



The Holy See

SECOND SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

(OCTOBER, 4-25, 2009)

***REFLECTION OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
DURING THE FIRST GENERAL CONGREGATION***

Synod Hall, Hour of Terce

Monday, 5 October 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With the invocation of the Holy Spirit we have now begun our Synodal Meeting, knowing full well that we cannot do at this moment what needs to be done for the Church and for the world: only with the power of the Holy Spirit can we discover what is right and put it into practice. And every day we shall start by invoking the Holy Spirit with the prayer of the Hour of Terce: "*Nunc, sancte, nobis Spiritus*". I would therefore like to meditate with you briefly on this hymn with which we shall begin our work each day, now, during the Synod, and also afterwards in our daily life.

"Nunc, sancte, nobis Spiritus". We pray that Pentecost may not only be an event of the past, at the very beginning of the Church, but that it may be today, indeed now, "*nunc, sancte, nobis Spiritus*". Let us pray that the Lord may bring about the outpouring of his Spirit now and recreate his Church and the world. Let us remember that after the Ascension the Apostles did not begin as might perhaps have been expected to organize, to create the Church of the future. They waited for God to act. They waited for the Holy Spirit. They understood that the Church cannot be made, that she is not the product of our organization: the Church must be born of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Lord himself was conceived and born of the Holy Spirit so the Church must also be conceived and born of the Holy Spirit. Only through this creative act of God can we enter into God's activity, into the divine action, and cooperate with him. In this regard, all our work at the Synod also consists in collaborating with the Holy Spirit, with the power of God that precedes us. And we must always implore, over and over again, the fulfilment of this divine initiative in which we can become

collaborators of God and contribute to ensuring that his Church is reborn and grows.

The second verse of this hymn: "*Os, lingua, mens, sensus, vigor, / Confessionem, personent: / Flammescat igne caritas, / accendat ardor proximos*" is the heart of this prayer. We ask of God three gifts, the essential gifts of Pentecost, of the Holy Spirit: *confessio, caritas, proximos*. *Confessio*: it is the tongue of fire that is "reasonable", that gives the right word and calls to mind the conquest of Babylon on the Feast of Pentecost. The confusion born from human egoism and pride, whose effect is the inability to understand each other, must be overcome by the power of the Spirit which unites without standardizing, which gives unity in plurality. Each one can understand the other, despite the diversity of languages. *Confessio*: the word, the tongue of fire that the Lord gives us, the common word in which we are all united, the City of God, Holy Church, in which all the wealth of our different cultures is present. *Flammescat igne caritas*. This confession is not a theory but life, love. The heart of Holy Church is love, God is love and communicates himself to us by communicating love to us. And lastly, our *neighbour*. The Church is never a closed group which lives for itself like so many of the groups that exist in the world; rather, she is distinguished by the universality of charity, of responsibility for her neighbour.

Let us consider these three gifts one by one. *Confessio*: in the language of the Bible and of the ancient Church, this word has two essential meanings, apparently in opposition but in fact constitute a single reality. *Confessio* is first of all the confession of sins: it means recognizing our guilt and knowing that before God we are found wanting, we are in a state of sin, we are not in the right relationship with him. This is the first point: knowing ourselves in the light of God. Only in this light can we know ourselves, can we also understand what is evil in us and thus perceive all that must be renewed, transformed. Only in the light of God do we recognize one another and truly see the whole of reality.

It seems to me that we should bear all this in mind in our analyses of reconciliation, justice and peace. Empirical analysis is important, it is important to know the reality of this world exactly. Yet these horizontal analyses, made with such precision and skill, are insufficient. They do not identify the real problems because they do not place them in the light of God. If we do not see that they are rooted in the Mystery of God, worldly things go wrong because the relationship with God is not properly in order. And if the first, basic relationship is off course, all the other relationships, however good they may be, fundamentally do not function. Therefore, all our analyses of the world are insufficient if we do not reach this point, if we do not consider the world in the light of God, if we do not discover that at the root of injustices, of corruption, is a heart that is not upright, there is closure to God and, consequently, a falsification of the essential relationship on which all the others are founded.

Confessio: to understand in God's light the realities of the world, the primacy of God and finally the whole human being and the human realities that are oriented to our relationship with God. And if this relationship has gone wrong it does not reach the point God wanted, it does not enter his

truth, nor can anything else be corrected because, once again, all the vices that destroy the social network and peace in the world spring up.

Confessio: to see reality in God's light, to understand that basically our realities depend on our relationship with our Creator and Redeemer, and thus lead to the truth, to the truth that saves. St Augustine, referring to Chapter three of the Gospel according to St John, defines the act of Christian confession as "he who makes truth comes to the light". Only by seeing in the light of God our faults, our sins, the insufficiency of our relationship with him do we walk in the light of the truth. And it is only the truth that saves. At last, let us work in truth: making truth is truly confessing in this depth of God's light.

This is the first meaning of the word *confessio*, the confession of sins, the recognition of the guilt that results from our defective relationship with God. However, a second meaning of confession is that of thanking God, glorifying God, witnessing to God. We can recognize the truth of our being because there is a divine response. God did not leave us alone with our sins; even when our relationship with his majesty is impeded, he does not withdraw but comes and takes us by the hand. *Confessio* therefore is the witness of God's goodness, it is evangelization. We could say that the second dimension of the word *confessio* is identical to evangelization. We see this on the Day of Pentecost when St Peter, in his discourse, on the one hand accuses people for their sins you have killed the holy and the just but, at the same time he says: this Saint is risen and loves you, embraces you, calls you to be his followers in repentance and in Baptism, as well as in communion with his Body. In the light of God confessing necessarily becomes proclaiming God, evangelizing and thereby renewing the world.

However the word *confessio* reminds us of yet another element. In Chapter 10 of his Letter to the Romans St Paul interprets the confession of Chapter 30 of Deuteronomy. In the latter text it would seem that in the Holy Land, upon entering into the definitive form of the Covenant, the Jews were afraid and could not really respond to God as they ought. The Lord says to them: do not be afraid, God is not far away. To reach God, a voyage across an unknown ocean is not required, nor is space travel through the sky, complicated or impossible ventures. God is not far away, he is not on the other side of the ocean or in these immense spaces of the universe. He is near. He is in your heart and on your lips, with the words of the Torah he enters your heart and is proclaimed by your lips. God is in you and with you, he is close.

In his interpretation, St Paul replaces the word "Torah" with the words "confession" and "faith". He says: God is close by, no complicated expeditions are necessary to reach him, nor spiritual or material adventures. God is close with faith, he is in your heart and with confession he is on your lips. He is within you and with you. With his presence, Jesus Christ really gives us the words of life.

Thus, in faith, he enters our hearts. He dwells in our heart and in confession we bring the realities of the Lord to the world, to this time of ours. This seems to me a very important element: the close

God. The things of science, of technology, entail great investments: spiritual and material ventures are expensive and difficult; but God gives himself freely. The most important things in life God, love and truth are free. God gives himself in our hearts. I would say that we should meditate often on God's free giving: to be close to God there is no need for great material or even intellectual gifts.

God gives himself freely in his love, he is in me, in my heart and on my lips. This is the courage, the joy of our life. It is also the courage present at this Synod, for God is not distant: he is with us in the words of faith. I think this duality is also important: words in the heart and on the lips. This depth of personal faith which truly connects me closely with God must then be confessed. Faith and confession, interiority in communion with God and the witness to faith that is expressed on my lips and thus becomes tangible and present in the world. These are two important things that always go together.

Then the hymn of which we are speaking also points to the places where confession is found: "*os, lingua, mens, sensus, vigor*". All our capacities for thinking, speaking, feeling, and acting must resound the Latin uses the verb "*personent*" with the word of God. Our being, in all its dimensions, must be filled with this word, which thereby becomes really tangible in the world which, through our existence resonates in the world: the word of the Holy Spirit.

And then, briefly, another two gifts. Charity: it is important that Christianity should not be the sum of ideas, a philosophy or a theology, but rather a way of life, Christianity is charity, it is love. Only in this way do we become Christian: if faith is transformed into charity, if it is charity. We could also say that *lógos* and *caritas* go together. Our God is on the one hand *lógos*, eternal reason. But this reason is also love; it is not cold mathematics that constructs the universe, it is not a demiurge; eternal reason is fire, it is charity. This union of reason and charity, of faith and charity, must be brought into being within us and thus, transformed into charity to become, as the Greek Fathers said, divinized. I would say that in the development of the world we have this uphill road, leading from the first created realities to the creature, man. But the ascent has not yet been completed. Man must be divinized and thus fulfilled. The unity of the creature and of the Creator: this is the true development, arriving with God's grace at this openness. Our essence is transformed by charity. If we speak of this development, we always think of the final goal, where God wants to arrive with us.

Lastly, our neighbour. Charity is not something individual but universal and practical. Today, at Mass, we proclaimed the Gospel passage of the Good Samaritan, in which we see the twofold reality of Christian charity, which is both universal and practical. The Samaritan meets a Jew who is therefore outside the boundaries of his tribe and his religion. But charity is universal so this stranger is in every sense a neighbour to him. Universality does away with the limits that close the world in and create differences and conflicts. At the same time, the fact that some practical action should be taken for universality, not only philosophy. We must strive for this unification of universality and practical action, we must really open these boundaries between tribes, ethnic

groups and religions to the universality of God's love. And this must not be in theory but in the places where we live and with all the necessary visibility. Let us pray the Lord to give us all this through the power of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, the hymn is a glorification of the Triune God and a prayer to know and to believe. Thus the end returns to the beginning. Let us also pray that we may know, that knowing may become believing and that believing may become loving, action. Let us pray the Lord to give us the Holy Spirit, that he may inspire a new Pentecost and help us to be his servants in the world at this time. Amen.

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