



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE MILLENNIUM
OF THE CATHEDRAL OF BAMBERG**

*To my Venerable Brother
Archbishop Ludwig Schick of Bamberg*

I learned with joy that in these days the Archdiocese of Bamberg is celebrating the 1,000th anniversary of its Imperial Cathedral. I gladly join in your festive joy, Your Excellency, and that of the Most Rev. Auxiliary Bishop, the priests, deacons and religious, as well as all the faithful and convey to you all my cordial good wishes and my blessing.

The lofty Cathedral of Bamberg combines power and beauty in an extraordinary testimony of the faith from whose spirit and strength this sublime house of God was born. The solemn celebration of the millennium of its consecration, in which, I am deeply involved in spirit, can become for the Archdiocese of Bamberg a prelude to the Year of Faith which I have proclaimed for the whole Church. The celebration will serve to encourage you all, priests and faithful, to rediscover and deepen the faith to which your splendid cathedral testifies, rising as a testimony of stone in the heart of the episcopal city and of Franconia. I would thus like to invite you to pay a mental visit to this house of God, to listen to the silent yet impressive message it proclaims to us without words.

What distinguishes a cathedral from all other churches is the bishop's chair [cathedra], set in a prominent position. The word "cathedral" comes from this term. The cathedra is not a throne; rather, it is a pulpit for teaching; from here the bishop's words are disseminated. Bishops, moreover, as successors of the Apostles, are such by divine institution as the Second Vatican Council teaches: "who have by divine institution taken the place of the Apostles as pastors of the Church" (*Lumen Gentium* n. 20). The bishop, as a teacher of the Catholic truth, guarantees the unity of the diocese, of its priests and of its faithful, and strictly in harmony with the community of faith of the universal Church which embraces space and time.

Advancing, we come to the altar. It is the centre of the Cathedral. The altar, that is, the sacred place on which the Eucharistic sacrifice is offered, where the passion, death and Resurrection are made present anew every day. "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20), Jesus promised. With special intensity the Church rejoices in this presence in the Eucharist, "the source and summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 11). This source rises from the altar and from here its life-giving spring flows into the entire diocese. Further, it is in front of this altar that the bishop lays his hands on the young men he sends into the communities as priests. It is here that the sacred oils are consecrated — of Chrism, of the Catechumens and of the Sick — with which the sacraments are administered throughout the archdiocese, of which this altar is truly the heart.

From here, the true, hidden nature of the Church shines out for us. Although she constitutes a community made up of people, she is at the same time a divine mystery. The Body of Christ, the house of God, is what Sacred Scripture calls her. The Church of Jesus Christ is not simply made up of group interests, a common enterprise, in short, a form of human society which could thus be shaped and guided in accordance with age-old political rules or with temporal means. A man called to serve the Church is not an official of the community but receives his office and mandate from Jesus Christ, Head of his Mystical Body. It is Christ himself who unites the faithful in a unity that is full of life.

Let us then pause in front of the extraordinary funerary monument of St Henry and St Kunigunda (or St Cunegonde), a work by Riemenschneider. In them we find Christians, to us exemplary, who from the sacraments of Baptism to Confirmation and Matrimony, received the mandate and mission to serve the Kingdom of God in the world. May you recognize in this pair of reigning saints, dear brothers and sisters, what it means to live as Christians in the world and to shape it in accordance with Christ's spirit. The imperial couple's tomb and likewise the tomb of King Konrad III are an appeal to you to make the word of the Gospel heard in the family, in the work place, in society, in the economy and in culture and to model earthly realities in accordance with its spirit.

Lastly, your cathedral preserves the tomb of Pope Clement II. Even after his election as Successor of Peter, Pope Clement wished to remain Bishop of Bamberg, thereby giving a remarkable proof of Bamberg's unity with Rome. From this tomb too a message comes. It is an echo of those words which the Lord once addressed to Peter and, through him, to all his successors: You are Peter, "on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18). These words are a reminder that your Archdiocese of Bamberg is built on this rock. Even in the current crisis of faith, in close communion with the Successor of the Apostle Peter and of the universal Church you will find proven faith and steadfast trust.

The cathedra of the bishop, the altar and the tombs of the patron saints of your diocese, as well as those of a Pope and of a king, have passed on their message in our time, as do the stout walls of the cathedral that preserve these sacred places. They are walls that have stood up to the storms of a millennium. And against them the waves of ideologies hostile to God and to the men of the

last century, broke. The house was and continues to be built on the rock.

Lastly, there are the four towers of the Imperial Cathedral that soar heavenward. They point to the destination of the Church's pilgrimage, as the motto of the cathedral's Jubilee says: "Heavenward". And it is in this direction that the Jubilee also wishes to draw the Church in Bamberg, all the faithful and visitors to the cathedral: "towards heaven".

Being well acquainted with this house on the rock, dear brothers and sisters, can strengthen you in the certainty that the Lord does not abandon his Church nor will he in the future, however difficult it may be. In the Church, in which the 1,000-year-old cathedral is a powerful symbol, future generations of Catholic faithful will also find the homeland of their heart, as well as protection.

May Mary, Mother of Our Lord, whom you proudly and joyfully call the "Duchess of Franconia", and Henry and Kunigunda, the holy patron saints of the diocese, continue to stretch out their protective hands over the cathedral, the city, the archdiocese and the whole of Franconia! With this wish, I warmly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

From the Vatican, 3 May 2012, Feast of the Apostles Philip and James

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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