



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS ORDAINED DURING THE PAST YEAR**

Hall of the Swiss, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Saturday, 22 September 2007

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

For several years now it has been customary for recently appointed Bishops to gather in Rome for a meeting experienced as a pilgrimage to the tomb of St Peter. I welcome you with special affection. As well as encouraging you to reflect on a Bishop's responsibilities and tasks, this experience enables you to revive in your souls the knowledge that you are not alone in governing God's Church, but that together with grace you have the support of the Pope and of your confreres.

Being at the heart of Catholicism in this Church of Rome opens your minds to a more vivid perception of the universality of the People of God and develops your concern for the whole Church.

I thank Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re for his words expressing your sentiments and address a special thought to Archbishop Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, as I greet each one of you and remember your Dioceses.

On the day of Episcopal Ordination, before the imposition of hands, the Church asks the candidate to take on certain commitments which, as well as proclaiming the Gospel faithfully and safeguarding the faith, also include the resolution "to pray for the People of God without ceasing". I would like to reflect with you precisely on the apostolic and pastoral character of the *Bishop's prayer*.

The Evangelist Luke wrote that Jesus Christ chose the Twelve Apostles after spending the whole night on the mountain in prayer (cf. Lk 6: 12); and the Evangelist Mark explained that the Twelve

were chosen "to be with him, and to be sent out" (cf. Mk 3: 14).

Like the Apostles, dear Confreres, we too have been called primarily to be with Christ, to know him more deeply and to share in his mystery of love and his relationship full of trust in the Father. Through intimate personal prayer, the Bishop, just as and more than all the faithful, is called to grow towards God in a filial spirit, learning confidence, trust and faithfulness, Jesus' own attitudes in his relationship with the Father, from Jesus himself.

And the Apostles understood well that prayerful listening and the proclamation of what they had heard were to take priority over the many things to be done, so they decided: "we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6: 4). This apostolic programme is more timely than ever.

In a Bishop's ministry today the organizational aspects are absorbing, the commitments many and the needs always numerous, but the first place in the life of a successor of the Apostles must be kept for God. Especially in this way will we help our faithful.

St Gregory the Great had formerly recommended in his "*Pastoral Rule*" that the Pastor should in a singular way lead all the others in prayer and contemplation (cf. II, 5). This is what tradition was subsequently to formulate in the well-known saying: "*Contemplata aliis tradere*" (cf. St Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 188, art. 6).

In the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, by referring to the account of the biblical episode of Jacob's ladder, I wished to emphasize how it is that precisely through prayer the Pastor becomes sensitive to the needs of others and merciful to all (cf. n. 7).

And I remembered the thought of St Gregory the Great, who held that the Pastor wrapped in contemplation is able to regard the needs of others as his own in prayer: "*per pietatis viscera in se infirmitatem caeterorum transferat*" (cf. *Pastoral Rule*, *ibid.*).

Prayer teaches people to love and opens hearts to pastoral charity in order to welcome all who turn to the Bishop. Modelled from within by the Holy Spirit, the Bishop consoles with the balsam of divine grace, enlightens with the light of the Word and reconciles and edifies in fraternal communion.

Dear Confreres, your priests must have a special place in your prayers so that they may always persevere in their vocation and be faithful to the presbyteral mission entrusted to them.

It is particularly edifying for every priest to know that the Bishop, from whom he has received the gift of the priesthood or who in any case is his father and friend, is close to him in prayer and affection and always ready to receive him, listen to him and encourage him.

Likewise, the entreaty for new vocations must never be absent from the Bishop's prayers. They must be insistently implored from God so that he may call "those whom he desires for the sacred ministry".

May the *munus santificandi* that you have received also involve you in being *animators of prayer in society*. In the cities where you live and work, often chaotic and noisy, where man hurries on and loses himself, where people live as though God did not exist, may you be able to create places and opportunities for prayer, where in silence, in listening to God through *lectio divina*, in personal and communal prayer, man may encounter God and have a living experience of Jesus Christ who reveals the authentic Face of the Father.

Never tire of ensuring that parishes and shrines, places of education and of suffering, but also families, become *places of communion with the Lord*. I would especially like to urge you to make the cathedral an exemplary house of prayer, particularly liturgical prayer, where the diocesan community, reunited with its Bishop, can praise and thank God for the work of salvation and intercede for all people.

St Ignatius of Antioch reminds us of the power of communal prayer: "If the prayer of one or two possesses such power, how much more that of the Bishop and the whole Church!" (*Epistle to the Ephesians*, n. 5).

In brief, beloved Bishops, *be men of prayer!* The "spiritual fruitfulness of the Bishop's ministry depends on the intensity of his union with the Lord. It is from prayer that a Bishop must draw light, strength and comfort in his pastoral activity", as is written in the Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops (*Apostolorum Successores*, n. 36).

In addressing God, for you yourselves and for your faithful, may you have the trust of children, the daring of a friend and the perseverance of Abraham who was tireless in intercession: like Moses, raise your hands to Heaven, while your faithful fight the good fight of faith; like Mary, praise God every day for the salvation that he brings about in the Church and the world, convinced that for God nothing will be impossible (cf. Lk 1: 37).

With these sentiments, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each one of you, to your priests, to the men and women religious, to the seminarians and to the faithful of your Dioceses.

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