



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO PORTUGAL ON THE OCCASION OF THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE BEATIFICATION OF JACINTA AND FRANCISCO,
YOUNG SHEPHERDS OF FÁTIMA

INTERVIEW OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
WITH THE JOURNALISTS DURING THE FLIGHT TO PORTUGAL

Papal Flight

Tuesday, 11 May 2010

Father Lombardi: Your Holiness, what concerns and feelings do you have about the situation of the Church in Portugal? What can be said to Portugal, which was once very Catholic and brought the faith to the world, but which today is undergoing a profound secularization, both in daily life as well as legally and culturally? How is the faith to be proclaimed in a context which is indifferent and even hostile to the Church?

Holy Father: Before all else, I wish you all a good morning, and may we have a good journey, despite the famous cloud beneath us. With regard to Portugal, I feel happy and grateful for everything that this country has done and is doing in the world and in history, and for the deep humanity of this people which I came to know from an earlier visit and from many Portuguese friends. I would say that it is true, very true, that Portugal has been a great force for the Catholic faith, it carried that faith throughout the world; a courageous, intelligent and creative faith; it was able to create a great culture which we see in Brazil and in Portugal itself, but also in the presence of the Portuguese spirit in Africa and Asia. On the other hand, the spirit of secularism is nothing new. The dialectic between secularism and faith in Portugal has a long history. Already in the eighteenth century the presence of the Enlightenment was strongly felt: we need only think of the name Pombal. So we can see that in these last centuries Portugal has always been living in a dialectic, which nowadays has naturally become more radical and appears with all the marks of the contemporary European spirit. This strikes me both as a challenge and a great opportunity. In

these centuries of a dialectic between enlightenment, secularism and faith, there were always individuals who sought to build bridges and create a dialogue, but unfortunately the prevailing tendency was one of opposition and mutual exclusion. Today we see that this very dialectic represents an opportunity and that we need to develop a synthesis and a forward-looking and profound dialogue. In the multicultural situation in which we all find ourselves, we see that if European culture were merely rationalist, it would lack a transcendent religious dimension, and not be able to enter into dialogue with the great cultures of humanity all of which have this transcendent religious dimension – which is a dimension of man himself. So to think that there exists a pure, anti-historical reason, solely self-existent, which is “reason” itself, is a mistake; we are finding more and more that it affects only part of man, it expresses a certain historical situation but it is not reason as such. Reason as such is open to transcendence and only in the encounter between transcendent reality and faith and reason does man find himself. So I think that the precise task and mission of Europe in this situation is to create this dialogue, to integrate faith and modern rationality in a single anthropological vision which approaches the human being as a whole and thus also makes human cultures communicable. So I would say that the presence of secularism is something normal, but the separation and the opposition between secularism and a culture of faith is something anomalous and must be transcended. The great challenge of the present moment is for the two to come together, and in this way to discover their true identity. This, as I have said, is Europe’s mission and mankind’s need in our history.

Father Lombardi: Thank you, Your Holiness. Let us continue with the subject of Europe. The economic crisis has recently worsened in Europe and involves Portugal in particular. Some European leaders think that the future of the European Union is at risk. What lessons can be learned from this crisis, also from the ethical and moral standpoint? What are the keys for consolidating unity and cooperation among Europe’s countries in the future?

Holy Father: I would say that this very economic crisis, with its moral component, that no one can ignore, is a practical, concrete case of what I said earlier, that is, that two separate cultural currents have to meet each other, or else we will not find the way to the future. Here too we find a false dualism, that is, an economic positivism that thinks it can work without an ethical component, a market regulated purely by itself, by economic forces alone, by the positivist and pragmatic reasoning of economics – while ethics would be something else, completely separate from it. The fact is, we are now seeing that a pure economic pragmatism which prescind from the reality of man – who is an ethical being – does not end happily, but creates insoluble problems. So now is the time to see that ethics is not something extraneous, but intrinsic to economic reasoning and pragmatism. On the other hand, we must also confess that the Catholic, Christian faith, was often excessively individualistic; it left practical, economic matters to the world and thought only of individual salvation, religious acts, without seeing that these imply global responsibility, responsibility for the world. Hence, here too we need to enter into a concrete dialogue. I set out in my Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* – and the whole tradition of the Church’s social teaching goes in this direction – to broaden the ethical aspect of the faith above and beyond the individual towards

