



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MEMBERS OF THE NEOCATECHUMENAL WAY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 40th ANNIVERSARY
OF ITS ORIGINS IN ROME**

St Peter's Basilica

Saturday, 10 January 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With great joy I welcome you who have come in such large numbers today, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the Neocatechumenal Way in Rome, which currently numbers a good 500 communities. My cordial greeting to you all. In a special way I greet the Cardinal Vicar Agostino Vallini, as well as Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko, President of the [Pontifical Council for the Laity](#), who has followed the process for the approval of your Statutes with dedication. I greet those in charge of the Neocatechumenal Way: Mr Kiko Argüello, whom I cordially thank for his words expressing all of your sentiments, I greet Mrs Carmen Hernández and I greet Fr Mario Pezzi. I greet the communities who set out to the neediest suburbs of Rome to do mission work, those who depart for the "*missio ad gentes*" on the five continents, the 200 new itinerant families and the 700 itinerant catechists responsible for the Neocatechumenal Way in the various nations. Thank you to all. May the Lord accompany you.

Significantly, this meeting of ours is taking place in the Vatican Basilica, built on the tomb of the Apostle Peter. It was he himself, Prince of the Apostles who, in response to the question that Jesus addressed to the Twelve concerning his identity, fervently confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Mt 16: 16). You are gathered here today to renew this same profession of faith. Your presence, so numerous and so lively, testifies to the miracles worked by the Lord in the past four decades. It also demonstrates the commitment with which you intend to persevere on the journey you have begun, a journey of following Christ faithfully and of courageous witness to his Gospel, not only here in Rome but wherever Providence leads you a way of docile adherence to the Pastors' directives and of communion with all the other members of the People of God. You

intend to do this being well aware that helping the people of our time to encounter Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, is what constitutes the mission of the Church and of every baptized person. The "Neocatechumenal Way" fits into this ecclesial mission as one of the many ways inspired by the Holy Spirit with the [Second Vatican Council](#) for the new evangelization.

It all began here in Rome, 40 years ago, when the first communities of the Neocatechumenal Way were established in the Roman Parish of the Holy Canadian Martyrs. How can we not praise the Lord for the spiritual fruits that it has been possible to gather in these years through your method of evangelization? How many fresh apostolic energies have been inspired, among both priests and lay people! How many men and women and how many families who had drifted away from the ecclesial community or had abandoned the practice of Christian life through the proclamation of the *kerygma* and the process of the rediscovery of Baptism have been helped to rediscover the joy of faith and the enthusiasm of Gospel witness! The recent approval of the Statutes of the Way by the Pontifical Council for the Laity has sealed the esteem and benevolence with which the Holy See follows the work that the Lord has inspired through your Initiators. The Pope, Bishop of Rome, thanks you for the generous service you offer to the evangelization of this City and for the dedication with which you work to bring the Christian proclamation into every environment thanks to all of you.

Your apostolic action, already very praiseworthy, will be all the more effective to the extent that you strive to constantly cultivate that yearning for unity which Jesus communicated to the Twelve during the Last Supper. As we have heard in the first song, before the Passion our Redeemer prayed intensely that his disciples all would be one so that the world would be impelled to believe in him (cf. Jn 17: 21) because this unity can come only by the power of God. It is this unity, a gift of the Holy Spirit and a ceaseless quest of believers, which makes each community a living structure that is well integrated into the Mystical Body of Christ. The unity of the Lord's disciples is part of the very essence of the Church and is an indispensable condition for its evangelizing action to be both fruitful and credible. I know with how much zeal the communities of the Neocatechumenal Way are working in at least 103 Roman parishes. As I encourage you to continue in this commitment, I urge you to intensify your adherence to all of the directives of the Cardinal Vicar, my direct collaborator in the pastoral government of the Diocese. Thank you for your "yes" that obviously comes from the heart. The organic insertion of the "Way" into the pastoral work of the Diocese and its unity with other ecclesial realities will prove beneficial to the entire Christian people and make the Diocese's effort for a renewed proclamation of the Gospel in this our city more effective. Actually today a vast missionary movement is necessary. It must involve the different ecclesial bodies which, while each retains the originality of its own charism, work in harmony, seeking to achieve that "integrated pastoral action" which has already made significant results possible. And you, placing yourselves at full disposal to the Bishop's service as your Statutes recall will be able to serve as an example for many local Churches that rightly look to that of Rome as a reference model.

There is another spiritual fruit that has matured in these 40 years for which I would like to thank Divine Providence together with you: it is the large number of priests and consecrated people which the Lord as Kiko has mentioned has inspired in your communities. Many priests are engaged in the parishes and in other fields of the diocesan apostolate, and many are the itinerant missionaries in various nations. They are carrying out a generous service to the Church of Rome and the Church of Rome renders an invaluable service to evangelization in the world. It is a true "springtime of hope" for the diocesan community of Rome and for the universal Church! I thank the Rector and his collaborators in Rome's *Redemptoris Mater* Seminary for their educational work. Their task is far from easy but is very important for the Church's future. I therefore encourage them to continue with this mission, adopting the formational approaches proposed both by the Holy See and by the Dioceses. The goal of all formators should be to prepare priests who are well integrated into the diocesan presbyterate and into both parochial and diocesan pastoral ministry.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Gospel passage that has been proclaimed has reminded us of the challenges and conditions of the apostolic mission. Jesus' words, recorded by the Evangelist St Matthew, resound as an invitation not to be discouraged in the face of difficulties, not to seek human success and not to fear misunderstandings or even persecutions. Rather, they are an encouragement to place one's trust in Christ's power, to take up one's "own cross" and to follow in the footsteps of our Redeemer who, in this Christmas Season now nearing its end, appeared to us in the humility and poverty of Bethlehem. May the Holy Virgin, model of every disciple of Christ and a "house of blessing" as you have sung, help you to carry out joyfully and faithfully the mandate that the Church confidently entrusts to you. As I thank you for your service to the Church of Rome, I assure you of my prayers and I warmly bless you who are present here and all the communities of the Neocatechumenal Way scattered in all the world.

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