



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT

OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

TO SAVONA AND GENOA (LIGURIA) EUCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION IN SAVONA *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI Piazza del Popolo, Savona*

Saturday, 17 May 2008 Dear Brothers and Sisters, It is a great joy for me to be in your midst and to celebrate the Eucharist for you on the solemn Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. I greet with affection your Pastor, Bishop Vittorio Lupi, whom I thank for the words with which he introduced the diocesan Community at the beginning of the celebration and, even more, for the sentiments of charity and pastoral hope that he expressed. I also thank the Mayor for his cordial greeting to me on behalf of the entire City. I greet the Civil Authorities, the priests, the Religious, the deacons, and the leaders of the Associations, Movements and Ecclesial Communities. I renew to you all in Christ my best wishes for grace and peace. On this Solemnity, the liturgy invites us to praise God not merely for the wonders that he has worked, but for who he is; for the beauty and goodness of his being from which his action stems. We are invited to contemplate, so to speak, the Heart of God, his deepest reality which is his being One in the Trinity, a supreme and profound communion of love and life. The whole of Sacred Scripture speaks to us of him. Indeed, it is he who speaks to us of himself in the Scriptures and reveals himself as Creator of the universe and Lord of history. Today we have heard a passage from the Book of Exodus in which - something quite exceptional - God proclaims his own Name! He does so in the presence of Moses with whom he spoke face to face, as with a friend. And what is God's Name? It never fails to move us: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34: 6). These are human words but were prompted and, as it were, uttered by the Holy Spirit. They tell us the truth about God. They were true in the past, they are true today and they will always be true; they make us see in our mind's eye the Face of the Invisible One, they tell us the Name of the Ineffable One. This Name is Mercy, Grace, Faithfulness. Dear friends, how can I fail to rejoice with you here in Savona for the fact that this is the very Name with which the Virgin Mary introduced herself, appearing on 18 March 1536 to a peasant, a son of this land? "Our Lady of Mercy" is the title by which she is venerated - and for some years now we have a large statue of her in the Vatican Gardens too. But Mary did not speak of herself, she never speaks of herself but always of God, and she did so with this name, so old yet ever new: mercy, which is a synonym of love, of grace. This is the whole essence of Christianity because it is the essence of God himself. God is One since he is all and only Love but precisely by being Love he is openness, acceptance,

dialogue; and in his relationship with us, sinful human beings, he is mercy, compassion, grace and forgiveness. God has created all things for existence and what he wills is always and only life. For those in danger he is salvation. We have just heard this in John's Gospel: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3: 16): in God's gift of himself in the Person of the Son the whole of the Trinity is at work.

It is the Father who places at our disposal what is dearest to him; the Son who, consenting to the Father, empties himself of his glory in order to give himself to us; the Spirit who leaves the peace of the divine embrace to water the deserts of humanity. For this work of his mercy, in preparing himself to take on our flesh, God chose to need a human "yes", the "yes" of a woman who would become the Mother of his Incarnate Word, Jesus, the human Face of Divine Mercy. Mary thus became and remains for ever the "Mother of Mercy" as she also made herself known here in Savona. In the course of the Church's history, the Virgin Mary did none other than to invite her children to return to God, to entrust themselves to him in prayer, to knock with trusting insistence at the door of his merciful Heart. In truth, all he wants is to pour out into the world the superabundance of his Grace. "Mercy and not justice", Mary implored, knowing that she would certainly have been heard by her Son Jesus but also knowing of the need for the conversion of sinners' hearts. For this reason she asked for prayer and penance. Therefore, my Visit to Savona on Trinity Sunday is first of all a pilgrimage, through Mary, to the sources of faith, hope and love. It is a pilgrimage that is also a memory and a tribute to my Venerable Predecessor Pius VII, whose dramatic experience is indissolubly linked to this City and its Marian Shrine. Two centuries later, I come to renew the expression of gratitude of the Holy See and of the entire Church for the faith, love and courage with which your fellow citizens supported the Pope under house arrest in this City, imposed upon him by Napoleon Bonaparte. Many testimonies of the manifestations of solidarity for the Pontiff, sometimes even at personal risk, have been preserved. They are events that the people of Savona can well be proud to commemorate today. As your Bishop rightly observed, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that dark page of Europe's history has become rich in graces and teachings for our day too. It teaches us courage in facing the challenges of the world: materialism, relativism, secularism without ever yielding to compromises, ready to pay in person while remaining faithful to the Lord and his Church. The example of serene firmness set by Pope Pius VII invites us to keep our trust in God unaltered in trials, aware that although he permits the Church to experience difficult moments he never abandons us. The episode the Great Pontiff went through in your land invites us always to trust in the intercession and motherly assistance of Mary Most Holy. The apparition of the Virgin at a tragic moment in Savona's history and the terrible experience that the Successor of Peter faced here are helpful in passing on a message of hope to the Christian generations of our time and encourage us to trust in the means of grace that the Lord makes available to us in every situation. And among these means of salvation I would like first of all to recall prayer: personal, family and community prayer. On today's Feast of the Trinity, I would like to emphasize the dimension of praise, contemplation and adoration. I am thinking of young families and I would like to ask them not to be afraid to adopt, from the first years of marriage, a simple style of domestic prayer, encouraged by the presence of small children who are often prompted to speak spontaneously to the Lord and to Our Lady. I urge parishes and associations to