responsibility for the world, towards a “performative” reasoning inspired by ethics. On the other hand, the most recent events in the market, over the past two or three years, have shown that the ethical dimension is internal and needs to enter deeply into economic activity, since man is a unified being, and it is man that we are speaking of, as well as a sound anthropology which embraces the whole, and only thus can the problem be solved, and only thus can Europe carry out and achieve its mission.

Father Lombardi: Thank you, and now come to Fatima, in some way the culmination, even spiritually, of this visit. Your Holiness, what meaning do the Fatima apparitions have for us today? In June 2000, when you presented the text of the third secret in the Vatican Press Office, a number of us and our former colleagues were present. You were asked if the message could be extended, beyond the attack on John Paul II, to other sufferings on the part of the Popes. Is it possible, to your mind, to include in that vision the sufferings of the Church today for the sins involving the sexual abuse of minors?

Holy Father: Before all else, I want to say how happy I am to be going to Fatima, to pray before Our Lady of Fatima. For us, Fatima is a sign of the presence of faith, of the fact that it is precisely from the little ones that faith gains new strength, one which is not limited to the little ones but has a message for the entire world and touches history here and now, and sheds light on this history. In 2000, in my presentation, I said that an apparition – a supernatural impulse which does not come purely from a person’s imagination but really from the Virgin Mary, from the supernatural – that such an impulse enters into a subject and is expressed according to the capacities of that subject. The subject is determined by his or her historical, personal, temperamental conditions, and so translates the great supernatural impulse into his or her own capabilities for seeing, imagining, expressing; yet these expressions, shaped by the subject, conceal a content which is greater, which goes deeper, and only in the course of history can we see the full depth, which was – let us say - “clothed” in this vision that was accessible to specific individuals. Consequently, I would say that, here too, beyond this great vision of the suffering of the Pope, which we can in the first place refer to Pope John Paul II, an indication is given of realities involving the future of the Church, which are gradually taking shape and becoming evident. So it is true that, in addition to moment indicated in the vision, there is mention of, there is seen, the need for a passion of the Church, which naturally is reflected in the person of the Pope, yet the Pope stands for the Church and thus it is sufferings of the Church that are announced. The Lord told us that the Church would constantly be suffering, in different ways, until the end of the world. The important thing is that the message, the response of Fatima, in substance is not directed to particular devotions, but precisely to the fundamental response, that is, to ongoing conversion, penance, prayer, and the three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity. Thus we see here the true, fundamental response which the Church must give – which we, every one of us, must give in this situation. As for the new things which we can find in this message today, there is also the fact that attacks on the Pope and the Church come not only from without, but the sufferings of the Church come precisely from within the Church, from the sin existing within the Church. This too is something that we have

always known, but today we are seeing it in a really terrifying way: that the greatest persecution of the Church comes not from her enemies without, but arises from sin within the Church, and that the Church thus has a deep need to relearn penance, to accept purification, to learn forgiveness on the one hand, but also the need for justice. Forgiveness does not replace justice. In a word, we need to relearn precisely this essential: conversion, prayer, penance and the theological virtues. This is our response, we are realists in expecting that evil always attacks, attacks from within and without, yet that the forces of good are also ever present and that, in the end, the Lord is more powerful than evil and Our Lady is for us the visible, motherly guarantee of God's goodness, which is always the last word in history.

Father Lombardi: Thank you, Your Holiness, for the clarity and the depth of your answers and for this concluding word of hope which you have given us. We offer you our very best wishes that this very demanding journey will be a pleasant one for you and that during it you will experience all the joy and spiritual depth that an encounter with the mystery of Fatima inspires in us. We wish you a happy visit and we will strive to do a good job in our service, and to report objectively what you will do.