



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO AUSTRIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 850th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE SHRINE OF MARIAZELL

**VESPERS WITH PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS,
DEACONS AND SEMINARIANS**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Shrine of Mariazell
Saturday, 8 September 2007

Venerable and dear Brothers in the Priestly Ministry,
Dear Men and Women of Consecrated Life,
Dear Friends,

We have come together in the venerable Basilica of our *Magna Mater Austriae* in Mariazell. For many generations people have come to pray here to obtain the help of the Mother of God. We too are doing the same today. We want to join Mary in praising God's immense goodness and in expressing our gratitude to the Lord for all the blessings we have received, especially the great gift of the faith. We also wish to commend to Mary our heartfelt concerns: to beg her protection for the Church, to invoke her intercession for the gift of worthy vocations for Dioceses and religious communities, to implore her assistance for families and her merciful prayers for all those longing for freedom from sin and for the grace of conversion, and, finally, to entrust to Mary's maternal care our sick and our elderly. May the great Mother of Austria and of Europe bring all of us to a profound renewal of faith and life!

Dear friends, as priests, and as men and women religious, you are servants of the mission of

Jesus Christ. Just as two thousand years ago Jesus called people to follow him, today too young men and women are setting out at his call, attracted by him and moved by a desire to devote their lives to serving the Church and helping others. They have the courage to follow Christ, and they want to be his witnesses. Being a follower of Christ is full of risks, since we are constantly threatened by sin, lack of freedom and defection. Consequently, we all need his grace, just as Mary received it in its fullness. We learn to look always, like Mary, to Christ, and to make him our criterion and measure. Thus we can participate in the universal saving mission of the Church, of which he is the head. The Lord calls priests, religious and lay people to go into the world, in all its complexity, and to cooperate in the building up of God's Kingdom. They do this in a great variety of ways: in preaching, in building communities, in the different pastoral ministries, in the practical exercise of charity, in research and scientific study carried out in an apostolic spirit, in dialogue with the surrounding culture, in promoting the justice willed by God and, in no less measure, in the recollected contemplation of the triune God and the common praise of God in their communities.

The Lord invites you to join the Church "on her pilgrim way through history". He is inviting you to become pilgrims with him and to share in his life which today too includes both the way of the Cross and the way of the Risen One through the Galilee of our existence. But he remains always one and the same Lord who, through the one Baptism, calls us to the one faith. Taking part in his journey thus means both things: the dimension of the Cross – with failure, suffering, misunderstanding and even contempt and persecution – , but also the experience of profound joy in his service and of the great consolation born of an encounter with him. Like the Church, individual parishes, communities and all baptized Christians find in their experience of the crucified and risen Christ the source of their mission.

At the heart of the mission of Jesus Christ and of every Christian is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Proclaiming the Kingdom in the name of Christ means for the Church, for priests, men and women religious, and for all the baptized, a commitment to be present in the world as his witnesses. The Kingdom of God is really God himself, who makes himself present in our midst and reigns through us. The Kingdom of God is built up when God lives in us and we bring God into the world. You do so when you testify to a "meaning" rooted in God's creative love and opposed to every kind of meaninglessness and despair. You stand alongside all those who are earnestly striving to discover this meaning, alongside all those who want to make something positive of their lives. By your prayer and intercession, you are the advocates of all who seek God, who are journeying towards God. You bear witness to a hope which, against every form of hopelessness, silent or spoken, points to the fidelity and the loving concern of God. Hence you are on the side of those who are crushed by misfortune and cannot break free of their burdens. You bear witness to that Love which gives itself for humanity and thus conquered death. You are on the side of all who have never known love, and who are no longer able to believe in life. And so you stand against all forms of injustice, hidden or apparent, and against a growing contempt for man. In this way, dear brothers and sisters, your whole life needs to be, like that of John the Baptist, a great, living witness to Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. Jesus called John "a burning and shining lamp"

(*Jn 5:35*). You too must be such lamps! Let your light shine in our society, in political and economic life, in culture and research. Even if it is only a flicker amid so many deceptive lights, it nonetheless draws its power and splendour from the great Morning Star, the Risen Christ, whose light shines brilliantly – wants to shine brilliantly through us – and will never fade.

Following Christ – we want to follow him – following Christ means taking on ever more fully his mind and his way of life; this is what the Letter to the Philippians tells us: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ!” (cf. 2:5). “To Look to Christ” is the theme of these days. In looking to him, the great Teacher of life, the Church has discerned three striking features of Jesus’ basic attitude. These three features – with the Tradition we call them the “evangelical counsels” – have become the distinctive elements of a life committed to the radical following of Christ: poverty, chastity and obedience. Let us reflect now briefly on them.

Jesus Christ, who was rich with the very richness of God, became poor for our sake, as Saint Paul tells us in the Second Letter to the Corinthians (cf. 8:9); this is an unfathomable statement, one to which we should always return for further reflection. And in the Letter to the Philippians we read: He emptied himself; he humbled himself and became obedient even to death on a Cross (cf. 2:6ff.) The one who himself became poor, called the poor “blessed”. Saint Luke, in his version of the Beatitudes, makes us understand that this statement – calling the poor blessed – certainly refers to the poor, the truly poor, in Israel at that time, where a sharp distinction existed between rich and poor. But Saint Matthew, in his version of the Beatitudes, explains to us that material poverty alone is not enough to ensure God’s closeness, since the heart can be hard and filled with lust for riches. Matthew – like all of Scripture – lets us understand that in any case God is particularly close to the poor. So it becomes evident: in the poor Christians see the Christ who awaits them, who awaits their commitment. Anyone who wants to follow Christ in a radical way must renounce material goods. But he or she must live this poverty in a way centred on Christ, as a means of becoming inwardly free for their neighbour. For all Christians, but especially for us priests, and for religious, both as individuals and in community, the issue of poverty and the poor must be the object of a constant and serious examination of conscience. In our own situation, in which we are not badly off, we are not poor, I think that we ought to reflect particularly on how we can live out this calling in a sincere way. I would like to recommend it for your – for our – examination of conscience.

