



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CIRCLE OF ST PETER***

Friday, 22 February 2008

Dear Members of the Circle of St Peter,

I am pleased to meet you again this year on the occasion of the Feast of the Chair of St Peter: thank you for your visit. I cordially greet you all and extend my greeting to your families, your loved ones and those who cooperate in the different activities that you coordinate. I greet your Spiritual Director, Mons. Franco Camaldo, and your General President, Duke Leopoldo Torlonia, whom I thank for the words with which he has interpreted the sentiments of all here present. He has also briefly illustrated for me what your well-known and praiseworthy association does.

Who does not know about the Circle of St Peter? Yours is a sodality that has ancient origins and is always distinguished by unconditional fidelity to the Church and her universal Pastor, the Roman Pontiff. The service rendered by the Circle constitutes, in its various articulations, a much-appreciated apostolate, and offers a continuous testimony of love that you nourish towards the Church and in particular towards the Holy See. I am thinking of your presence in the Vatican Basilica and the duty to keep order during the Celebrations over which I preside; I am thinking of your formational and spiritual meetings that tend to arouse within you a constant drive toward holiness; I am thinking of your assistance and charitable work that you carry out with generosity.

Thank you for your collaboration and for the many initiatives that you promote in a Gospel spirit and an ecclesial sense. We could almost say that what you do, in a certain way, is done in the name of the Pope himself. For example, it is in his name that you are concerned with meeting, as far as possible, the needs of the great many poor who live in the city of Rome, whose Bishop is the Successor of Peter. You thus wish to be his arms and his heart that reach out, also through you, to those who are struggling in precarious situations. And I know that in the course of these past years, you have multiplied your efforts in order to respond, with generous and demanding charitable initiatives, to the exigencies of these people in need.

I thank you for your collaboration: operating with admirable apostolic zeal, you give a silent yet eloquent witness to the Gospel. Responding to the command of Christ, you seek to see and serve in each person the same Jesus who in the Gospel assures us: "Every time that you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (cf. Mt 25: 40). The faith and love we nourish for him, the Lord calls us to translate into daily gestures of care for the people we encounter, especially those experiencing moments of trial, so that in the face of each person, even more of those in need, the Face of Christ may shine forth. In the Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, I wrote that "to accept the 'other' who suffers, means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. Because it has now become a shared suffering, though, in which another person is present, this suffering is penetrated by the light of love" (n. 38). In such a way you become messengers and witnesses of the Gospel of love, achieving an authentic and widespread network of evangelization.

Dear friends, there is another reason why I want to thank you. Today, too, in fact, as every year, you come to consign to me St Peter's Pence that you yourselves have been occupied with collecting here in Rome. It represents a concrete help offered to the Pope so that he can respond to the many requests sent to him from every part of the world, especially from the poorest countries. Thank you, therefore, for this service of yours that you carry out with such generosity in a spirit of sacrifice. May the Blessed Virgin, who during this Lenten Season we contemplate in association with the Passion of Christ, help and sustain you in every good endeavour and project. For my part, I assure you of a special remembrance in prayer, while with affection I impart to you the Apostolic Blessing, which I willingly extend to your families and loved ones.