



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
TO PILGRIMS FROM THE SOUTHERN ITALIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF AMALFI-CAVA DE' TIRRENI***

Saturday, 22 November 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome to the house of the Successor of Peter: I greet you with affection and address my cordial greeting to you all. I extend it first of all to the Pastor of your ecclesial community, Archbishop Orazio Soricelli, whom I also thank for his words on your behalf. I then greet the priests, deacons and seminarians, the men and women religious, the lay people committed to the various pastoral activities, the young people, the choir and the sick with the volunteers of UNITALSI [the National Italian Union for Transporting the Sick to Lourdes and International Shrines]. I greet the civil authorities, the mayors of the municipalities of the diocese with the leaders. Lastly, I extend my thoughts to the entire Archdiocese of Amalfi-Cava de' Tirreni, which has come to Rome on pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostle Peter, bringing the venerable relics of St Andrew, your august Patron, preserved since the fourth century in your Cathedral crypt. Indeed, this pilgrimage is being made precisely in the name of the Apostle Andrew on the occasion of the eighth centenary of the translation of his relics from great Constantinople to your city of Amalfi, small in size but also great in its civil and religious history, as your Archbishop has just recalled. On the occasion of the Feast of St Andrew on 30 November 1996, I was also able to stop and pray before this precious reliquary, and I still retain grateful memories of that visit.

On this now imminent occasion, the Jubilee Year will end with Holy Mass, celebrated in your Cathedral by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, my Secretary of State. It has been a special year which culminated in the solemn commemorative act last 8 May, at which Cardinal Walter Kasper presided as my Special Envoy. Indeed, by looking at the example of St Andrew and having recourse to his intercession, you desire to give a new impetus to your apostolic and missionary vocation, extending the perspectives of your heart to the expectations of peace among peoples,

intensifying the prayer for the unity of all Christians. *Vocation, mission and ecumenism* are therefore the three key-words that have guided you in this spiritual and pastoral commitment, in which today you receive an encouragement from the Pope to persevere with generosity and enthusiasm. May St Andrew, the first of the Apostles to be called by Jesus on the banks of the River Jordan (cf. Jn 1: 35-40), help you to rediscover increasingly the importance and the urgent need to witness to the Gospel in every social milieu. May your entire diocesan community, in imitation of the early Church, grow in faith and communicate Christian hope to all.

Dear brothers and sisters, our meeting is taking place on the very eve of the Solemnity of Christ the King. I therefore invite you to turn the gaze of your heart to Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. In the face of the *Pantocrator* we recognize, as Pope Paul VI wonderfully affirmed during the Second Vatican Council, "Christ, our beginning! Christ, our way and our guide! Christ our hope and our end!" (*Inaugural Discourse of the second session*, 29 September 1963). The Word of God that we will hear tomorrow will repeat to us that his Face, the revelation of the invisible mystery of the Father, is that of the Good Shepherd, ready to take care of his scattered sheep, to gather them together so that they may graze and then rest in safety. With patience he goes in search of the lost sheep and cares for the one that is sick (cf. Ez 34: 11-12, 15-17). Only in him can we find that peace which he purchased for us at the price of his Blood, taking the sins of the world upon himself and obtaining our reconciliation.

The Word of God will remind us too that the Face of Christ, King of the Universe, is that of the judge, for God is at the same time a good and merciful Shepherd and a just Judge. In particular, the Gospel passage (Mt 25: 31-46) will present to us the great picture of the Last Judgment. In this parable, the Son of man in his glory, surrounded by his angels, acts like the shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats and set the just on his right and the reprobates on his left. He invites the just to enter into the inheritance that has been prepared for them from eternity, while he condemns the reprobates to eternal fire, prepared for the devil and for the other rebellious angels. The criterion of judgment is decisive. This criterion is love, the concrete charity to neighbour, and in particular to the "little", the people in the greatest difficult: hungry, thirsty, foreigners, naked, sick and in prison. The king solemnly declares to all that what they did or did not do to them, they did or did not do to him himself. That is to say that Christ identifies with "the least of these" his brethren, and the Last Judgment will be the account of what previously happened in earthly life.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is this that interests God. Historical kingship does not matter to him; but he wants to reign in peoples' hearts, and from there, over the world: he is King of the whole universe but the critical point, the zone in which his Kingdom is at risk, is our heart, for it is there that God encounters our freedom. We, and we alone, can prevent him from reigning over us and hence hinder his kingship over the world: over the family, over society, over history. We men and women have the faculty to choose whose side we wish to be on: with Christ and his Angels or with the devil and his followers, to use the same language as the Gospel. It is for us to decide whether to practice justice or wickedness, to embrace love and forgiveness or revenge and homicidal

hatred. On this depends our personal salvation but also the salvation of the world. This is why Jesus wishes to associate us with his kingship; this is why he invites us to collaborate in the coming of his Kingdom of love, justice and peace. It is left to us to respond to him, not with words but with deeds: by choosing the path of effective and generous love for our neighbour we allow him to extend his lordship in time and space. May St Andrew help you to renew courageously your decision to belong to Christ and to put yourselves at the service of his Kingdom of justice, peace and love, and may the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus our King, always protect your communities. For my part, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer while thanking you once again for your visit I warmly bless you all.

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