



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MÜNCHEN, ALTÖTTING AND REGENSBURG
(SEPTEMBER 9-14, 2006)

**MARIAN VESPERS WITH THE RELIGIOUS
AND SEMINARIANS OF BAVARIA**

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

*Basilica of Saint Anne, Altötting
Monday, 11 September 2006*

Dear Friends!

Here in Altötting, in this grace-filled place, we have gathered - seminarians preparing for the priesthood, priests, men and women religious and members of the Society for Spiritual Vocations - gathered in the Basilica of Saint Anne, before the shrine to her daughter, the Mother of the Lord. We have gathered here to consider our vocation to serve Jesus Christ and, under the watchful gaze of Saint Anne, in whose home the greatest vocation in the history of salvation developed, to understand it better. Mary received her vocation from the lips of an angel. The Angel does not enter our room visibly, but the Lord has a plan for each of us, he calls each one of us by name. Our task is to learn how to listen, to perceive his call, to be courageous and faithful in following him and, when all is said and done, to be found trustworthy servants who have used well the gifts given us.

We know that the Lord seeks labourers for his harvest. He himself said as much: "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest" (*Mt 9:37-38*). That is why we are gathered here: to make this urgent request to the Lord of the harvest. God's harvest is indeed great, and it needs labourers: in the so-called Third World - in Latin America, in Africa and in Asia - people are waiting for heralds to bring them the

Gospel of peace, the good news of God who became man. But also in the so-called West, here among us in Germany, and in the vast lands of Russia it is true that a great harvest could be reaped. But there is a lack of people willing to become labourers for God's harvest. Today it is as then, when the Lord was moved with pity for the crowds which seemed like sheep without a shepherd - people who probably knew how to do many things, but found it hard to make sense of their lives. Lord, look upon our troubled times, which need preachers of the Gospel, witnesses to you, persons who can point the way towards 'life in abundance'! Look upon our world and feel pity once more! Look upon our world and send us labourers! With this petition we knock on God's door; but with the same petition the Lord is also knocking on the doors of our own heart. Lord do you want me? Is it not perhaps too big for me? Am I too small for this? "Do not be afraid", the Angel said to Mary. "Do not fear: I have called you by name", God says through the Prophet Isaiah (43:1) to us - to each of us.

Where do we go, if we say "yes" to the Lord's call? The briefest description of the priestly mission - and this is true in its own way for men and women religious too - has been given to us by the Evangelist Mark. In his account of the call of the Twelve, he says: "Jesus appointed twelve to be with him and to be sent out" (3:14). To be with Jesus and, being sent, to go out to meet people - these two things belong together and together they are the heart of a vocation, of the priesthood. To be with him and to be sent out - the two are inseparable. Only one who is "with him" comes to know him and can truly proclaim him. And anyone who has been with him cannot keep to himself what he has found; instead, he has to pass it on. Such was the case with Andrew, who told his brother Simon: "We have found the Messiah" (*Jn* 1:41). And the Evangelist adds: "He brought Simon to Jesus" (*Jn* 1:42). Pope Gregory the Great, in one of his homilies, once said that God's angels, however far afield they go on their missions, always move in God. They remain always with him. And while speaking about the angels, Saint Gregory thought also of bishops and priests: wherever they go, they should always "be with him". We know this from experience: whenever priests, because of their many duties, allot less and less time to being with the Lord, they eventually lose, for all their often heroic activity, the inner strength that sustains them. Their activity ends up as an empty activism. To be with Christ - how does this come about? Well, the first and most important thing for the priest is his daily Mass, always celebrated with deep interior participation. If we celebrate Mass truly as men of prayer, if we unite our words and our activities to the Word that precedes us and let them be shaped by the Eucharistic celebration, if in Communion we let ourselves truly be embraced by him and receive him - then we are being with him.

The Liturgy of the Hours is another fundamental way of being with Christ: here we pray as people conscious of our need to speak with God, while lifting up all those others who have neither the time nor the ability to pray in this way. If our Eucharistic celebration and the Liturgy of the Hours are to remain meaningful, we need to devote ourselves constantly anew to the spiritual reading of sacred Scripture; not only to be able to decipher and explain words from the distant past, but to discover the word of comfort that the Lord is now speaking to me, the Lord who challenges me by

this word. Only in this way will we be capable of bringing the inspired Word to the men and women of our time as the contemporary and living Word of God.

Eucharistic adoration is an essential way of being with the Lord. Thanks to Bishop Schraml, Altötting now has a new "treasury". Where once the treasures of the past were kept, precious historical and religious items, there is now a place for the Church's true treasure: the permanent presence of the Lord in his Sacrament. In one of his parables the Lord speaks of a treasure hidden in the field; whoever finds it sells all he has in order to buy that field, because the hidden treasure is more valuable than anything else. The hidden treasure, the good greater than any other good, is the Kingdom of God - it is Jesus himself, the Kingdom in person. In the sacred Host, he is present, the true treasure, always waiting for us. Only by adoring this presence do we learn how to receive him properly - we learn the reality of communion, we learn the Eucharistic celebration from the inside. Here I would like to quote some fine words of Saint Edith Stein, Co-Patroness of Europe, who wrote in one of her letters: "The Lord is present in the tabernacle in his divinity and his humanity. He is not there for himself, but for us: for it is his joy to be with us. He knows that we, being as we are, need to have him personally near. As a result, anyone with normal thoughts and feelings will naturally be drawn to spend time with him, whenever possible and as much as possible" (*Gesammelte Werke* VII, 136ff.). Let us love being with the Lord! There we can speak with him about everything. We can offer him our petitions, our concerns, our troubles. Our joys. Our gratitude, our disappointments, our needs and our aspirations. There we can also constantly ask him: "Lord send labourers into your harvest! Help me to be a good worker in your vineyard!"

Here in this Basilica, our thoughts turn to Mary, who lived her life fully "with Jesus" and consequently was, and continues to be, close to all men and women. The many votive plaques are a concrete sign of this. Let us think of Mary's holy mother, Saint Anne, and with her let us also think of the importance of mothers and fathers, of grandmothers and grandfathers, and the importance of the family as an environment of life and prayer, where we learn to pray and where vocations are able to develop.

Here in Altötting, we naturally think in a special way of good Brother Conrad. He renounced a great inheritance because he wanted to follow Jesus Christ unreservedly and to be completely with him. As the Lord recommended in the parable, he chose to take the lowest place, that of a humble lay - brother and porter. In his porter's lodge he was able to achieve exactly what Saint Mark tells us about the Apostles: "to stay with him", "to be sent" to others. From his cell he could always look at the tabernacle and thus always "stay with Christ". From this contemplation he learned the boundless goodness with which he treated the people who would knock at his door at all hours - sometimes mischievously, in order to provoke him, at other times loudly and impatiently. To all of them, by his sheer goodness and humanity, and without grand words, he gave a message more valuable than words alone. Let us pray to Brother Saint Conrad; let us ask him to help us to keep our gaze fixed on the Lord, in order to bring God's love to the men and women of our time. Amen!

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