



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO RECENTLY APPOINTED BISHOPS WHO TOOK PART
IN THE ANNUAL COURSE ORGANIZED BY THE
CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS AND FOR THE EASTERN CHURCHES**

Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo

Thursday, 15 September 2011

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

As Cardinal Ouellet mentioned, for 10 years now the recently appointed Bishops have gathered in Rome to make a pilgrimage to the Tomb of St Peter and to reflect on the main commitments of the episcopal ministry. This meeting, organized by the Congregation for Bishops and the Congregation for Eastern Churches, fits into the project for permanent formation desired by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, n. 24. Shortly after your episcopal consecration, you too are thus invited to renew the profession of your faith at the Tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, and your trusting adherence to Jesus Christ with the impetus of love of this same Apostle, intensifying your bonds of communion with the Successor of Peter and with your brother bishops.

This inner aspect of the initiative is combined with a powerful experience of affective collegiality. The bishop, as you well know, is not a man on his own but is integrated into that *corpus episcoporum* [body of bishops] which is handed down from the apostolic stock to our day, back to Jesus, "Pastor and Bishop of our souls" (Roman Missal, *Preface after the Ascension*). May the episcopal brotherhood that you are experiencing in these days imbue the daily feeling and acting of your service, helping you always to work in communion with the Pope and with your brothers in the episcopate, ever seeking to cultivate friendship with them and with your priests.

In this spirit of communion and friendship I welcome you with deep affection, Bishops of the Latin Rite and of the Eastern Rite, greeting in each one of you the Churches entrusted to your pastoral care, with a special thought for those experiencing suffering, especially in the Middle East. I thank

Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, for his words on your behalf and for the book, as well as Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches.

The annual meeting with the bishops appointed during the year has given me the opportunity to emphasize several aspects of the episcopal ministry. Today I would like to reflect briefly with you on the importance of the acceptance on the part of the bishop of the charisms that the Spirit calls into being for the edification of the Church. Episcopal consecration has conferred upon you the fullness of the sacrament of Orders which, in the ecclesial community, is placed at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful, of their spiritual growth and of their holiness.

The purpose and mission of ministerial priesthood, in fact, as you know, is to enliven the priesthood of the faithful, who, by virtue of Baptism, share in their own way in the one priesthood of Christ, as the Conciliar Constitution *Lumen Gentium* says: “The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ” (n. 10). For this reason it is the task of bishops to watch over the baptized and work to enable them to develop in grace and in accordance with the charisms that the Holy Spirit awakens in their hearts and in their communities. The Second Vatican Council recalled that while the Holy Spirit unifies “the Church in communion and in the works of ministry, he bestows upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts... and adorns her with his fruits” (cf. *ibid.*, n. 4).

The recent World Youth Day in Madrid has shown once again the fruitfulness of the wealth of charisms in the Church in this very time, and the ecclesial unity of all the faithful gathered around the Pope and the Bishops. It is a vitality that reinforces the work of evangelization and the Church’s presence in the world. And we see, we can almost feel tangibly, that the Holy Spirit is also present in the Church today, creating charisms and creating unity.

The fundamental gift that you are called to nurture in the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care is first and foremost that of divine filiation, which is the participation of each person in Trinitarian communion. The essential is that we truly become sons and daughters in the Son. Baptism which makes human beings “sons in the Son” and members of the Church, is the root and source of all the other charismatic gifts. With your ministry of sanctification you teach the faithful to participate ever more intensely in the prophetic and royal office of Christ, helping them to build the Church in accordance with the gifts received from God, in an active and co-responsible way. In fact, we must always bear in mind that the gifts of the Spirit, whether they are extraordinary or simple and humble, are always given freely for the edification of all. The Bishop, as a visible sign of the unity of his particular Church (cf. *ibid.*, n. 23), has the task of unifying and harmonizing charismatic diversity in the unity of the Church, encouraging reciprocity between the hierarchical priesthood and the baptismal priesthood.

Therefore accept charisms with gratitude for the sanctification of the Church and the vitality of the apostolate! And this welcome and gratitude to the Holy Spirit, who is also active among us today, are inseparable from *discernment*, which is proper to the bishop's mission, as was reasserted by the Second Vatican Council which entrusted to the pastoral ministry the judgement of the genuineness and proper use of these gifts, not to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and to hold fast to what is good (cf. *ibid.* n. 12). This seems to me important: on the one hand not to extinguish, but on the other to distinguish, to test and to hold fast through examination.

For this reason it must always be clear that no charism dispenses with reference and submission to the pastors of the Church (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, n. 24). By receiving, judging and testing the various gifts and charisms the bishop renders a great and precious service to the priesthood of the faithful and to the vitality of the Church, which will shine out as the Bride of the Lord, clothed in the holiness of her children.

This articulated and delicate ministry demands that the bishop nurture his own spiritual life with care. Only in this way does the gift of discernment develop. As the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* affirms, the bishop becomes a "father" for the very reason that he is fully a "son" of the Church (n. 10). On the other hand, by virtue of the fullness of the sacrament of Orders, he is a teacher, sanctifier and pastor, who acts in the name and in the Person of Christ. These two inseparable aspects call him to grow as a son and as a pastor in the following of Christ, so that his personal holiness will express the objective holiness received with episcopal consecration, since the objective holiness of the sacrament and the personal holiness of the bishop go hand in hand.

I therefore urge you, dear brothers, always to remain in the presence of the Good Shepherd and to assimilate his sentiments and his human and priestly virtues increasingly, through personal prayer which must accompany the apostolic challenges of your days. In intimacy with the Lord you will find comfort and support for your demanding ministry. Do not be afraid to entrust your every concern to the Heart of Jesus Christ, certain that he takes care of you, as the Apostle Peter already recommended (cf. 1 Pt 5:6). Let prayer always be nourished by meditation on the word of God, by personal study, by recollection and by sufficient rest so that you may serenely be able to listen and understand "what the Spirit says to the Churches" (Rev 2:11), and to lead all to the unity of faith and love. With the holiness of your life and pastoral charity may you be an example and a help to priests, your first and indispensable collaborators. Let it be your concern to make them develop in coresponsibility as wise guides of the faithful, who are called with you to build the community with their gifts, their charisms and the testimony of their life, so that in the unanimity of communion the Church may bear witness to Jesus Christ, so that the world may believe. And this closeness to priests, this very day, with all the problems, is of very great importance.

As I entrust your ministry to Mary, Mother of the Church, who shines before the People of God, full of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I impart with affection to each one of you, to your dioceses and particularly to your priests, the Apostolic Blessing. Many thanks.

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