give time and space to prayer since activities are pastorally sterile if they are not constantly preceded, accompanied and sustained by prayer. And what can be said of the Eucharistic Celebration, especially Sunday Mass? The Lord's Day is rightly at the centre of the Italian Bishops' attention: the Christian root of Sunday must be rediscovered, starting with the celebration of the Risen Lord, encountered in the Word of God and recognized in the breaking of the Eucharistic Bread. Then the Sacrament of Reconciliation also asks to be reassessed as a fundamental means for spiritual growth and for facing today's challenges with strength and courage. Together with prayer and the Sacraments, other inseparable instruments for growth are works of charity, which should be practised with a lively faith. I also chose to reflect on this aspect of Christian life in my Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. In the modern world, which often makes beauty and physical efficiency an idea to be pursued in every possible way, we are called as Christians to discover the Face of Jesus Christ, "the fairest of the sons of men" (Ps 45[44]: 2[3]), precisely in people who are suffering and marginalized. Today, the moral and material emergencies that worry us are unfortunately numerous. In this regard, I gladly take this opportunity to address a greeting to the prisoners and personnel of the St Augustine Penitentiary in Savona, who have lived for some time in a situation of particular hardship. I also extend an equally warm greeting to the sick who are patients in the hospital, in clinics or in private homes. I would like to address a special word to you, dear priests, to express my appreciation of your silent work and the demanding fidelity with which you carry it out. Dear brothers in Christ, always believe in the effectiveness of your daily priestly service! It is precious in the eyes of God and of the faithful and its value cannot be quantified in figures and statistics: we shall only know the results in Paradise! Many of you are quite elderly: this reminds me of that wonderful passage by the Prophet Isaiah which says: "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Is 40: 30-31). Together with the deacons at the service of the diocese, live communion with the Bishop and among yourselves, expressing it in active collaboration, mutual support and shared pastoral coordination. Persevere in the courageous and joyful witness of your service. Search people out, as did the Lord Jesus: in visits to families, in contact with the sick, in dialogue with young people, making yourselves present in every context of work and life. To you, dear men and women religious, whom I thank for your presence, I confirm that the world needs your witness and your prayer. Live your vocation in daily fidelity and make your life an offering pleasing to God: the Church is grateful to you and encourages you to persevere in your service. I want, of course, to give a special warm greeting to you young people! Dear friends, put your youth at the service of God and of your brethren. Following Christ always requires the courage to go against the tide. However, it is worth it: this is the way to real personal fulfilment and hence to true happiness. With Christ, in fact, one experiences that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20: 35). This is why I encourage you to take the ideal of holiness seriously. A well known French writer has left us in one of his works a sentence I would like to consign to you today: "There is only one real sadness: not to be saints" (Léon Bloy, *La femme pauvre*, II, 27). Dear young people, dare to dedicate your life to courageous choices, not alone of course, but with the Lord! Give this City the impetus and enthusiasm that flow from your living experience of faith,

an experience that does not spoil the expectations of human life but exalts them by participation in the very experience of Christ. And this also applies for Christians who are no longer young. My hope for all is that faith in the Triune God will imbue in every person and in every community the fervour of love and hope, the joy of loving one another as brothers and sisters and of putting oneself humbly at the service of others. This is the "leaven" that causes humanity to grow, the light that shines in the world. May Mary Most Holy, Mother of Mercy, together with all your Patron Saints help you to express in living your life the Apostle's exhortation which we have just heard. I make it my own with great affection: "Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you" (II Cor 13: 11). Amen.

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