To understand correctly the meaning of chastity, we must start with its positive content. Once again, we find this only by looking to Christ. Jesus’ life had a two-fold direction: he lived for the Father and for others. In sacred Scripture we see Jesus as a man of prayer, one who spends entire nights in dialogue with the Father. Through his prayer, he made his own humanity, and the humanity of us all, part of his filial relation to the Father. This dialogue with the Father thus became a constantly-renewed mission to the world, to us. Jesus’ mission led him to a pure and unreserved commitment to men and women. Sacred Scripture shows that at no moment of his life did he betray even the slightest trace of self-interest or selfishness in his relationship with others.

Jesus loved others in the Father, starting from the Father – and thus he loved them in their true being, in their reality. Entering into these sentiments of Jesus Christ – in this total communion with the living God and in this completely pure communion with others, unreservedly at their disposition – this entering into the mind of Christ inspired in Paul a theology and a way of life consonant with Jesus' words about celibacy for the Kingdom of heaven (cf. *Mt 19:12*). Priests and religious are not aloof from interpersonal relationships. Chastity, on the contrary, means – and this is where I wished to start – an intense relationship; it is, positively speaking, a relationship with the living Christ and, on the basis of that, with the Father. Consequently, by the vow of celibate chastity we do not consecrate ourselves to individualism or a life of isolation; instead, we solemnly promise to put completely and unreservedly at the service of God's Kingdom – and thus at the service of others - the deep relationships of which we are capable and which we receive as a gift. In this way priests and religious become men and women of hope: staking everything on God and thus showing that God for them is something real, they open up a space for his presence – the presence of God's Kingdom – in our world. Dear priests and religious, you have an important contribution to make: amid so much greed, possessiveness, consumerism and the cult of the individual, we strive to show selfless love for men and women. We are living lives of hope, a hope whose fulfilment we leave in God's hands, because we believe that he will fulfil it. What might have happened had the history of Christianity lacked such outstanding figures and examples? What would our world be like, if there were no priests, if there were no men and women in religious congregations and communities of consecrated life – people whose lives testify to the hope of a fulfilment beyond every human desire and an experience of the love of God which transcends all human love? Precisely today, the world needs our witness.

We now come to obedience. Jesus lived his entire life, from the hidden years in Nazareth to the very moment of his death on the Cross in listening to the Father, in obedience to the Father. We see this in an exemplary way at Gethsemane. "Not my will, but yours be done". In this prayer Jesus takes up into his filial will the stubborn resistance of us all, and transforms our rebelliousness into his obedience. Jesus was a man of prayer. But at the same time he was also someone who knew how to listen and to obey: he became "obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (*Phil 2:8*). Christians have always known from experience that, in abandoning themselves to the will of the Father, they lose nothing, but instead discover in this way their deepest identity and interior freedom. In Jesus they have discovered that those who lose themselves find themselves, and those who bind themselves in an obedience grounded in God and inspired by the search for God, become free. Listening to God and obeying him has nothing to do with external constraint and the loss of oneself. Only by entering into God's will do we attain our true identity. Our world today needs the testimony of this experience precisely because of its desire for "self-realization" and "self-determination".

Romano Guardini relates in his autobiography how, at a critical moment on his journey, when the faith of his childhood was shaken, the fundamental decision of his entire life – his conversion – came to him through an encounter with the saying of Jesus that only the one who loses himself

finds himself (cf. *Mk* 8:34ff.; *Jn* 12:25); without self-surrender, without self-loss, there can be no self-discovery or self-realization. But then the question arose: to what extent it is proper to lose myself? To whom can I give myself? It became clear to him that we can surrender ourselves completely only if by doing so we fall into the hands of God. Only in him, in the end, can we lose ourselves and only in him can we find ourselves. But then the question arose: Who is God? Where is God? Then he came to understand that the God to whom we can surrender ourselves is alone the God who became tangible and close to us in Jesus Christ. But once more the question arose: Where do I find Jesus Christ? How can I truly give myself to him? The answer Guardini found after much searching was this: Jesus is concretely present to us only in his Body, the Church. As a result, obedience to God's will, obedience to Jesus Christ, must be, really and practically, humble obedience to the Church. I think that this too is something calling us to a constant and deep examination of conscience. It is all summed up in the prayer of Saint Ignatius of Loyola – a prayer which always seems to me so overwhelming that I am almost afraid to say it, yet one which, for all its difficulty, we should always repeat: "Take O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will. All that I have and all that I possess you have given me: I surrender it all to you; it is all yours, dispose of it according to your will. Give me only your love and your grace; with these I will be rich enough and will desire nothing more".

Dear brothers and sisters! You are about to return to those places where you live and carry out your ecclesial, pastoral, spiritual and human activity. May Mary, our great Advocate and Mother, watch over and protect you and your work. May she intercede for you with her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank you for your prayers and your labours in the Lord's vineyard, and I join you in praying that God will protect and bless all of you, and everyone, particularly the young people, both here in Austria and in the various countries from which many of you have come. With affection I accompany all of you with my blessing.

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