



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY
OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL "COR UNUM"**

Consistory Hall

Friday, 13 November 2009

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to greet each one of you, Members, Consultors and Officials of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum", gathered here for the Plenary Assembly during which the theme "*Formative paths for Charity Workers*" is being discussed. I greet Cardinal Paul Josef Cordes, President of the Dicastery, and thank him for his courteous words to me also on your behalf. I express to all my appreciation for the invaluable service you offer to the Church's charitable activity. My thoughts are addressed in a special way to the numerous faithful who, in various capacities and in every part of the world, give their time and their energy, with generosity and dedication, to witnessing to the love of Christ, the Good Samaritan, who bends over the needy in body and in spirit. For, as I emphasized in my Encyclical *Deus caritas est*: "The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), of celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and of exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*)" (cf. n. 25, a), charity is part of the Church's very being.

Working in this sphere of ecclesial life, you carry out a mission that is in constant tension between two poles: the proclamation of the Gospel with concern for human hearts and the environment in which human beings live. This year two special ecclesial events have highlighted this aspect: the publication of the Encyclical *Caritas in veritate* and the celebration of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops on reconciliation, justice and peace. In different but converging perspectives, these events have emphasized how in her salvific proclamation the Church may not

ignore the practical aspects of the life of the men and women to whom she is sent. The action to improve them concerns her own life and mission, for Christ's salvation is integral and concerns the human being in all his dimensions: physical, spiritual, social and cultural, earthly and heavenly. It is precisely from this awareness that many works and ecclesial structures came into being down the centuries whose aim was the promotion of people and peoples which made and continue to make an irreplaceable contribution to the growth and the harmonious and integral development of the human being. As I reaffirmed in the Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, "Testimony to Christ's charity, through works of justice, peace and development, is part and parcel of evangelization, because Jesus Christ, who loves us, is concerned with the whole person" (n. 15).

The Church's commitment to the development of a more just society in which all the rights of the individual and of peoples are respected should be considered in this light (cf. n. 6). In this regard many of the lay faithful carry out useful activities in the economic, social, legislative and cultural fields, and promote the common good. They witness to the Gospel, helping to build a just order in society and participating personally in public life (cf. *Deus caritas est*, n. 28). Of course, it is not incumbent upon the Church to intervene directly in the affairs of States or in the construction of a just political framework (cf. *ibid.*). The Church by proclaiming the Gospel opens the human heart to God and to neighbour and awakens the conscience. Through the power of her proclamation she defends true human rights and works for justice. Faith is a spiritual force that purifies reason in the quest for a just order, freeing it from the ever present risk of being "dazzled" by selfishness, personal interest and power. Truly, as experience shows, *caritas* remains necessary even in the most advanced societies from the social viewpoint: the service of *love* never becomes superfluous not only because the human soul, material things apart, always needs love, but because situations of suffering, loneliness and need endure and demand personal dedication and practical assistance. When the Church offers human beings loving attention, she feels pulsating within her the fullness of love inspired by the Holy Spirit who, while he helps human beings to free themselves from material oppression, assures the soul refreshment and support and frees it from the evils afflicting it. The source of his love is God himself, infinite mercy and eternal love. Therefore anyone who serves within the ecclesial bodies that manage charitable initiatives and structures, cannot but have this principal aim: to make the merciful Face of the Heavenly Father known and felt for in the heart of God-Love lies the true response to the deepest expectations of every human heart.

How necessary it is for Christians to keep their gaze fixed on Christ's Face! In him alone, fully God and fully man, we may contemplate the Father (cf. Jn 14: 9) and experience his infinite mercy! Christians know that they are called to serve and love the world, even without being "of the world" (cf. Jn 15: 19); to bring a word of integral salvation to man who cannot withdraw into the earthly horizon; to remain like Christ totally faithful to the Father's will even to the supreme gift of themselves, in order to perceive more easily the need for true love that exists in every heart. This is the path that anyone who wishes to witness to Christ's charity must take if he/she wishes to follow the logic of the Gospel.

Dear friends, it is important that the Church, placed among the events of history and human beings lives, make herself the channel of God's kindness and love. May this be so for you and for all who work in the vast sphere with which your Pontifical Council is concerned! With this hope, I invoke the motherly intercession of Mary upon your work and, as I renew my thanks for your presence and for the work you carry out, I very willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing to each one of you and to your families.

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