



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO RECENTLY APPOINTED BISHOPS
WHO TOOK PART IN THE MEETING ORGANIZED
BY THE CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS**

*Hall of the Swiss, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Monday, 13 September 2010*

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I am very glad to meet you, the recently appointed Bishops from various countries in the world, gathered in Rome for the annual convention promoted by the Congregation for Bishops. I thank Cardinal Marc Ouellet for his courteous words on behalf of you all; and I wish to offer him special good wishes at the beginning of his service as Prefect of this Dicastery. I am glad, venerable Brother, that you have the opportunity to begin with this beautiful experience of ecclesial communion among the new Pastors of various particular Churches. I also cordially greet Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, and express my gratitude to all who collaborate in the organization of this meeting.

According to a very significant custom, you have first of all made a pilgrimage to the tomb of the Apostle Peter, who conformed to Christ the Teacher and Pastor until his death and death on the Cross. In this regard, certain sayings of St Thomas Aquinas are illuminating and can constitute a true and proper programme of life for every Bishop. Commenting on Jesus' words in the Gospel according to John: "The Good Shepherd lays down his bodily life for his sheep" St Thomas observes: "the sheep who are his by authority and charity. Both are required, for they must obey him and he must love them; the first without the second is not enough" *Expositio in evangelium Johannis*, 10, 3). The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, specifies: "Since he is sent by the Father to govern his family, a Bishop must keep before his eyes the example of the Good Shepherd who came not to be ministered unto but to minister (cf. Mt 20: 28; Mk 10: 45) and to lay down his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10: 11). Taken from among men, and himself beset with weakness, he is able to have compassion on those who are ignorant and erring (cf. Heb 5: 1-2).

Let him not refuse to listen to his subjects whom he cherishes as his true sons and exhorts to cooperate readily with him. As having ... to render to God an account for their souls to God (cf. Heb 13: 17), he takes care of them by his prayer, preaching and all good works of charity, and not only of them, but also of those who are not yet of the one flock. For these also are commended to him in the Lord. Since, like Paul the Apostle, he is a debtor to all men" (n. 27).

The Bishop's mission cannot be understood with the mentality of efficiency and efficacy, which is why attention should be paid first of all to what is to be done, but it is always necessary to keep in mind the ontological dimension that is at the root of the functional aspect. In fact, the Bishop, through the authority of Christ in which he is clad, when he is seated on his chair he is placed above and "before" the community, since he is "for" the community to which he addresses his pastoral concern (John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores Gregis*, n. 29). The *Regula Pastoralis* of Pope St Gregory the Great that may be considered the first "directory" for Bishops in the history of the Church, describes pastoral government as "the art of arts" (I,1,4), and explains that supreme rule "is ordered well when superiors... smite faults and acknowledge themselves to be on a par with the others" and "presides over vices, rather than over the brethren" (II, 6).

They reflect the explanatory words of the rite of the Investiture of the Ring in the Liturgy of Episcopal Ordination: "Take this ring, the seal of your fidelity. With faith and love protect the bride of God, his Holy Church". The Church is the "bride of Christ" and the Bishop is the "guardian" (*episkopos*) of this mystery. The ring is therefore a sign of fidelity: it is fidelity to the Church and to the purity of the faith in her. To the Bishops, therefore, is entrusted a nuptial covenant: that of the Church with Christ. The words we read in John's Gospel are significant: "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice" (Jn 3: 29). The concept of "guarding" does not only mean preserving what has been established although this element must never be lacking but includes, in its essence, also the dynamic aspect, in other words a perpetual and practical aspiration to perfection, in full harmony and continuous adaptation to the new needs that have arisen from the development and progress of that living organism which is the community.

The Bishop's responsibilities for the good of the diocese, as well as for society, are great. He is called to be "strong and determined, just and serene" (cf. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores*, n. 44), for a sapiential discernment of people, reality and events, required by his task of being "father, brother and friend" (*ibid.*, nn. 76-77) on the Christian and human journey. This is a profound perspective of faith and not merely human, administrative or sociological, into which fits the ministry of the Bishop who is not a mere ruler or a bureaucrat or a simple moderator and organizer of diocesan life. It is fatherhood and brotherhood in Christ which give the person in charge the ability to create an atmosphere of trust, of welcome and of affection but also of frankness and justice. Particularly illuminating in this regard are the words of an ancient prayer by Abbot St Aelred of Rievaulx: "You, O sweet Lord, have

placed one such as me at the head of your family, of the sheep of your flock ... so that your mercy may be made manifest and your wisdom revealed. It has pleased your benevolence to govern your family well through such a man, so that the sublimity of your power may be seen and not that of man, so that the wise may not boast of their wisdom or the just of their justice or the strong of their strength. For when the latter govern your people well, it is not they who sustain them but you. And therefore, O Lord, glorify not us but your Name" (*Speculum Caritatis, PL CXCV*).

In entrusting to you, dear Brothers, these brief reflections, I invoke the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy *Regina Apostolorum*, and I cordially impart to each one of you, to your priests, to the men and women religious, to the seminarians and to the faithful of your dioceses a special Apostolic Blessing.

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