



The Holy See

ORDINARY PUBLIC CONSISTORY FOR THE CREATION OF NEW CARDINALS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Saint Peter's Square
Friday 24 March 2006*

*Venerable Cardinals, Patriarchs and Bishops,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!*

On this vigil of the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, the penitential mood of Lent makes way for the feast: today, the College of Cardinals is to gain fifteen new members. To you in particular, my dear Brothers, whom I have had the joy of raising to the cardinalate, I address a most sincere and cordial greeting, and I thank Cardinal William Joseph Levada for the sentiments and good wishes that he has expressed to me in the name of all of you. I am also pleased to greet the other Cardinals present, the venerable Patriarchs, the Bishops, the priests, the men and women religious and the many lay faithful, especially family members who have come here to honour the new Cardinals in prayer and Christian joy. With special gratitude I welcome the distinguished civil and governmental authorities, representing various nations and institutions. The Ordinary Public Consistory is an event that manifests most eloquently the universal nature of the Church, which has spread to every corner of the world in order to proclaim to all people the Good News of Christ our Saviour. The beloved Pope John Paul II celebrated nine Consistories in all, thus contributing effectively to the renewal of the College of Cardinals along the lines established by the Second Vatican Council and the Servant of God Pope Paul VI. If it is true that down the centuries the College of Cardinals has changed in many ways, nevertheless the substance and essential nature of this important ecclesial body remain unaltered. Its ancient roots, its historical development and its composition today make it truly a kind of "Senate", called to cooperate closely with the Successor of Peter in accomplishing the tasks connected with his universal apostolic

ministry.

The Word of God, which has just been proclaimed to us, takes us back in time. With the Evangelist Mark we return to the very origin of the Church and specifically to the origin of the Petrine ministry. With the eyes of our hearts we see the Lord Jesus once again, to whose praise and glory this act in which we are engaged is totally directed and dedicated. The words he speaks to us recall to our minds the definition of the Roman Pontiff so dear to the heart of Saint Gregory the Great: “*Servus servorum Dei*”. When Jesus explains to the twelve Apostles that their authority will have to be exercised quite differently from that of “the rulers of the Gentiles”, he expresses it in terms of service: “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant (διάκονος), and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (here Jesus uses a stronger word - δουλος. Mk 10:43-44). Total and generous availability to serve others is the distinctive mark of those in positions of authority in the Church, because it was thus for the Son of Man, who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). Although he was God, or one might even say driven by his divinity, he assumed the form of a servant - “*formam servi*” - as is wonderfully expressed in the hymn to Christ contained in the Letter to the Philippians (cf. 2:6-7).

The first “servant of the servants of God” is therefore Jesus. After him, and united with him, come the Apostles; and among these, in a particular way, Peter, to whom the Lord entrusted the responsibility of guiding his flock. The Pope must be the first to make himself the servant of all. Clear testimony to this is found in the first reading of today’s liturgy, which puts before us Peter’s exhortation to the “presbyters” and elders of the community (cf. *1 Pet* 5:1). It is an exhortation given with the authority that comes to the Apostle from the fact that he is a witness of the sufferings of Christ, the Good Shepherd. We sense that Peter’s words come from his personal experience of service to God’s flock, but first and foremost they are derived from direct experience of Jesus’s own behaviour: the way he served to the point of self-sacrifice, the way he humbled himself even unto death, death on a cross, trusting in the Father alone, who subsequently raised him on high. Peter, like Paul, was utterly “conquered” by Christ - “*comprehensus sum a Christo Iesu*” (cf. *Phil* 3:12) - and like Paul he can exhort the elders with full authority because it is no longer he who lives, but Christ lives in him - “*vivo autem iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus*” (*Gal* 2:20).

Yes, venerable and dear Brothers, these words of the Prince of the Apostles apply particularly to those who are called to wear the cardinalatial scarlet: “I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed” (*1 Pet* 5:1). These words, in their essential structure, recall the Paschal Mystery, specially present in our hearts during these days of Lent. Saint Peter applies them to himself as a “fellow elder” (συμπρεσβύτερος), indicating that the elder in the Church, the presbyter, through experience accumulated over the years and through trials faced and overcome, must be particularly “in tune” with the inner dynamic of the Paschal Mystery. How many times, dear

Brothers who have just received the cardinalatial dignity, have you found in these words matter for meditation and a source of spiritual inspiration to follow in the footsteps of the crucified and risen Lord! The demands that your new responsibility places upon you will confirm these words in a new and exacting way. More closely linked to the Successor of Peter, you will be called to work together with him in accomplishing his particular ecclesial service, and this will mean for you a more intense participation in the mystery of the Cross as you share in the sufferings of Christ. All of us are truly witnesses of his sufferings today, in the world and also in the Church, and hence we also have a share in his glory. And so you will be able to draw more abundantly upon the sources of grace and to disseminate their life-giving fruits more effectively to those around you.

Venerable and dear Brothers, I want to sum up the meaning of this new call that you have received in the word which I placed at the heart of my first Encyclical: *caritas*. This matches well the colour of your cardinalatial robes. May the scarlet that you now wear always express the *caritas Christi*, inspiring you to a passionate love for Christ, for his Church and for all humanity. You now have an additional motive to seek to rekindle in yourselves those same sentiments that led the incarnate Son of God to pour out his blood in atonement for the sins of the whole world. I am counting on you, venerable Brothers, I am counting on the entire College into which you are being incorporated, to proclaim to the world that “Deus caritas est”, and to do so above all through the witness of sincere communion among Christians: “By this”, said Jesus, “all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (*Jn 13:35*). I am counting on you, dear Brother Cardinals, to ensure that the principle of love will spread far and wide, and will give new life to the Church at every level of her hierarchy, in every group of the faithful, in every religious Institute, in every spiritual, apostolic or humanitarian initiative. I am counting on you to see to it that our common endeavour to fix our gaze on Christ’s open Heart will hasten and secure our path towards the full unity of Christians. I am counting on you to see to it that the Church’s solicitude for the poor and needy challenges the world with a powerful statement on the civilization of love. All this I see symbolized in the scarlet with which you are now invested. May it truly be a symbol of ardent Christian love shining forth in your lives.

I entrust this my prayer into the maternal hands of the Holy Virgin of Nazareth, source of the life-blood which the Son of God was to pour out on the Cross as the supreme expression of his love. In the mystery of the Annunciation which we are about to celebrate, it is revealed to us that the divine Word was made flesh through the action of the Holy Spirit and came to dwell among us. Through Mary’s intercession, may the Spirit of truth and love be poured out abundantly upon the new Cardinals and upon us all, so that as we become ever more fully conformed to Christ, we may dedicate ourselves tirelessly to building up the Church and to spreading the Gospel in the world.

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana