



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE FRENCH SEMINARY IN ROME

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 6 June 2009*

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Monsignor Rector,
Dear Priests and Seminarians,*

I welcome you with joy on the occasion of the celebrations of these days that mark an important moment in the history of the Pontifical French Seminary in Rome. After a century and a half of faithful service, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, which had been in charge of conducting the Seminary since its foundation, has now handed it over to the Bishops' Conference of France.

We must thank the Lord for the work carried out in this institution where, since it opened, almost 5,000 seminarians or young priests have been trained for their future vocation. In acknowledging the work of the members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, Fathers and Brothers, I would like to entrust to the Lord in particular the apostolates which the Congregation founded by Venerable Fr Libermann preserves and develops across the world and most especially in Africa based on his charism which has lost none of its power and justice. May the Lord bless the Congregation and its missions.

The task of forming priests is a delicate mission. The formation offered by the Seminary is demanding, because a portion of the People of God will be entrusted to the pastoral solicitude of the future priests, the People that Christ saved and for whom he gave his life. It is right for seminarians to remember that if the Church demands much of them it is because they are to care for those whom Christ ransomed at such a high price. Many qualities are required of future priests: human maturity, spiritual qualities, apostolic zeal, intellectual rigour.... To achieve these virtues,

candidates to the priesthood must not only be able to witness to them to their formation teachers but even more, they must be the first to benefit from these same qualities lived and shared by those who are in charge of helping them to attain maturity. It is a law of our humanity and our faith that we are all too often capable of giving only what we ourselves have previously received from God through the ecclesial and human mediation that he has established. Those who are placed in charge of discernment and formation must remember that the hope they have for others is in the first place a duty for themselves.

This passing on of witnessing coincides with the beginning of the *Year for Priests*. This coincidence is a grace for the new team of priest-formation teachers gathered by the Bishops' Conference of France. While the team receives its mission, like the whole Church, it is given the possibility to examine more deeply the identity of the priest, a mystery of grace and mercy. I would like to mention here the eminent figure of Cardinal Suhard, who said of Christ's ministers: "Eternal paradox of the priest. He bears within him those who are contrary. He reconciles, at the price of his life, fidelity to God with fidelity to man. He seems poor and feeble.... He has neither political power nor financial means, nor the force of arms that others use to conquer the earth. His strength lies in being unarmed and being "able to do all things in the One who gives him strength" (Fulget *Ecclesia*, n. 141, p. 21, 14 December 1960). May these words that so vividly evoke the figure of the Holy Curé d'Ars ring out as a vocational appeal to numerous young Christians in France who desire a useful and fruitful life in order to serve God's love.

The particular characteristic of the French Seminary is its location in the city of Peter; echoing the desire of Paul VI (cf. *Address to the Alumni of the French Pontifical Seminary*, 12 September 1968; ORE, 26 September 1968), I hope that during their stay in Rome the seminarians will give priority to becoming acquainted with the Church's history in order to discover the breadth of her catholicity and her living unity around the Successor of Peter, and that love of the Church will thus be rooted in their hearts for ever.

As I invoke upon you all the Lord's abundant graces through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Clare and Blessed Pius IX, I very warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to all of you and to your families, to the former seminarians who have been unable to come here and to all the Seminary's lay personnel.

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