



The Holy See

***MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOP OF TRIER (FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY)
FOR THE START OF THE PILGRIMAGE TO THE "HOLY GARMENT," CELEBRATING THE 5TH
CENTENARY
OF ITS PUBLIC EXPOSITION (CATHEDRAL OF TRIER, 13 APRIL 2012)***

*To my Venerable Brother
Stephan Ackermann
Bishop of Trier*

The exposition of the Holy Garment is taking place in these days in the great Cathedral of Trier, exactly five hundred years after its first public exposition at the initiative of Archbishop Richard von Greiffenklau, complying with the wishes of the Emperor Maximilian I, with the opening of the high altar. On this special occasion, I too am a pilgrim, in thought, to the ancient and venerable episcopal city of Trier, in a certain sense to join the ranks of the faithful who will take part in the pilgrimage to the Holy Garment in the coming weeks. I would like to assure you, Your Excellency, my Brother Bishops in the episcopal ministry present here, the priests and deacons, the men and women religious and all those who have come to the Cathedral of Trier for the beginning of the pilgrimage of the fraternal closeness of the Successor of Peter.

Since the first exposition in the 1512, the Holy Garment has attracted the faithful because this relic makes present one of the most dramatic moments of Jesus' earthly life, his death on the Cross. In this context the division of the garments of the Crucified One by the soldiers may appear to be merely a secondary episode, to which the Synoptic Gospels allude only in passing. The Evangelist John, however, dwells on this event with a certain solemnity. It is the only mention to the garment which "was without seam, woven from top to bottom" (19:23). He explains the event to us and helps us, thanks to the relic, to look with faith to the Mystery of Salvation.

The garment, as John tells us, was seamless. The soldiers who, according to Roman custom, shared out the poor things of the Crucified One among themselves as booty, since they did not

want to tear the tunic. They cast lots for it and thus it remained whole. The Fathers of the Church see in this passage the unity of the Church, founded as one indivisible community on the love of Christ. The Holy Garment intends to make all of this visible. The Saviour's love reunites what is divided. The Church is one in many. Christ does not abolish the plurality of men, but unites them in being Christians for and with others so that they themselves may become intercessors, in various ways, for others toward God.

Christ's garment is "woven from top to bottom" (Jn 19:23). This too is an image of the Church that does not live of herself but by God. Like a unique and indivisible community, she is the work of God, not the product of human beings and their skills. At the same time, the Holy Garment must be, as it were, a warning for the Church so that she remains faithful to her origins and become aware that her unity, her consensus, her effectiveness, her witness can be essentially created only from above, can be given only by God. Only when Peter acknowledged: "You are the Christ" (Mt 16: 16), did he receive the power to bind and absolve, therefore, the service favouring the unity of the Church.

Finally the Holy Garment is not a toga, an elegant robe which expresses a role in society. It is a modest garment which serves to cover and protect he who wears it, maintaining his privacy. This garment is an undivided gift of the Crucified One to the Church, which he sanctified with his Blood. Thus the Holy Garment recalls the dignity proper to the Church. But how often do we see how fragile are the vessels (cf. 2 Cor 4:7) the treasure that the Lord entrusted to us in his Church? And how, due to our selfishness, our weaknesses and mistakes, the integrity of the Body of Christ is wounded? There is a need for constant openness to conversion and humility, in order to follow the Lord with love and truth. At the same time, the particular dignity and integrity of the Church cannot be exposed and subjected to the public's noisy, summary judgement.

The Jubilee Pilgrimage has as its motto an invocation to the Lord: "Restore unity to what is divided". We do not want to remain in isolation. We desire to call upon the Lord to guide us on the common journey of faith and to make its content active in us again. And so, growing together as Christians in faith, prayer and witness, in the midst of the trials of our time, we can recognize the munificence and goodness of the Lord. For this reason, to you and to all those who are taking part in the pilgrimage to the Holy Garment in Trier in these weeks of celebration, I impart my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, Good Friday, 6 April 2012

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI
