



The Holy See

LENTEN MEETING WITH THE CLERGY OF ROME

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Hall of Blessings

Thursday, 22 February 2007

*The first question was addressed to the Holy Father by **Mons. Pasquale Silla**, Rector at the Shrine of Santa Maria del Divino Amore at Castel di Leva, not far from Rome. Mons. Silla recalled Benedict XVI's Visit to the Shrine on 1 May 2006 and his request to the parish community for powerful prayer for the Bishop of Rome and his collaborators, as well as for the priests and faithful of the Diocese. In response to this request, the community of Our Lady of Divine Love attempted to give the best possible quality to prayer in all its forms, especially liturgical prayer: one of the results of this commitment is the Perpetual Adoration of the Eucharist that will begin at the Shrine on 25 March. In the field of charity, the Shrine is concentrating on broadening its outreach, especially in the area of welfare for minors, families and the elderly. In this perspective, Mons. Silla asked Pope Benedict XVI for practical instructions to enable the Shrine to play an increasingly effective role in the Diocese.*

Pope Benedict XVI: I would like first of all to say that I am glad and happy to feel here that I am truly the Bishop of a large Diocese. The Cardinal Vicar said that you are expecting light and comfort. And I must say that to see so many priests of all generations is light and comfort to me. Above all, I have already learned something from the first question, and to my mind this is another essential element of our Meeting. Here I can hear the actual living voices of parish priests and their pastoral experiences; thus, above all I can learn about your concrete situation, your queries, your experiences and your difficulties, and live them not only in the abstract but in authentic dialogue with real parish life.

I now come to the first question. It seems to me, basically, that you have also supplied the answer as to what this Shrine can do.... I know that this Marian Shrine is the one best loved by the people

of Rome. During the several Visits I paid to the ancient Shrine, I also felt the age-old devotion. One senses the presence of the prayer of generations and one can almost tangibly feel Our Lady's motherly presence.

In the encounter with Mary, it is truly possible to experience an encounter with the centuries-old Marian devotion as well as with the desires, needs, sufferings and joys of the generations. Thus, this Shrine, visited by people with their hopes, questions, requests and sufferings, is an essential factor for the Diocese of Rome.

We are seeing more and more that Shrines are a source of life and faith in the universal Church, hence, also in the Church of Rome. In my Country, I had the experience of making pilgrimages on foot to our national Shrine of Altötting. It is an important popular mission.

Young people in particular go there. As pilgrims walking for three days, they experience the atmosphere of prayer and an examination of conscience and rediscover, as it were, their Christian awareness of the faith. These three days of pilgrimage on foot are days of confession and prayer, they are a true journey towards Our Lady, towards the family of God and also towards the Eucharist.

Pilgrims go on foot to Our Lady, and with Our Lady they go to the Lord, to the Eucharistic encounter, preparing themselves for interior renewal with confession. They live anew the Eucharistic reality of the Lord who gives himself, just as Our Lady gave her own flesh to the Lord, thereby opening the door to the Incarnation.

Our Lady gave her flesh for the Incarnation and thereby made possible the Eucharist, where we receive the Flesh that is Bread for the world. In going to the encounter with Our Lady, young people themselves learn to offer their own flesh, their daily life, so that it may be given over to the Lord. And they learn to believe and little by little to say "yes" to the Lord.

I would therefore say, to return to the question, that the Shrine as such, as a place of prayer, confession and the celebration of the Eucharist, provides a great service in the Church today for the Diocese of Rome. I therefore think that the essential service, of which, moreover, you have spoken in practical terms, is precisely that of providing a place of prayer, of sacramental life and of a life of practised charity.

If I have understood correctly, you spoke of four dimensions of prayer. The first is personal. And here Mary shows us the way. St Luke says twice that the Virgin Mary "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (2: 19; cf. 2: 51). She was a person in conversation with God, with the Word of God and also with the events through which God spoke to her.

The *Magnificat* is a "fabric" woven of words from Sacred Scripture. It shows us how Mary lived in a

permanent conversation with the Word of God, and thus, with God himself. Then of course, in life with the Lord, she was also always in conversation with Christ, with the Son of God and with the Trinitarian God. Therefore, let us learn from Mary and speak personally with the Lord, pondering and preserving God's words in our lives and hearts so that they may become true food for each one of us. Thus, Mary guides us at a school of prayer in personal and profound contact with God. The second dimension you mentioned is liturgical prayer. In the Liturgy, the Lord teaches us to pray, first of all giving us his Word, then introducing us through the Eucharistic Prayer to communion with the mystery of his life, the Cross and the Resurrection.

St Paul once said we do not even know what to ask for: "we do not know how to pray as we ought" (Rom 8: 26); we do not know how to pray or what to say to God. God, therefore, has given us words of prayer in the Psalter, in the important prayers of the Sacred Liturgy, and precisely in the Eucharistic liturgy itself. Here, he teaches us how to pray.

We enter into the prayer that was formed down the centuries under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and we join in Christ's conversation with the Father. Thus, the Liturgy, above all, is prayer: first listening and then a response, in the Responsorial Psalm, in the prayer of the Church and in the great Eucharistic Prayer. We celebrate it well if we celebrate it with a "prayerful" attitude, uniting ourselves with the Mystery of Christ and his exchange as Son with the Father.

If we celebrate the Eucharist in this way, first as listening and then as a response, hence, as prayer, using the words pointed out to us by the Holy Spirit, then we are celebrating it well. And through our prayer in common, people are attracted to joining the ranks of God's children.

The third dimension is that of popular piety. An important Document of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments speaks of this popular piety and tells us how to "guide it". Popular piety is one of our strengths because it consists of prayers deeply rooted in people's hearts. These prayers even move the hearts of people who are somewhat cut off from the life of the Church and who have no special understanding of faith.

All that is required is to "illuminate" these actions and "purify" this tradition so that it may become part of the life of the Church today.

Then comes Eucharistic Adoration. I am very grateful because Eucharistic Adoration is being increasingly renewed. During the Synod on the Eucharist, the Bishops talked a great deal about their experiences, of how new life is being restored to communities with this adoration, and also with nocturnal adoration, and how, precisely in this way, new vocations are also born.

I can say that I will shortly be signing the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist, which will then be available to the Church. It is a Document offered precisely for meditation. It will be a help in the liturgical celebration as well as in personal reflection, in the preparation of homilies

and in the celebration of the Eucharist. And it will also serve to guide, enlighten and revitalize popular piety.

Lastly, you spoke to us of the Shrine as a place of *caritas*. I think this is very logical and necessary. A little while ago I read what St Augustine said in Book X of his *Confessions*: "I was tempted and I now understand that it was a temptation to enclose myself in contemplative life, to seek solitude with you, O Lord; but you prevented me, you plucked me from it and made me listen to St Paul's words: "Christ died for us all. Consequently, we must die with Christ and live for all'. I understood that I cannot shut myself up in contemplation; you died for us all. Therefore, with you, I must live for all and thus practise works of charity. True contemplation is expressed in works of charity. Therefore, the sign for which we have truly prayed, that we have experienced in the encounter with Christ, is that we exist "for others".

This is what a parish priest must be like. And St Augustine was a great parish priest. He said: "In my life I also always longed to spend my life listening to the Word in meditation, but now - day after day, hour after hour - I must stand at the door where the bell is always ringing, I must comfort the afflicted, help the poor, reprimand those who are quarrelsome, create peace and so forth".

St Augustine lists all the tasks of a parish priest, for at that time the Bishop was also what the *Kadi* in Islamic countries is today. With regard to problems of civil law, let us say, he was the judge of peace: he had to encourage peace between the litigants. He therefore lived a life that for him, a contemplative, was very difficult. But he understood this truth: thus, I am with Christ; in existing "for others", I am in the Crucified and Risen Lord.

I think this is a great consolation for parish priests and Bishops. Even if little time is left for contemplation, in being "for others", we are with the Lord.

You spoke of other concrete elements of charity that are very important. They are also a sign for our society, in particular for children, for the elderly, for the suffering. I therefore believe that with these four dimensions of life he has given us the answer to your question: What should we do at our Shrine?

Fr Maurizio Secondo Mirilli, Parochial Vicar of Santa Bernadette Soubirous Parish and head of the Diocesan Youth Programme, emphasized the demanding task incumbent on priests in their mission to instil faith in the new generations. Fr Mirilli asked the Pope for a word of guidance on how to transmit the joy of the Christian faith to youth, especially in the face of today's cultural challenges, and also asked him to point out the priority topics on which to focus in order to help young men and women to encounter Christ in practice.

Pope Benedict XVI: Thank you for your work for teenagers. We know that the young really must be a priority of our pastoral work because they dwell in a world far from God. And in our cultural context it is not easy to encounter Christ, the Christian life and the faith life.

