



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO AQUILEIA AND VENICE

**ASSEMBLY FOR THE CONCLUSION
OF THE DIOCESAN PASTORAL VISIT**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Basilica of Saint Mark - Venice
Third Sunday of Easter, 8 May 2011*

(Video)

“Magnificat anima mea Dominum”

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the words of the Virgin Mary I would like to raise with you the hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for the gift of the Pastoral Visit, which began in the Patriarchate of Venice in 2005 and which today has reached its appropriate conclusion in this General Assembly. To God, the Giver of all good, we address our praise for having supported your spiritual resolutions and your apostolic efforts during this time of the Pastoral Visit, made by your Pastor, Cardinal Angelo Scola, whom I greet and thank for his kind words to me on behalf of you all.

With him I also greet the Auxiliary Bishop and Bishop-elect of Vicenza, the episcopal vicars and all those who have assisted in this long and complex pastoral commitment, an event of grace and a powerful ecclesial experience, in which the entire Christian people has been regenerated in faith, reaching forward with renewed enthusiasm for its mission.

And it is therefore especially to you, dear priests, religious and lay faithful, that I extend my warm greetings and sincere appreciation for your service, particularly in the smooth-running of ecclesial

Assemblies. I am very pleased to greet the ancient Armenian community of Venice with the Abbot and the Mechitarist monks. A thought goes to the Greek-Orthodox Metropolitan Gennadios of Italy and to Bishop Nestor of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as to the representatives of the Lutheran and Anglican Communities.

Gratitude and joy are therefore the feelings that characterize our meeting. It is taking place in the sacred space, so full of art and memories, of the Basilica of San Marco, where faith and human creativity have given rise to an eloquent catechesis through images.

The Servant of God Albino Luciani, who was your unforgettable patriarch, described his first visit to this Church as a young priest: "I found myself immersed in a river of light ... At last I could see with my own eyes and enjoy the full splendour of a world of art and unique beauty, whose charm penetrates your inmost depths (*Io sono il ragazzo del mio Signore*, Venice-Quarto d'Altino, 1998). This temple is the image and symbol of the Church of living stones which you are, Christians of Venice. "[I] must stay at your house today'. So he made haste and came down and received him joyfully" (Lk 19:5-6). How often during the Pastoral Visit, did you listen to and ponder these words, addressed by Jesus to Zacchaeus!

They have been the main theme of your community meetings, providing you with an effective stimulus to welcome the Risen Jesus, a sure way to find fullness of life and happiness. In fact, genuine human fulfilment and true joy are not found in power, success or money, but only in God, whom Jesus Christ makes known and brings close to us.

This is Zacchaeus' experience. According to the current mentality, he has it all: power and money. He can be called a "man who has 'made it'": he has worked his way up, has achieved what he wanted and could say, like the rich fool in the Gospel parable, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years, take your ease, eat, drink and be merry" (Lk 12:19). For this reason his desire to see Jesus is surprising. What impelled him to seek Jesus out? Zacchaeus realized that what he possessed was not enough, he felt the desire for more. And here was Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth, passing through Jericho, his hometown.

The echo of some unusual words spoken by Jesus had reached him: blessed are the poor, the meek, those who mourn, who hunger for righteousness. These words were strange to him, but perhaps for this very reason, were also fascinating and new. He wanted to see this Jesus. But though Zacchaeus was rich and powerful, he was short. So he ran ahead and climbed a tree, a sycamore. It did not matter to him whether he was exposing himself to ridicule: he found a way to make the meeting possible.

And Jesus arrived, he looked up at him and called him by name: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today" (Lk 19:5). Nothing is impossible to God! From this meeting streamed forth a new life for Zacchaeus: he welcomed Jesus with joy, discovering at last

the reality that can truly and fully fill his life. He had first hand experience of salvation, was no longer the same as before. As a sign of conversion he committed himself to donating half of his possessions to the poor and giving back four-fold to those he had robbed. He found the true treasure, because the Treasure, which is Jesus, found him!

Beloved Church in Venice! Imitate the example of Zacchaeus and surpass it! Overtake the men and women of today and help them to surmount the barriers of individualism, of relativism; never let yourselves be brought low by the failures that can scar Christian communities. Strive to look closely at the person of Christ, who said: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6).

