



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF
ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE AT TORRINO

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Sunday, 4 March 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

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Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Parish of St John Baptist de La Salle,

First of all I would like to say a heartfelt thank you for this most cordial and warm welcome. I am grateful to the good Parish Priest for his beautiful words, and for the spirit of familiarity that I am encountering. We really are a family of God and the fact that you also see the Pope as a father is something very lovely that encourages me! However we must now remember that the Pope is not the highest authority to appeal to. The highest is the Lord and let us look to the Lord in order to perceive, to understand — as far as we can — something of the message of this Second Sunday of Lent.

Today's liturgy prepares us both for the mystery of the Passion — as we heard in the First Reading — and for the joy of the Resurrection.

The First Reading refers us to the episode in which God puts Abraham to the test (cf. Gen 22:1-18). He had an only son, Isaac, who was born to him in his old age. He was the son of the promise, the son who would also bring salvation to the peoples. Nevertheless one day Abraham received from God the order to sacrifice him as an offering.

The elderly patriarch found himself facing the prospect of a sacrifice which for him, as a father, was without any doubt the greatest imaginable. Yet not even for a moment did he hesitate and

having made the necessary preparations, he set out with Isaac for the arranged place.

And we can imagine this journey toward the mountaintop, and what happened in his own heart and in his son's. He builds an altar, lays the wood upon it and having bound the boy, grasps the knife, ready to sacrifice him. Abraham trusts totally in God, to the point of being ready even to sacrifice his own son and, with his son the future, for without a child the promised land was as nothing, ends in nothing. And in sacrificing his son he is sacrificing himself, his whole future, the whole of the promise. It really is the most radical act of faith. At that very moment he is restrained by an order from on high: God does not want death, but life, the true sacrifice does not bring death but life, and Abraham's obedience became the source of an immense blessing to this day. Let us end here now, but we can meditate upon this mystery.

In the Second Reading, St Paul says that God himself has made a sacrifice: he has given us his own Son, he gave him on the Cross to triumph over sin and death, to triumph over the Evil One and to overcome all the evil that exists in the world. And God's extraordinary mercy inspires the Apostle's admiration and profound trust in the power of God's love for us; indeed, St Paul says: "He [God] who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom 8:32).

If God gives himself in the Son, he gives us everything. And Paul insists on the power of Christ's redeeming sacrifice against every other force that can threaten our life.

He wonders: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us?" (vv. 33-34).

We are in God's heart, this is our great trust. This creates love and in love we go towards God. If God has given his own Son for all of us, no one can accuse us, no one can condemn us, no one can separate us from his immense love. Precisely the supreme sacrifice of love on the Cross, which the Son of God accepted and chose willingly, becomes the source of our justification, of our salvation. Just think that this act of the Lord's endures in the Blessed Eucharist, and in his heart, for eternity, and this act of love attracts us, unites us with him.

Lastly, the Gospel speaks to us of the episode of the Transfiguration (cf. Mk 9:2-10): Jesus manifests himself in his glory before the sacrifice of the Cross and God the Father proclaims his beloved Son, the one he loves, and commands the disciples to listen to him. Jesus goes up a high mountain and takes three Apostles with him — Peter, James and John — who will be particularly close to him in his extreme agony, on another mountain, the Mount of Olives.

A little earlier the Lord had announced his Passion and Peter had been unable to understand why the Lord, the Son of God, should speak of suffering, rejection, death, a Cross, indeed he had

opposed the prospect of all this with determination.

Jesus now takes the three disciples with him to help them to understand that the path to attaining glory, the path of luminous love that overcomes darkness, passes through the total gift of self, passes through the folly of the Cross. And the Lord must take us with him too ever anew, at least if we are to begin to understand that this is the route to take.

The Transfiguration is a moment of light in advance, which also helps us see Christ's Passion with a gaze of faith. Indeed, it is a mystery of suffering but it is also the "blessed Passion" because — in essence — it is a mystery of God's extraordinary love; it is the definitive exodus that opens for us the door to the freedom and newness of the Resurrection, of salvation from evil. We need it on our daily journey, so often also marked by the darkness of evil.

Dear brothers and sisters, as I have said, I am very happy to be with you today to celebrate the Lord's Day. I cordially greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary Bishop of the Sector, Fr Giampaolo Perugini, your parish priest, whom I thank once again for his kind words on behalf of you all and also for the pleasing gifts you have offered me.