Young people require so much guidance if they are truly to find this path. I would say - even if I unfortunately live rather far away from them and so cannot provide very practical instructions - that the first element is, precisely and above all, guidance. They must realize that living the faith in our time is possible, that it is not a question of something obsolete but rather, that it is possible to live as Christians today and so to find true goodness.

I remember an autobiographical detail in St Cyprian's writings. "I lived in this world of ours", he says, "totally cut off from God because the divinities were dead and God was not visible. And in seeing Christians I thought: it is an impossible life, this cannot be done in our world! Then, however, meeting some of them, joining their company and letting myself be guided in the catechumenate, in this process of conversion to God, I gradually understood: it is possible! And now I am happy at having found life. I have realized that the other was not life, and to tell the truth", he confesses, "even beforehand, I knew that that was not true life".

It seems to me to be very important that the young find people - both of their own age and older - in whom they can see that Christian life today is possible, and also reasonable and feasible. I believe there are doubts about both these elements: about its feasibility, because the other paths are very distant from the Christian way of life, and about its reasonableness, because at first glance it seems that science is telling us quite different things and that it is therefore impossible to mark out a reasonable route towards faith in order to show that it is something attuned to our time and our reason.

Thus, the first point is experience, which also opens the door to knowledge. In this regard, the "catechumenate" lived in a new way - that is, as a common journey through life, a common experience of the possibility of living in this way - is of paramount importance.

Only if there is a certain experience can one also understand. I remember a piece of advice that Pascal gave to a non-believer friend. He told him: "Try to do what a believer does, then you will see from this experience that it is all logical and true".

I would say that one important aspect is being shown to us at this very moment by Lent. We cannot conceive of immediately living a life that is 100 percent Christian without doubts and without sins. We have to recognize that we are journeying on, that we must and can learn, and also, gradually, that we must convert. Of course, fundamental conversion is a definitive act. But true conversion is an act of life that is achieved through the patience of a lifetime. It is an act in which we must not lose trust and courage on the way.

We must recognize exactly this: we cannot make ourselves perfect Christians from one moment to the next. Yet, it is worth going ahead, being true to the fundamental option, so to speak, then firmly persevering in a process of conversion that sometimes becomes difficult.

Indeed, it can happen that I feel discouraged so that I am in a state of crisis and want to give up everything instantly. We should not allow ourselves to give up immediately, but should take heart and start again. The Lord guides me, the Lord is generous and with his forgiveness I make headway, also becoming generous to others. Thus, we truly learn love for our neighbour and Christian life, which implies this perseverance in forging ahead.

As for the important topics, I would say that it is important to know God. The subject "God" is essential. St Paul says in his Letter to the Ephesians: "Remember that you were at that time... having no hope and without God.... But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near" (Eph 2: 12-13). Thus, life has a meaning that guides me even through difficulties.

It is therefore necessary to return to God the Creator, to the God who is creative reason, and then to find Christ, who is the living Face of God. Let us say that here there is a reciprocity. On the one hand, we have the encounter with Jesus, with this human, historical and real figure; little by little, he helps me to become acquainted with God; and on the other, knowing God helps me understand the grandeur of Christ's Mystery which is the Face of God.

Only if we manage to grasp that Jesus is not a great prophet or a world religious figure but that he is the Face of God, that he is God, have we discovered Christ's greatness and found out who God is. God is not only a distant shadow, the "primary Cause", but he has a Face. His is the Face of mercy, the Face of pardon and love, the Face of the encounter with us. As a result, these two topics penetrate each other and must always go together.

Then of course, we have to realize that the Church is our vital travelling companion on our journey. In her, the Word of God lives on and Christ is not only a figure of the past but is present. We must therefore rediscover sacramental life, sacramental forgiveness, the Eucharist and Baptism as a new birth.

On the Easter Vigil, in his last mystagogical Catechesis, St Ambrose said: "Until now we have spoken of moral topics; it is now time to speak of the Mystery". He offered guidance in moral experience, in the light of God of course, but which then opens to the Mystery. I believe that today these two things must penetrate each other: a journey with Jesus who increasingly unfolds the depths of his Mystery. Thus, one learns to live as a Christian, one learns the importance of forgiveness and the greatness of the Lord who gives himself to us in the Eucharist.

On this journey, we are naturally accompanied by the saints. Despite their many problems, they lived and were true and living "interpretations" of Sacred Scripture. Each person has his saint from

whom he can best learn what living as a Christian means. There are the saints of our time in particular, and of course there is always Mary, who remains the Mother of the Word. Rediscovering Mary helps us to make progress as Christians and to come to know the Son.

