



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO AQUILEIA AND VENICE

SECOND ECCLESIAL CONVENTION OF AQUILEIA

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Basilica of Aquileia
Saturday, 7 May 2011*

(Video)

*Dear Cardinal Patriarch,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear brothers and sisters,*

In the magnificent setting of this historic Basilica that solemnly welcomes us, I extend my warmest greetings to all of you who represent the 15 Dioceses of Triveneto. I am very pleased to meet you as you prepare to celebrate the second Ecclesial Convention of Aquileia next year. I greet with affection the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice and my Brothers in the Episcopate, in particular the Archbishop of Gorizia, whom I thank for the words with which he welcomed me, and Archbishop-Bishop of Padua, who gave us a view of the path towards the Convention.

I greet with equal affection, the priests, men and women religious and the many lay faithful. With the Apostle John, I also repeat to you: “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev. 1:4). It is through the “synodal assembly” that the Holy Spirit speaks to your beloved Churches and to all of you individually, strengthening you for a more mature growth in fellowship and mutual cooperation. This “ecclesial gathering” allows all the Christian communities that you represent here, first of all to share the original experience of Christianity, that of the personal encounter with Jesus, who fully discloses to every man and every woman the meaning and direction of our path, both through life and through history.

It is appropriate that you wanted your Ecclesial Convention to take place in the Mother Church of Aquileia, from which the Churches of the North East of Italy have germinated, but also the Churches of Slovenia and Austria and some Croatian and Bavarian and even Hungarian churches.

Meeting at Aquileia is therefore a significant return to the “roots” in order to rediscover the living “stones” of the spiritual building that has its foundation in Christ and its extension in the most eloquent witnesses of the Aquileian Church: Sts Hermagoras and Fortunatus, Hilary and Tatian, Chrysogonus, Valerian and Chromatius. Coming back to Aquileia means above all learning from the glorious Church which generated you, how to commit yourselves today, in a world which is radically changed, to a renewed evangelization of your area, and how to hand down to future generations the precious heritage of our Christian faith.

“He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev 2:7). Your pastors have repeated this invitation of the Book of Revelation to all your individual Churches and the various ecclesial realities. In this way they have urged you to discover and to “narrate” what the Holy Spirit has done and is doing in your communities; to read with the eyes of faith the profound changes taking place, the new challenges and questions emerging. How should one proclaim Jesus Christ, to communicate the Gospel and educate people in the faith today? You have chosen to prepare yourselves thoroughly, diocese by diocese, with a view of the Convention of 2012, in order to address challenges that cross the boundaries of individual diocesan realities with a new evangelization rooted in centuries of faith and renewed in vigour.

The presence today in this magnificent Basilica of the dioceses born from Aquileia seems to indicate the mission of the *North-East of the future* which is also open to the surrounding areas and to those who, for various reasons, come into contact with them. The North-East of Italy is a witness and heir to a rich history of faith, culture and art, the signs of which are still visible even in today’s secularized society. The Christian experience has forged a people who are friendly, hardworking, tenacious and supportive and profoundly marked by the Gospel of Christ, despite the diversity of its cultural identities. This is demonstrated by the vitality of your parish communities, the liveliness of your groups, the responsible commitment of your pastoral workers.

The horizon of faith and its Christian motivations have given and continue to give a new impetus to social life, they inspire intentions and guide morals. There are clear signs of this in the openness and sensitivity to the transcendent dimension of life, despite widespread materialism; a basic religious sense, shared by almost the entire population; the attachment to religious traditions; the renewal of courses of Christian initiation; the many expressions of faith, love and culture; the manifestations of popular piety; the sense of solidarity and the voluntary work undertaken. Preserve, strengthen, and live this precious heritage. Be jealous of all that has made and still makes these lands great!

The primary mission that God entrusts to you today, renewed by a personal encounter with him, is to bear witness to God's love for man. You are called to do this first and foremost with works of love and life decisions in favour of real people, starting with those most vulnerable, frail, helpless, and dependent, such as the poor, the elderly, the sick, the disabled, what St Paul calls the weak parts of the Body of the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12.15-27).

New ideas and achievements in the approach to longevity, such a precious asset for human relations, are a beautiful and innovative witness to evangelical charity projected into the social dimension. Be sure to put at the centre of your attention the family, the cradle of love and life, the fundamental cell of society and the ecclesial community; this pastoral commitment is made more urgent by the growing crisis of married life and the declining birth rate. In all your pastoral activities make sure that you reserve a very special care for young people: they, who today look to the future with great uncertainty, often live in a state of unease, insecurity and fragility, but who carry in their hearts a great hunger and thirst for God, which calls for a constant attention and response!

Also in this context of yours, Christian faith today must face new challenges: the often exacerbated search for economic well-being in a period of serious economic and financial crisis, the practical materialism, the prevailing subjectivism. It is within the complexity of these situations that you are called to promote the Christian meaning of life through the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, brought with gentle pride and great joy to the various milieus of daily life.

From faith lived with courage, today as in the past, flows a rich culture of love for life, from conception until its natural end, the promotion of human dignity, of the elevation of the importance of the family based on faithful marriage and open to life, and of the commitment to justice and solidarity. The cultural changes taking place are asking you to be committed Christians, "Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope" (1 Pet 3:15), able to face up to new cultural challenges, in a respectful confrontation which is both constructive and mindful with all those who live in this society.

The geographical location of the North East, no longer only the crossroads between East and West Europe, but also between the North and the South (the Adriatic carries the Mediterranean to the heart of Europe), the huge phenomenon of tourism and immigration, territorial mobility, the process of homogenization resulting from the action of a pervasive mass media, have accentuated cultural and religious pluralism. In this context, which in any case is that which Providence gives us, it is necessary that Christians, sustained by a "trustworthy hope", present the beauty of the event of Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, to every man and every woman, in a frank and sincere relationship with the non-practicing, with non-believers and with believers of other religions.

You are called to live with that attitude full of faith that is described in the *Letter to Diognetus*: do not deny anything of the Gospel in which you believe, but live in the midst of others with sympathy,

communicating by your very way of life that humanism which is rooted in Christianity, in order to build together with all people of good will a “city” which is more human, more just and more supportive.

As the long tradition of Catholicism in these regions testifies, continue to witness vigorously God’s love also by promoting the “common good”: the good of each and by everyone. Your Church communities generally have a positive relationship with civil society and with the various institutions. Continue to give your contribution in order to humanize the areas of civil coexistence.

Finally, I entrust to you, as to the other Churches in Italy, the commitment to inspire a new generation of men and women capable of assuming responsibility in the various areas of society, especially in politics. This area needs more than ever people who are capable of building a “good life” for the benefit and at the service of all, especially young people. Indeed, Christians, pilgrims bound for Heaven but who already live an anticipation of eternity on earth cannot shirk this commitment.

Dear brothers and sisters! I thank God who has granted me to share with you this very significant moment. I entrust you to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and to your holy Patrons, and with great affection I impart my Apostolic Blessing to all of you and your loved ones.