



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

TO FRANCE ON THE OCCASION OF THE 150th ANNIVERSARY

OF THE APPARITIONS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AT LOURDES

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INTERVIEW OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI

DURING THE FLIGHT TO FRANCE

Friday, 12 September 2008

Fr Federico Lombardi, S.J., Director of the Holy See Press Office: "France, are you faithful to your Baptismal promises?" John Paul II asked in 1980 during his first trip there. Today, what will your message be to the French? Do you think that, due to secularism, France is losing its Christian identity?

Benedict XVI: It seems to me obvious today that secularism in itself is not in opposition to the faith. I would even say that it is a fruit of the faith because the Christian faith was a universal religion from the very start and consequently could not be identified with any single State; it is present in all States and different in these States. It has always been clear to Christians that religion and faith are not politics but another sphere of human life.... Politics, the State, were not a religion but rather a secular reality with a specific role... and the two must be open to each other. In this regard, I would say that today, for the French, and not only for the French, for us Christians in today's secularized world, it is important to live the freedom of our faith joyfully, to live the beauty of faith and to make visible in the world today that it is beautiful to be a believer, that it is beautiful to know God, God with a human face in Jesus Christ... thus to show that it is possible to be a believer today and even that it is necessary for contemporary society that people exist who know God and can therefore live in accordance with the great values he has given to us and contribute to the presence of values that are fundamental to the construction and survival of our States and our societies.

Fr Federico Lombardi, S.J., Director of the Holy See Press Office: You know and love France... what connects you most particularly to this country? Which are the French authors, secular or Christian, which have made the greatest impression on you or have left you with the most moving memories of France?

Benedict XVI: I would not dare to say that I know France well. I know it a little, but I love France, the great French culture, especially of course the great cathedrals and also the great French art... the great theology that begins with St Irenaeus of Lyons through until the 13th century, and I have studied the 13th century University of Paris: St Bonaventure and St Thomas Aquinas. This theology was crucial for the development of theology in the West.... And naturally the theology of the century of the Second Vatican Council. I had the great honour and joy of being a friend of Fr de Lubac, one of the most important figures of the past century, but I also had a good working relationship with Fr Congar, Jean Daniélou and others. I had very good personal relationships with Etienne Gilson and Henri-Irénée Maroux.

Thus, I truly had very profound, very personal and enriching contact with the great theological and philosophical culture of France. This was truly decisive for the development of my thought. But there was also the rediscovery of the original Gregorian chant with Solesmes, the great monastic culture... and of course great poetry. As a man of the Baroque, I am very partial to Paul Claudel, to his *joie de vivre*, and also to Bernanos and the great French poets of the past century. Thus it is a culture which truly determined my personal, theological, philosophical and human development.

Fr Federico Lombardi, S.J., Director of the Holy See Press Office: What do you say to those who, in France, fear that the "Motu proprio" Summorum Pontificum signals a step backwards from the great insights of the Second Vatican Council? How can you reassure them?

Benedict XVI: Their fear is unfounded, for this "Motu Proprio" is merely an act of tolerance, with a pastoral aim, for those people who were brought up with this liturgy, who love it, are familiar with it and want to live with this liturgy. They form a small group, because this presupposes a schooling in Latin, a training in a certain culture. Yet for these people, to have the love and tolerance to let them live with this liturgy seems to me a normal requirement of the faith and pastoral concern of any Bishop of our Church. There is no opposition between the liturgy renewed by the Second Vatican Council and this liturgy.

On each day [of the Council], the Council Fathers celebrated Mass in accordance with the ancient rite and, at the same time, they conceived of a natural development for the liturgy within the whole of this century, for the liturgy is a living reality that develops but, in its development, retains its identity. Thus, there are certainly different accents, but nevertheless [there remains] a fundamental identity that excludes a contradiction, an opposition between the renewed liturgy and the previous liturgy. In any case, I believe that there is an opportunity for the enrichment of both parties. On the one hand the friends of the old liturgy can and must know the new saints, the new prefaces of the

liturgy, etc.... On the other, the new liturgy places greater emphasis on common participation, but it is not merely an assembly of a certain community, but rather always an act of the universal Church in communion with all believers of all times, and an act of worship. In this sense, it seems to me that there is a mutual enrichment, and it is clear that the renewed liturgy is the ordinary liturgy of our time.

Fr Federico Lombardi, S.J., Director of the Holy See Press Office: What is your frame of mind as you begin your pilgrimage to Lourdes and have you been there before?

Benedict XVI: I was in Lourdes for the International Eucharistic Congress in 1981, after the attack on the Holy Father [John Paul II]. And Cardinal Gantin was the Holy Father's Delegate. It is a very beautiful memory for me.

The day of St Bernadette's Feast is also my birthday. This fact already makes me feel very close to the little Saint, this little girl, young, pure and humble, with whom our Virgin spoke.

To encounter this reality, this presence of the Blessed Virgin in our times, to see the traces of this young girl who was a friend of the Virgin and moreover, to meet the Virgin, her Mother, is a very important event for me. Naturally, we are not going there in search of miracles.

I am going in order to find there the love of our Mother which is the true cure for all illnesses, all sorrows. I go to be in solidarity with all those who are suffering; I go in a sign of love for our Mother. This seems to me a very important sign for our epoch.

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