, as a synthesis and a crown, *agape*, the love that God has given us through Jesus, the love that the Holy Spirit has poured into our hearts. And if we are to be re clothed in Christ, his word must dwell among us and in us, with all its richness and in abundance. In an atmosphere of constant thanksgiving, the Christian community feeds on the word and causes to rise towards God, as a song of praise, the word that he himself has given us. And every action, every gesture, every service, is accomplished within this profound relationship with God, in the interior movement of Trinitarian love that descends towards us and rises back towards God, a movement that finds its highest expression in the eucharistic sacrifice.

This word also sheds light upon the happy circumstances that bring us together today, in the name of Saint Gregory the Great. Through the faithfulness and benevolence of the Lord, the Congregation of Camaldolese monks of the Order of Saint Benedict has completed a thousand years of history, feeding daily on the word of God and the Eucharist, as their founder Saint Romuald taught them, according to the *triplex bonum* of solitude, community life and evangelization. Exemplary men and women of God, such as Saint Peter Damian, Gratian – author of the *Decretum* – Saint Bruno of Querfurt and the five brother martyrs, Rudolph I and II, Blessed Gherardesca, Blessed Giovanna da Bagno and Blessed Paolo Giustiniani; men of art and science like Brother Maurus the Cosmographer, Lorenzo Monaco, Ambrogio Traversari, Pietro Delfino and Guido Grandi; illustrious historians like the Camaldolese Annalists Giovanni Benedetto Mittarelli and Anselmo Costadoni; zealous pastors of the Church, among whom Pope Gregory XVI stands

out, have revealed the horizons and the great fruitfulness of the Camaldolese tradition.

Every phase of the long history of the Camaldolese has produced faithful witnesses of the Gospel, not only in the hidden life of silence and solitude and in the common life shared with the brethren, but also in humble and generous service towards others. Particularly fruitful was the hospitality offered by Camaldolese guest-houses. In the days of Florentine humanism, the walls of Camaldoli witnessed the famous *disputationes*, in which great humanists such as Marsilio Ficino and Cristoforo Landino took part. In the turbulent years of the Second World War, those same cloisters were the setting for the birth of the famous *Codex of Camaldoli*, one of the most significant sources of the Constitution of the Italian Republic. Nor were the years of the Second Vatican Council any less productive, for at that time individuals of high calibre emerged among the Camaldolese, enriching the Congregation and the Church and promoting new initiatives and new houses in the United States of America, Tanzania, India and Brazil. In all this activity, a guarantee of fruitfulness was the support of monks and nuns praying constantly for the new foundations from the depths of their “withdrawal from the world”, lived at times to a heroic degree.

On 17 September 1993, during his meeting with the monks of the Sacred Hermitage of Camaldoli, Blessed John Paul II commented on the theme of their imminent General Chapter, “Choosing hope, choosing the future”, with these words: “Choosing hope and the future in the last analysis implies choosing God ... It means choosing Christ, the hope of every human being.” And he continued, “This particularly occurs in that form of life which God himself brought about in the Church, inspiring Saint Romuald to found the Benedictine family of Camaldoli, with its characteristic complementarity of hermitage and monastery, solitary life and cenobitic life in harmony with each other.” Moreover, my blessed Predecessor emphasized that “choosing God also means humbly and patiently cultivating, according to God’s design, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue”, always on the basis of fidelity to the original charism received from Saint Romuald and transmitted through a thousand years of varied tradition.

Encouraged by the visit from the Successor of Peter, and by his words, all of you Camaldolese monks and nuns have pursued your path, constantly seeking the right balance between the eremitical and the cenobitic spirit, between the need to dedicate yourselves totally to God in solitude, the need to support one another in communal prayer, and the need to welcome others so that they can draw upon the wellsprings of spiritual life and evaluate the events of the world with a truly Gospel-formed conscience. In this way you seek to attain that *perfecta caritas* that Saint Gregory the Great considered the point of arrival of every manifestation of faith, a commitment that finds confirmation in the motto of your coat of arms: “*Ego Vobis, vos mihi*”, a synthesis of the covenant formula between God and his people, and a source of the perennial vitality of your charism.

The Monastery of *San Gregorio al Celio* is the Roman setting for our celebration of the millennium of Camaldoli in company with His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury who, together with us,

recognizes this Monastery as the birthplace of the link between Christianity in Britain and the Church of Rome. Today's celebration is therefore marked by a profoundly ecumenical character which, as we know, is part and parcel of the modern Camaldolese spirit. This Roman Camaldolese Monastery has developed with Canterbury and the Anglican Communion, especially since the Second Vatican Council, links that now qualify as traditional. Today, for the third time, the Bishop of Rome is meeting the Archbishop of Canterbury in the home of Saint Gregory the Great. And it is right that it should be so, because it was from this Monastery that Pope Gregory chose Augustine and his forty monks and sent them to bring the Gospel to the Angles, a little over 1,400 years ago. The constant presence of monks in this place, over such a long period, is already in itself a testimony of God's faithfulness to his Church, which we are happy to be able to proclaim to the whole world. We hope that the sign of our presence here together in front of the holy altar, where Gregory himself celebrated the eucharistic sacrifice, will remain not only as a reminder of our fraternal encounter, but also as a stimulus for all the faithful – both Catholic and Anglican – encouraging them, as they visit the glorious tombs of the holy Apostles and Martyrs in Rome, to renew their commitment to pray constantly and to work for unity, and to live fully in accordance with the "*ut unum sint*" that Jesus addressed to the Father.

This profound desire, that we have the joy of sharing, we entrust to the heavenly intercession of Saint Gregory the Great and Saint Romuald. Amen.

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