Fr Franco Incampo, Rector of the Church of Santa Lucia del Gonfalone, presented his experience of the integral interpretation of the Bible, on which his Community has embarked together with the Waldensian Church. "We have set ourselves to listen to the Word", he said. "It is an extensive project. What is the value of the Word in the Ecclesial Community? Why are we so unfamiliar with the Bible? How can we further knowledge of the Bible so that the Word will also train the community to have an ecumenical approach?"

Pope Benedict XVI: You certainly have a more practical experience of how to do this. I can say in the first place that we will soon be celebrating the Synod on the Word of God. I have already been able to look at the *Lineamenta* worked out by the Synod Council and I think that the various dimensions of the Word's presence in the Church appear clearly in it.

The Bible as a whole is of course enormous; it must be discovered little by little, for if we take the individual parts on their own, it is often hard to understand that this is the Word of God: I am thinking of certain sections of the Book of Kings with the Chronicles, with the extermination of the peoples who lived in the Holy Land. Many other things are difficult.

Even Qoheleth can be taken out of context and prove extremely difficult: it seems to theorize desperation, because nothing is lasting and even the Preacher dies in the end, together with the foolish. We had the Reading from it in the Breviary just now.

To my mind, a preliminary point would be to read Sacred Scripture in its unity and integrity. Its individual parts are stages on a journey and only by seeing them as a whole, as a single journey where each section explains the other, can we understand this.

Let us stay, for example, with Qoheleth. First, there was the word of wisdom according to which the good also live well: that is, God rewards those who are good. And then comes Job and one sees that it is not like this and that it is precisely those who are righteous who suffer the most. Job seems truly to have been forgotten by God.

Then come the Psalms of that period where it is said: But what does God do? Atheists and the proud have a good life, they are fat and well-nourished, they laugh at us and say: But where is God? They are not concerned with us and we have been sold like sheep for slaughter. What do you have to do with us, why is it like that?

The time comes when Qoheleth asks: But what does all this wisdom amount to? It is almost an existentialist book, in which it is said: "all is vanity". This first journey does not lose its value but opens onto a new perspective that leads in the end to the Cross of Christ, "the Holy One of God", as St Peter said in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to John. It ends with the Crucifixion. And in this very way is revealed God's wisdom, which St Paul was later to explain to us.

Therefore, it is only if we take all things as a journey, step by step, and learn to interpret Scripture in its unity, that we can truly have access to the beauty and richness of Sacred Scripture.

Consequently, one should read everything, but always mindful of the totality of Sacred Scripture, where one part explains the other, one passage on the journey explains the other. On this point, modern exegesis can also be of great help to us.

Let us take, for example, the Book of Isaiah. When the exegetes discovered that from chapter 40 on the author was someone else - Deutero-Isaiah, as he was then called - there was a moment of great panic for Catholic theologians.

Some thought that in this way Isaiah would be destroyed and that at the end, in chapter 53, the vision of the Servant of God was no longer that of Isaiah who lived almost 800 years before Christ. "What shall we do?", people wondered.

We now realize that the whole Book is a process of constantly new interpretations where one enters ever more deeply into the mystery proposed at the beginning, and that what was initially present but still closed, unfolds increasingly. In one Book, we can understand the whole journey of Sacred Scripture, which is an ongoing reinterpretation, or rather, a new and better understanding of all that had been said previously.

Step by step, light dawns and the Christian can grasp what the Lord said to the disciples at Emmaus, explaining to them that it was of him that all the Prophets had spoken. The Lord unfolds to us the last re-reading; Christ is the key to all things and only by joining the disciples on the road to Emmaus, only by walking with Christ, by reinterpreting all things in his light, with him, Crucified and Risen, do we enter into the riches and beauty of Sacred Scripture.

Therefore, I would say that the important point is not to fragment Sacred Scripture. The modern critic himself, as we now see, has enabled us to understand that it is an ongoing journey. And we can also see that it is a journey with a direction and that Christ really is its destination. By starting from Christ, we start the entire journey again and enter into the depths of the Word.

To sum up, I would say that Sacred Scripture must always be read in the light of Christ. Only in this way can we also read and understand Sacred Scripture in our own context today and be truly enlightened by it. We must understand this: Sacred Scripture is a journey with a direction. Those

who know the destination can also take all those steps once again now, and can thus acquire a deeper knowledge of the Mystery of Christ.

In understanding this, we have also understood the ecclesiality of Sacred Scripture, for these journeys, these steps on the journey, are the steps of a people. It is the People of God who are moving onwards. The true owner of the Word is always the People of God, guided by the Holy Spirit, and inspiration is a complex process: the Holy Spirit leads the people on, the people receive it.

Thus, it is the journey of a people, the People of God. Sacred Scripture should always be interpreted well. But this can happen only if we journey on within this subject, that is, the People of God which lives, is renewed and re-constituted by Christ, but continues to dwell in its own identity. I would therefore say that there are three interrelated dimensions. The historical dimension, the Christological dimension and the ecclesiological dimension - of the People on their way - converge. A complete reading is one where all three dimensions are present. Therefore, the liturgy - the common liturgy prayed by the People of God - remains the privileged place for understanding the Word; this is partly because it is here that the interpretation becomes prayer and is united with Christ's prayer in the Eucharistic Prayer.

I would like to add here one point that has been stressed by all the Fathers of the Church. I am thinking in particular of a very beautiful text by St Ephraim and of another by St Augustine in which he says: "If you have understood little, admit it and do not presume that you have understood it all. The Word is always far greater than what you have been able to understand".

And this should be said now, critically, with regard to a certain part of modern exegesis that thinks it has understood everything and that, therefore, after the interpretation it has worked out, there is nothing left to say about it. This is not true. The Word is always greater than the exegesis of the Fathers and critical exegesis because even this comprehends only a part, indeed, a minimal part. The Word is always greater, this is our immense consolation. And on the one hand it is lovely to know that one has only understood a little. It is lovely to know that there is still an inexhaustible treasure and that every new generation will rediscover new treasures and journey on with the greatness of the Word of God that is always before us, guides us and is ever greater. One should read the Scriptures with an awareness of this.

St Augustine said: the hare and the donkey drink from the fountain. The donkey drinks more but each one drinks his fill. Whether we are hares or donkeys, let us be grateful that the Lord enables us to drink from his water.

Fr Gerardo Raul Carcar, a Schönstatt Father who arrived in Rome from Argentina six months ago

and today is Vicar Cooperator of the Parish of San Girolamo at Corviale, said that Ecclesial Movements and new communities are a providential gift for our time. These are entities with a creative impetus, they live the faith and seek new forms of life to find the right place in the Church's mission. Fr Carcar asked the Pope for advice on how he should fit into them to develop a real ministry of unity in the universal Church.

Pope Benedict XVI: So I see that I must be briefer. Thank you for your question. I think you mentioned the essential sources of all that we can say about Movements. In this sense, your question is also an answer.

I would like to explain immediately that in recent months I have been receiving the Italian Bishops on their *ad limina* visits and so have been able to find out a little more about the geography of the faith in Italy. I see many very beautiful things together with the problems that we all know. I see above all that the faith is still deeply rooted in the Italian heart even if, of course, it is threatened in many ways by today's situations.

The Movements also welcome my fatherly role as Pastor. Others are more critical and say that Movements are out of place. I think, in fact, that situations differ and everything depends on the people in question.

It seems to me that we have two fundamental rules of which you spoke. The first was given to us by St Paul in his First Letter to the Thessalonians: do not extinguish charisms. If the Lord gives us new gifts we must be grateful, even if at times they may be inconvenient. And it is beautiful that without an initiative of the hierarchy but with an initiative from below, as people say, but which also truly comes from on High, that is, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, new forms of life are being born in the Church just as, moreover, they were born down the ages.

At first, they were always inconvenient. Even St Francis was very inconvenient, and it was very hard for the Pope to give a final canonical form to a reality that by far exceeded legal norms. For St Francis, it was a very great sacrifice to let himself be lodged in this juridical framework, but in the end this gave rise to a reality that is still alive today and will live on in the future: it gives strength, as well as new elements, to the Church's life.

I wish to say only this: Movements have been born in all the centuries. Even St Benedict at the outset was a Movement. They do not become part of the Church's life without suffering and difficulty. St Benedict himself had to correct the initial direction that monasticism was taking. Thus, in our century too, the Lord, the Holy Spirit, has given us new initiatives with new aspects of Christian life. Since they are lived by human people with their limitations, they also create difficulties.

So the first rule is: do not extinguish Christian charisms; be grateful even if they are inconvenient.

The second rule is: the Church is one; if Movements are truly gifts of the Holy Spirit, they belong to and serve the Church and in patient dialogue between Pastors and Movements, a fruitful form is born where these elements become edifying for the Church today and in the future.

This dialogue is at all levels. Starting with the parish priest, the Bishops and the Successor of Peter, the search for appropriate structures is underway: in many cases it has already borne fruit. In others, we are still studying.