As Successor of the Apostle Peter, visiting your land in these days, I repeat to each one of you: do not be afraid to swim against the tide in order to meet Jesus, to direct your attention upwards to meet his gaze. The "logo" of my Pastoral Visit portrays the scene of Mark delivering the Gospel to Peter, taken from a mosaic in this basilica. Today, symbolically, I come to redeliver the Gospel to you, the spiritual children of St Mark, in order to strengthen you in the faith and encourage you in the face of the challenges of the present time. Move ahead with confidence on the path of the new evangelization, in loving service to the poor and with courageous testimony in the various social realities. Be aware that you bear a message meant for every man and for the whole man; a message of faith, of hope and of love.

This invitation is in the first place, for you, dear priests, configured through the sacrament of Orders to Christ "Head and Shepherd" and placed as guides of his people. Recognizing the immense gift you have received, continue to carry out your ministry with generosity and dedication, seeking support both in priestly brotherhood lived as co-responsibility and cooperation, and in intense prayer and in-depth theological and pastoral renewal. An affectionate greeting to the sick and elderly priests who are united with us in spirit. This invitation is also extended to you, consecrated persons, who form a valuable spiritual resource for the entire Christian people, and who point out in a special way the importance and the possibility of total self gift to God through the profession of your vows.

Lastly, this invitation is for all of you, dear lay faithful. May you always and everywhere know how to account for the hope that is in you (cf. 1 Pt 3:15). The Church needs your gifts and your enthusiasm. Know how to say "yes" to Christ who calls you to be his disciples, to be holy. I would remind you, once again, that "holiness" does not mean doing extraordinary things, but following the will of God every day, living one's own vocation really well, with the help of prayer, of the Word of God, the sacraments and with the daily effort for consistency. Yes, it takes lay faithful who are fascinated by the ideal of "holiness", to build a society worthy of man, a civilization of love.

During the Pastoral Visit you paid special attention to the testimony that your Christian communities are called upon to give, beginning with the faithful who are more motivated and aware. In this regard, you are rightly concerned to revive the evangelization and catechesis of

adults and of the younger generations beginning with small communities of adults and parents, who, being domestic as it were, can live the logic of the Christian event first and foremost by witnessing to communion and love.

I urge you to spare no energy in proclaiming the Gospel and in Christian education, promoting both catechesis at all levels, and the cultural and educational contributions that make up your considerable spiritual heritage. May you be able to devote special attention to the Christian formation of children, adolescents and young people. They need effective points of reference: be an example to them of human and Christian coherence. During the course of the Pastoral Visit the need for an ever greater commitment in love, experienced as a free and generous gift of self, also emerged as well as the need to demonstrate clearly the missionary face of the parish to the point of creating pastoral realities which, without sacrificing pervasiveness, should be more capable of apostolic zeal.

Dear friends, the mission of the Church bears fruit because Christ is truly present among us in a quite special way in the Holy Eucharist. His is a dynamic presence which grasps us in order to make us his, to liken us to him. Christ draws us to himself, he brings us out of ourselves to make us all one with him. In this way he also inserts us into the community of brothers and sisters: communion with the Lord is always also communion with others.

For this reason our spiritual life depends essentially on the Eucharist. Without it, faith and hope are extinguished, love cools. I therefore urge you increasingly to pay special attention to the quality of Eucharistic celebrations, especially those on Sunday, so that the day of the Lord is lived fully and may illuminate the happenings and activities of daily life. From the Eucharist, the inexhaustible source of divine love, you can tap into the energy needed to bring Christ to others and to bring others to Christ, to be daily witnesses of charity and solidarity and to share the goods that Providence gives you with brothers and sisters who lack the necessities of life.

Dear friends, I assure you of my prayers that the demanding journey of growth in communion which you have made in these years of the Pastoral Visit, may renew the life of faith of your particular church as a whole and, at the same time, may kindle a more selfless dedication to service of God and neighbour.

May Most Holy Mary, whom you honour with the title “Virgin Nicopeja”, whose evocative image is resplendent in this Basilica, obtain for all of you and for the entire diocesan community complete fidelity to Christ. I commend the journey that awaits you to the intercession of the heavenly Mother of the Redeemer and to the support of the saints and blessed of your land, while with affection I impart to you and to the whole Church of St Mark a special Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to the sick, to prisoners and to all suffering in body and in spirit.

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