



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO BISHOPS ORDAINED DURING THE PAST YEAR
WHO HAD BEEN TAKING PART IN A CONGRESS
ORGANIZED JOINTLY BY THE CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS
AND THE CONGREGATION FOR THE EASTERN CHURCHES**

*Hall of the Swiss, Papal Summer Residence of Castel Gandolfo
Monday, 21 September 2009*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I cordially thank you for your visit on the occasion of the Congress organized for the Bishops who have only recently taken on their pastoral ministry. These days of reflection, prayer and updating are truly useful to you, dear Brothers, and will help you familiarize yourselves better with the tasks you are called to carry out as the Pastors of diocesan communities; they are also days of friendly coexistence that provide a special experience of that "*collegialitas affectiva*" that unites all Bishops in one apostolic body, together with the Successor of Peter, "the perpetual and visible source and foundation of... unity" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 23).

I thank Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, Prefect of the [Congregation for Bishops](#), for his courteous words on your behalf; I greet Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the [Congregation for the Eastern Churches](#), Cardinal Pell, Archbishop of Sydney, and I express my gratitude to all who, in their various capacities, collaborate in the organization of this annual meeting.

This year, as Cardinal Re has mentioned, your Congress fits into the context of the [Year for Priests](#), inaugurated in honour of the 150th anniversary of the death of St John Mary Vianney. As I wrote in the Letter I addressed to all priests for the occasion, this special Year is "meant to deepen the commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a more forceful and incisive witness to the Gospel in today's world" (*Letter to Priests for the inauguration of the Year for Priests*, 16 June 2009). For every priest, imitation of the Good Shepherd is the obligatory way to

his own sanctification and the essential condition for exercising the pastoral ministry responsibly. If this applies for priests, it applies especially for us, dear Brother Bishops. Indeed, it is important not to forget that one of the Bishop's essential tasks is, precisely, to help priests - by his example and his brotherly support - to follow their vocation faithfully and to work with enthusiasm and love in the Lord's vineyard.

In this regard, in his Post-Synodal Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, my venerable Predecessor John Paul II pointed out that the action of the priest who places his hands in the hands of the Bishop on the day of his priestly ordination commits them both: the priest and the Bishop. The new priest chooses to entrust himself to the Bishop and the Bishop, for his part, obliges himself to look after those hands (cf. n. 47). At a close look, this is a solemn task which, for the Bishop, takes the form of paternal responsibility in safeguarding and fostering the priestly identity of those presbyters entrusted to his pastoral care. Today, unfortunately, we see this identity severely tried by the spreading secularization. Therefore, *Pastores Gregis* continues, "the Bishop will always strive to relate to his priests as a father and brother who loves them, listens to them, welcomes them, corrects them, supports them, seeks their cooperation and, as much as possible, is concerned for their human spiritual, ministerial and financial well-being" (*ibid.*, n. 47).

The Bishop is called in a special way to nurture spiritual life in his priests so as to foster in them harmony between prayer and the apostolate, looking at Jesus' example and that of the Apostles whom Jesus called first of all, as St Mark tells us, "to be with him" (Mk 3: 14). Indeed, an indispensable condition for producing fruits of good is that the priest remain united with the Lord; herein lies the secret of his ministry's fruitfulness: only if he is incorporated into Christ, the true Vine, does he bear fruit. Today a priest's mission and even more so that of a Bishop, entails a mountain of work that tends to absorb him continuously and totally. Difficulties increase and his duties multiply, partly because he is faced by new situations and greater pastoral demands. Yet, attention to every day problems and initiatives that aim to lead people on God's path must never distract us from intimate and personal union with Christ. Being available to people must not diminish or cloud our availability to the Lord. The time that priests and Bishops dedicate to God in prayer is always well spent, because prayer is the soul of pastoral activity, the "sap" that imbues them with strength, it is support in moments of uncertainty and discouragement and is the inexhaustible source of missionary zeal and brotherly love for all.

At the heart of priestly life is the Eucharist. In my Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* I stressed that "Mass is formative in the deepest sense of the word, since it fosters the priest's configuration to Christ and strengthens him in his vocation" (n. 80). May the Eucharistic celebration therefore illumine the whole of your day and that of your priests, impressing its grace and its spiritual influence upon the sad and joyous, disturbed and restful moments, the moments of action and moments of contemplation. An advantageous way of extending the mysterious sanctifying action of the Eucharist throughout the day is the devout recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, as well as Eucharistic Adoration, *lectio divina* and the contemplative prayer of the Rosary.

The Holy Curé d'Ars teaches us how valuable are the priest's identification of himself with the Eucharistic sacrifice and the education of the faithful in the Eucharistic presence and in communion. As I recalled in the Letter to Priests, thanks to the word and to the sacraments of Jesus, St John Mary Vianney built up his flock (cf. *Letter to Priests for the Inauguration of the Year for Priests*, 16 June 2009). When the Saint was appointed parish priest of Ars, the Vicar General of the Diocese of Belley said to him: "There is little love of God in that parish; you will be the one to put it there" (*ibid.*). And that parish was transformed.

Dear new Bishops, thank you for the service you are rendering to the Church with dedication and love. I greet you with affection and assure you of my constant support, united with my prayers that you may "go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (Jn 15: 16). For this reason I invoke the intercession of Mary *Regina Apostolorum*, and I wholeheartedly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to your priests and to your diocesan communities.

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