For example, we ask ourselves whether, after five years of experience, it is possible to confirm definitively the Statutes for the Neocatechumenal Way, whether a trial period is necessary or whether, perhaps, certain elements of this structure need perfecting.

In any case, I knew the Neocatechumens from the very outset. It was a long Way, with many complications that still exist today, but we have found an ecclesial form that has already vastly improved the relationship between the Pastor and the Way. We are going ahead like this! The same can be said for other Movements.

Now, as a synthesis of the two fundamental rules, I would say: gratitude, patience and also acceptance of the inevitable sufferings. In marriage too, there is always suffering and tension. Yet, the couple goes forward and thus true love matures. The same thing happens in the Church's communities: let us be patient together.

The different levels of the hierarchy too - from the parish priest to the Bishop, to the Supreme Pontiff - must continually exchange ideas with one another, they must foster dialogue to find together the best road. The experiences of parish priests are fundamental and so are the experiences of the Bishop, and let us say, the universal perspectives of the Pope have a theological and pastoral place of their own in the Church.

On the one hand, these different levels of the hierarchy as a whole and on the other, all life as it is lived in the parish context with patience and openness in obedience to the Lord, really create new vitality in the Church.

Let us be grateful to the Holy Spirit for the gifts he has given to us. Let us be obedient to the voice of the Spirit, but also clear in integrating these elements into our life; lastly, this criterion serves the concrete Church and thus patiently, courageously and generously, the Lord will certainly guide and help us.

Fr Angelo Mangano, Parish Priest of San Gelasio, a parish that since 2003 has been entrusted to the pastoral care of the World Church Mission Community, spoke on pastoral work on the Feast of

the Chair of St Peter. He pointed out the importance of developing unity between spiritual life and pastoral life, which is not an organizational technique but coincides with the life of the Church itself. Fr Mangano asked the Holy Father how to spread the concept of pastoral service among God's People as the true life of the Church, and how to ensure that pastoral work is always nourished by conciliar ecclesiology.

Pope Benedict XVI: I think there are several questions here. One question is: how can we inspire parishes with conciliar ecclesiology and make the faithful live this ecclesiology? Another is how should we behave and make pastoral work spiritual within us?

Let us start with the latter question. There is always a certain tension between what I absolutely have to do and what spiritual reserves I must have. I always see it in St Augustine, who complains about this in his preaching. I have already cited him: "I long to live with the Word of God from morning to night but I have to be with you". Augustine nonetheless finds this balance by being always available but also by keeping for himself moments of prayer and meditation on the Sacred Word, because otherwise he would no longer be able to say anything.

Here in particular, I would like to underline what you said about the fact that pastoral work must never be mere strategy or administrative work but must always be a spiritual task. Nor, of course, can the latter be totally lacking either, because we are on this earth and such problems exist: the efficient management of money, etc. This too is a sector that cannot be totally ignored.

Nonetheless, the fundamental emphasis must be on the very fact that being a pastor is in itself a spiritual act. You rightly referred to John's Gospel, chapter 10, in which the Lord describes himself as the "Good Shepherd". And as a first definitive moment, Jesus says that the Pastor goes first. In other words, it is he who shows the way, he is the first to be an example to others, the first to take the road that is the road for others. The Pastor leads the way.

This means that he himself lives first of all on the Word of God; he is a man of prayer, a man of forgiveness, a man who receives and celebrates the sacraments as acts of prayer and encounter with the Lord. He is a man of charity, lived and practised, thus all the simple acts, conversation, encounter, everything that needs to be done, become spiritual acts in communion with Christ. His "*pro omnibus*" becomes our "*pro meis*".

Then, he goes before us and I think that in having mentioned this "leading the way", the essential has already been said. Chapter 10 of John continues, saying that Jesus goes before us, giving himself on the Cross. And this is also inevitable for the priest. The offering of himself is also participation in the Cross of Christ, and thanks to this we too can credibly comfort the suffering and be close to the poor, the marginalized, etc.

Therefore, in this programme that you have developed, it is fundamental to spiritualize daily

pastoral work. It is easier to say this than to do it, but we must try.

Moreover, to be able to spiritualize our work, we must again follow the Lord. The Gospels tell us that by day he worked and by night he was on the mountain with his Father, praying. Here, I must confess my weakness. At night I cannot pray, at night I want to sleep. However, a little free time for the Lord is really necessary: either the celebration of Mass or the prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours and even a brief daily meditation following the Liturgy, the Rosary. But this personal conversation with the Word of God is important; it is only in this way that we can find the reserves to respond to the demands of pastoral life.

