



The Holy See

CONCLUSION OF THE ANNUAL LENTEN SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

"Redemptoris Mater" Chapel

Saturday, 16 February 2008

Dear Brothers,

At the end of these Spiritual Exercises I would like to say heartfelt thanks to you, Your Eminence, for your spiritual guidance offered with such theological competence and with such spiritual depth. From my line of vision, I have always had before my eyes the image of Jesus on his knees before St Peter to watch his feet. Through your meditations this image has spoken to me. I have seen that exactly here, in this behaviour, in this act of extreme humility, the new priesthood of Jesus is realized. It is fulfilled exactly in the act of solidarity with us, with our weaknesses, our suffering, our trials, even to death. Thus, in a new way, I have also seen Jesus' red garments, which speak to us of his blood. You, Your Eminence, have taught us how Jesus' blood was, because of his prayer, "oxygenated" by the Holy Spirit. And thus it became the power of the Resurrection and the font of life for us.

I could also not fail to meditate deeply on the figure of St Peter. It is the moment when he asked the Lord to wash not only his feet but also his head and hands. It seems to me to express, beyond that moment, the difficulty of St Peter and all the Lord's disciples to understand the surprising novelty of Jesus' priesthood, this priesthood which is precisely abasement, solidarity with us, and thus allows our access to the true sanctuary, Jesus' risen body.

It seems to me that throughout his time of discipleship, even until his own crucifixion, St Peter always had to listen anew to Jesus, to enter more profoundly into the mystery of his priesthood, of Christ's priesthood communicated to the Apostles and their successors.

In this sense the figure of Peter appears to me like the image of all of us in these days. You, Your Eminence, have helped us to listen to the Lord's voice so as to learn anew what his and our priesthood is. You have helped us to enter into participation in Christ's priesthood and therefore also to receive a new heart, Jesus' Heart, as the centre of the mystery of the new covenant.

Thank you for all this, Your Eminence. Your words and meditations will accompany us in this Season of Lent in our journey toward the Lord's Passover. In this sense I wish all of you, dear brothers, a good, spiritually fruitful Lent, so that we can truly reach Easter with an ever deeper participation in our Lord's priesthood.