I greet the Parochial Vicars. And I greet the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who have been here for so many years. They deserve praise for having fostered the life of this parish, because their house immediately offered generous hospitality to it, during the first three years of its life.

I then extend my greeting to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who are naturally attached to this parish church dedicated to their Founder. I greet in addition all those who are active in the parish context. I am referring to the catechists, the members of the associations and movements, as well as the various parish groups. Lastly I would like to embrace in spirit all the inhabitants of the district, and especially the elderly, the sick, and people who are lonely or in difficulty.

In coming to you today I noticed the special position of this church, set at the highest point in the district and endowed with a slender spire, as if it were a finger or an arrow pointing towards heaven. It seems to me that this is an important indication: like the three Apostles of the Gospel, we also need to climb the mountain of the Transfiguration to receive God's light, so that his Face may illuminate our face. And it is in personal and community prayer that we encounter the Lord, not as an idea or a moral proposal but, rather, as a Person who wishes to enter into a relationship with us, who wants to be a friend and to renew our life to make it like his.

This encounter is not solely a personal event; your church, set at the highest point in the neighbourhood, reminds you that the Gospel must be communicated and proclaimed to all. We do not expect others to bring different messages, that do not lead to true life. Make yourselves missionaries of Christ to your brothers and sisters wherever they live, work, study or just spend

their leisure time.

I know about the many important evangelization projects that you undertake, in particular through the after-school prayer and recreation centre called “Pole-star” — I am also glad to wear this shirt (the centre’s shirt) — where, thanks to the volunteer work of competent and generous people and the involvement of families, the gathering of young people through sports is encouraged, without however neglecting their cultural formation, through art and music. Above all the relationship with God, the Christian values and an increasingly aware participation in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration, are inculcated in them here.

I rejoice that the sense of belonging to the parish community has continued to develop and been consolidated down the years. Faith must be lived together and the parish is a place in which we learn to live our own faith in the “we” of the Church. And I would like to encourage you to promote pastoral co-responsibility too, in a perspective of authentic communion among all the realities present, which are called to walk together, to live complementarity in diversity, to witness to the “we” of the Church, of God’s family.

I know how committed you are in preparing the children and young people for the sacraments of Christian life. May the upcoming “Year of Faith” be a favourable opportunity also for this parish to increase and to reinforce the experience of catechesis on the great truths of the Christian faith, so as to enable the whole neighbourhood to know and to deepen its knowledge of the Church’s Creed, and to surmount that “religious illiteracy” which is one of the greatest difficulties of our day.

Dear friend, yours is a young community — it is made up of young families and, thanks be to God, of the numerous children and youth who live in it. In this regard, I would like to recall the task of the family and of the entire Christian community to educate in faith, assisted in this by the theme of the current Pastoral Year, by the Pastoral Guidelines proposed by the Italian Episcopal Conference and without forgetting the profound and ever up to date teaching of St John Baptist de La Salle.

You in particular, dear families, are the environment in which the first steps of faith are taken; may you be communities in which one learns to know and love the Lord more and more, communities in which each enriches the other in order to live a truly adult faith.

Lastly, I would like to remind all of you of the importance and centrality of the Eucharist in personal and community life. May the heart of your Sunday be Holy Mass which should be rediscovered and lived as a day of God and of the community, a day on which to praise and celebrate the One who died and was raised for our salvation, a day on which to live together the joy of an open community, ready to receive every person who is lonely or in difficulty.

Indeed, gathered around the Eucharist in fact, we more easily realize that the mission of every

Christian community is to bring the message of God's love to everyone. This is why it is important that the Eucharist always be at the heart of the faithful's life, just as it is today.

Dear brothers and sisters, from Mount Tabor, the mountain of the Transfiguration, the Lenten journey takes us to Golgotha, the hill of the supreme sacrifice of love of the one Priest of the new and eternal Covenant. That sacrifice contains the greatest power of transformation of both the human being and of history. Taking upon himself every consequence of evil and sin, Jesus rose the third day as the conqueror of death and of the Evil One. Lent prepares us to take part personally in this great mystery of faith which we shall celebrate in the Triduum of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Christ.

Let us entrust our Lenten journey and likewise that of the whole Church to the Virgin Mary. May she, who followed her Son Jesus to the Cross, help us to be faithful disciples of Christ, mature Christians, to be able to share with her in the fullness of Easter joy. Amen!

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