The second point: you rightly underlined the ecclesiology of the Council. It seems to me that we must interiorize this ecclesiology far more, that of *Lumen Gentium* and of *Ad Gentes*, which is also an ecclesiological Document, as well as the ecclesiology of the minor Documents and of *Dei Verbum*.

By interiorizing this vision we can also attract our people to this vision, which understands that the Church is not merely a large structure, one of these supranational bodies that exist. Although she is a body, the Church is the Body of Christ, hence, she is a spiritual body, as St Paul said. She is a spiritual reality. I think this is very important: that people see that the Church is not a supranational organization nor an administrative body or power, that she is not a social agency, but indeed that although she does social and supranational work, she is a spiritual body.

I consider that in our prayers with the people, listening with the people to the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments with the People of God, acting with Christ in charity, etc., and especially in our homilies, we should disseminate this vision. It seems to me, in this regard, that the homily affords a marvellous opportunity to be close to the people and to communicate the spirituality taught by the Council. And it thus seems to me that if the homily is developed from prayer, from listening to the Word of God; it is a communication of the content of the Word of God.

The Council truly reaches out to our people, not those fragments in the press that presented an erroneous image of the Council but the true spirituality of the Council. Thus, we must always learn the Word of God anew, with the Council and in the spirit of the Council, interiorizing its vision. By so doing, we can also communicate with our people and thus truly carry out a task that is both pastoral and spiritual.

Fr Alberto Pacini, Rector of the Basilica of Sant'Anastasia, spoke of perpetual Eucharistic Adoration - especially of the possibility of organizing night vigils - and asked the Pope to explain the meaning and value of Eucharistic reparation with reference to sacrilegious thefts and satanic sects.

Pope Benedict XVI: In general we do not speak much about Eucharistic Adoration, which has truly penetrated our hearts and penetrates the hearts of the people. You have asked this specific question about Eucharistic reparation. This has become a difficult topic.

I remember, when I was young, that on the Feast of the Sacred Heart we prayed using a beautiful prayer by Leo XIII and then one by Pius XI in which reparation had a special place, precisely in reference, already at that time, to sacrilegious acts for which reparation had to be made.

I think we should get to the bottom of it, going back to the Lord himself who offered reparation for the sins of the world, and try to atone for them: let us say, try to balance the *plus* of evil and the *plus* of goodness. We must not, therefore, leave this great negative *plus* on the scales of the world but must give at least an equal weight to goodness.

This fundamental idea is based on what Christ did. As far as we can understand it, this is the sense of the Eucharistic sacrifice. To counter the great weight of evil that exists in the world and pulls the world downwards, the Lord places another, greater weight, that of the infinite love that enters this world. This is the most important point: God is always the absolute good, but this absolute good actually entered history: Christ makes himself present here and suffers evil to the very end, thereby creating a counterweight of absolute value. Even if we see only empirically the proportions of the *plus* of evil, they are exceeded by the immense *plus* of good, of the suffering of the Son of God.

In this sense there is reparation which is necessary. I think that today it is a little difficult to understand these things. If we see the weight of evil in the world which is constantly increasing, which seems indisputably to have the upper hand in history, one might - as St Augustine said in a meditation - truly despair.

But we see that there is an even greater *plus* in the fact that God himself entered history, he made himself share in history and suffered to the very end. This is the meaning of reparation. This *plus* of the Lord is an appeal to us to be on his side, to enter into this great *plus* of love and make it present, even with our weakness. We know that this *plus* was needed for us too, because there is evil in our lives as well. We all survive thanks to the *plus* of the Lord. However, he gives us this gift so that, as the Letter to the Colossians says, we can associate in his abundance and, let us say, effectively increase this abundance during our time in history.

I think that theology ought to do more to enable people to understand this reality of reparation better. In history, there were also some erroneous ideas. In the past few days I have been reading the theological discourses of St Gregory Nazianzus, who at a certain moment speaks of this aspect and asks: For whom did the Lord offer his Blood? He states, the Father did not desire the Blood of the Son, the Father is not cruel, it is not necessary to attribute this to the Father's will, but history wanted it, the needs and imbalances of history desired it; it was necessary to enter into these imbalances and recreate true balance here. This is very enlightening.

But it seems to me that we have not sufficiently mastered the language to make this fact understood to ourselves, and subsequently, also to others. We should not offer to a cruel God the blood of God. But God himself, with his love, must enter into the suffering of history, not only to create a balance, but also a *plus* of love which is stronger than the abundance of the existing evil. This is what the Lord invites us to do.

