



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO RECENTLY APPOINTED BISHOPS OF MISSION COUNTRIES
TAKING PART IN THE FORMATION COURSE ORGANIZED BY THE
CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES**

Hall of the Swiss, Papal Residence of Castel Gandolfo

Friday, 7 September 2012

Dear Brothers,

I am pleased to meet with you, gathered in Rome for the formation course for recently appointed bishops, sponsored by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. I cordially greet Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Dicastery, and thank him for his courteous words to me, also on your behalf. I greet Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai and Archbishop Protase Rugambwa, Secretary and Adjunct Secretary of the Congregation; I express my gratitude to them and to all who contribute to the success of the Seminar. This course is taking place as the Year of Faith approaches, a precious gift from the Lord to his Church to help the baptized become aware of their faith and to communicate it to all who have not yet experienced its beauty.

The communities of which you are pastors in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania, although in different situations, are all engaged in the first evangelization and in the work of consolidating the faith. You perceive their joys and hopes, as well as their wounds and anxieties, like the Apostle Paul who wrote: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col 1:24). And he added: "for this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me" (v. 29). May you always have in your heart steadfast trust in the Lord. The Church belongs to him and it is he who guides her in both difficult and peaceful times. Your communities are almost all recent foundations and demonstrate the advantages and disadvantages deriving from their brief history. They show a shared and joyful faith, lively and creative but one that is often not yet firmly rooted. Enthusiasm and apostolic zeal alternate in them, with moments of instability and incoherence. Friction and

neglect surface here and there.

However, they are Churches which are maturing not only thanks to pastoral action but also thanks to the gift of that *communio sanctorum* which permits a true and proper osmosis of grace between the Churches of ancient tradition and those of recent foundation, and first and foremost, between the heavenly Church and the pilgrim Church on earth. For some time now a decrease in the number of missionaries has been recorded. Nevertheless, it is balanced by an increase in the number of diocesan and religious clergy. The numerical growth of indigenous priests also produces a new form of missionary cooperation: some young Churches have started to send their priests to Sister Churches which are short of clergy in the same country or in other nations on the same continent; this communion must always enliven evangelizing action.

The young Churches are consequently a sign of hope for the future of the universal Church. In this context, dear Brothers, I encourage you to spare no effort, and to be courageous in your diligent pastoral work, mindful of the gift of grace that was sown within you at your episcopal ordination and which can be summed up in the *tria munera* of teaching, sanctifying and governing. Have at heart the *missio ad gentes*, inculturation of the faith, the formation of candidates to the priesthood, the care of the diocesan clergy, of men and women religious and of lay people. The Church is born from the mission and grows with the mission. Make your own the inner call of the Apostle to the Gentiles: “*Caritas Christi urget nos*” (2 Cor 5:14). May a correct inculturation of the faith help you to embody the Gospel in the cultures of peoples and to value the good that is alive within them. This is a lengthy and difficult process that must in no way jeopardize the specificity and integrity of the Christian faith (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 52). The mission needs Pastors configured to Christ for holiness of life, prudent and far-sighted, ready to expend themselves generously for the Gospel and to carry in their hearts concern for all the Churches.

Watch over your flock, paying special attention to priests. Guide them by your example, live in communion with them, be available to listen to them and to welcome them with fatherly kindness, making the most of their different abilities. Strive to provide your priests with specific and regular formation meetings. Ensure that the Eucharist is always at the heart of their existence and the *raison d'être* of their ministry. Look at today's world with a gaze of faith to understand it in depth, and with a generous heart, ready to enter into communion with the women and men of our time. Do not fail in your first responsibility as men of God, called to prayer and to the service of his Word for the benefit of your flock. May what the priest Onias said of Jeremiah also be said of you: “This is a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people and the holy city” (2 Mac 15:14). Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, Shepherd of shepherds: the world today needs people who speak to God, so as to be able to speak of God. Only in this way will the word of salvation bear fruit (cf. *Discourse to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization*, 15 October 2011).

Dear Brothers, your Churches are familiar with the context of social instability that has disturbing effects on people's daily life. Food, health and educational emergencies call the ecclesial

communities into question and involve them directly. Indeed, their attention and their work are appreciated and praised. In addition to natural disasters are cultural and religious discrimination, intolerance and factiousness, the result of forms of fundamentalism that reveal an erroneous vision of man and lead to undervaluing, if not actually rejecting, the right to religious freedom, respect for the weakest, especially children, women and those with disabilities. Lastly, recurrent contrasts between ethnic groups and castes lead to unjustifiable episodes of violence. Put your trust in the Gospel, in its power for renewal, in its ability to reawaken consciences and to bring about the redemption of people and the creation of a new brotherhood from within. The dissemination of the Lord's word makes the gift of reconciliation flourish and encourages the unity of peoples.

In the Message for the next World Mission Day I wished to recall that faith is a gift to be received in our hearts and in our lives, and for which we should always thank the Lord. But faith is given to us to be shared; it is a talent granted so that it may bear fruit; it is a light that must never be hidden. It is the most important gift which has been made to us in our lives: we cannot keep it to ourselves! "All people... have a right to know the value of this gift and to approach it freely", John Paul II says in the Encyclical Redemptoris Missio (n. 11). The Servant of God Paul VI reaffirming the priority of evangelization said: "men can gain salvation also in other ways, by God's mercy, even though we do not preach the Gospel to them; but as for us, can we gain salvation if through negligence or fear or shame or as a result of false ideas we fail to preach it?" (Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi, n. 80). This question echoes again in our heart as an appeal to understand the absolute priority of the task of evangelization.

Dear Brothers, I entrust you and your communities to Mary Most Holy, the first disciple of the Lord and the first evangelizer, having given to the world the Word of God made flesh. May She, the Star of Evangelization always guide your steps. In confirmation of this I impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.