It seems to me a typically Catholic reality. Luther said: we cannot add anything. And this is true. And then he said: our acts thus do not count for anything. And this is not true, because the Lord's generosity is revealed precisely in his invitation to us to enter and also gives value to our being with him.

We must learn all this better and also be aware of the greatness and generosity of the Lord and the greatness of our vocation. The Lord wants to associate us with his great *plus*. If we begin to understand it, we will be glad that the Lord invites us to do this. It will be a great joy to be taken seriously by the Lord's love.

Fr Francesco Tedeschi, a lecturer at the Pontifical Urban University who also serves at the Basilica of San Bartolomeo on the Tiber Island in Rome, a site that is the memorial of nine 20th century martyrs, reflected on the exemplarity and capacity for attraction among young people of the figures of the martyrs. The martyrs reveal the beauty of the Christian faith and witness to the world that it is possible to respond to evil with good by basing one's life on the strength of hope. The Pope did not choose to add any further words on this reflection.

Pope Benedict XVI: The applause we have heard shows that you yourself have given ample answers.... Therefore, I can only reply to your question: yes, it is as you have said. And let us meditate upon your words.

Fr Krzysztof Wendlik, Parochial Vicar of Santi Urbano e Lorenzo Parish at Prima Porta, spoke of the problem of relativism in our contemporary culture, and asked the Pope for an enlightening word on the relationship between unity of faith and pluralism in theology.

Pope Benedict XVI: What an important question! When I was still a member of the International Theological Commission, we took a year to address this problem. I was the speaker and I therefore remember it quite well. Yet, I recognize that I am unable to explain the matter in just a few words.

I only wish to say that theology has always been multiple. Let us think of the Fathers in the Middle Ages, the Franciscan School, the Dominican School, then the Late Middle Ages and so on. As we

have said, the Word of God is always larger than us. Therefore, we can never come to the end of the outreach of his Word, and various approaches, various types of reflection are necessary.

I would simply like to say: it is important that the theologian, on the one hand, in his responsibility and professional capacity, should seek openings that correspond with the needs and challenges of our time.

On the other hand, he needs to be ever aware that all this is based on the faith of the Church and so he must always refer to the Church's faith. I think, if a theologian is personally and profoundly rooted in faith and understands that this work is a reflection on the faith, that he will be able to reconcile unity and plurality.

The last question was asked by Fr Luigi Veturi, Parish Priest of San Giovanni Battista dei Fiorentini. He focused on the theme of sacred art and asked the Pope whether this should be better evaluated as a means for communicating faith.

Pope Benedict XVI: The answer could be very simple: yes! I arrived here a little late because I first paid a visit to the Pauline Chapel where restoration work has been underway for several years. I was told that the work will take another two years. I could glimpse between the scaffolding part of this miraculous artwork. And it is worth restoring it well so that it will once again shine out and be a living catechesis.

In saying this, I wanted to recall that Italy is particularly rich in art, and art is a treasure of inexhaustible and incredible catecheses. It is also our duty to know and understand it properly, not in the way that it is sometimes done by art historians, who interpret it only formally in terms of artistic technique.

Rather, we must enter into the content and make the content that inspired this great art live anew. It truly seems to me to be a duty - also in the formation of future priests - to know these treasures and be able to transform all that is present in them and that speaks to us today into a living catechesis.

Thus, the Church also appears as an organism - neither of oppression nor of power, as some people would like to demonstrate - with a unique, spiritually fertile history, one which I would dare to say is not to be found outside the Catholic Church. This is also a sign of the Catholic Church's vitality, which, despite all her weaknesses as well as her sins, has always remained a great spiritual reality, an inspirer which has given us all these riches.

It is therefore our duty to enter into this wealth and to be capable of making ourselves interpreters

of this art. May this also be true for pictorial and sculptural art, as well as for sacred music, which is a branch of art that deserves to be revived. I would say that the Gospel variously lived is still today an inspiring force that gives and will give us art.

Above all, the most beautiful sculptures also exist today, which show that the fertility of faith and of the Gospel are not extinguished, that there are still musical compositions today.... I believe that it is possible to emphasize a situation which is, let us say, contradictory to art, an even somewhat desperate situation of art.

The Church also inspires today, because faith and the Word of God are inexhaustible. And this gives all of us courage. It gives us the hope that the future world will also have new visions of faith and at the same time, the certainty that the 2,000 years of Christian art that have already passed are still valid and still a "today" of the faith.

Well, thank you for your patience and your attention. My good wishes for your Lent!

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