



The Holy See

HOLY ROSARY WITH THE BISHOPS OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
AND ENTRUSTMENT OF ITALY TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 150th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL UNION

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Basilica of Saint Mary Major
Thursday, 26 May 2011

Photo Gallery

Dear and Venerable Brother Bishops, Brothers and Sisters,

You are gathered in this magnificent Basilica — the place where spirituality and art merge together in an age-old alliance — to share an intense moment of prayer, entrusting to the maternal protection of Mary, *Mater Unitatis*, the whole Italian people, 150 years after the country's political unity. It is significant that this initiative has been prepared by similar meetings in your dioceses: in this way too you express the Church's concern to be close to this beloved Nation and its future. In turn, we feel in communion with every community, even with the smallest, in which the tradition of dedicating the month of May to Marian devotion is kept alive. This finds expression in very many signs: shrines, churches, works of art, and especially in the prayer of the Holy Rosary, through which the People of God give thanks for the gifts they continually receive from the Lord, through the intercession of Mary Most Holy, and entreat him for their many needs. Prayer — which culminates in the Liturgy, whose form is guarded by the living Tradition of the Church — is always to make space for God: his action involves us in the history of salvation. This evening, in particular, we have been invited, in Mary's school, to walk in the footsteps of Jesus: to descend with Him into the Jordan River, so that the Spirit may confirm in us the grace of Baptism; to sit at the banquet of Cana, in order to receive from Him the "good wine" of the celebration, to enter the Synagogue of Nazareth, just like the poor to whom the joyful message of the Kingdom of God is

addressed; further, to climb Mount Tabor, in order to live the Cross in the light of Easter, and, finally, to participate in the Upper Room in the new and eternal sacrifice, which, anticipating the new heaven and new earth, regenerates the whole of Creation. This Basilica was the first in the West to be dedicated to the Virgin Mother of God. On entering, my thoughts went back to the first day of the year 2000, when [Bl. John Paul II](#) opened the Holy Door, entrusting the Jubilee Year to Mary that she might keep watch over the path of those who recognized themselves as pilgrims of grace and mercy. Today, as pilgrims, we too do not hesitate to wish to cross the threshold of that most sacred “Door” which is Christ and we want to ask the Virgin Mary to support our journey and intercede for us. As the Son of God, Christ is the *form* of man: he is his deepest truth, the sap that nourishes a history that would otherwise be irredeemably compromised. Prayer helps us to recognize in him the centre of our life, to remain in his presence, to conform our will to his, to do “whatever he tells us” (cf. Jn 2:5), convinced of his fidelity. This is the essential task of the Church, whom he crowned as mystical bride, as shown in the splendour of the apse. Mary is the model: it is she who holds out the mirror in which we are invited to recognize our identity. Her life is a call which brings us back to listening to and welcoming the Word through faith to give praise to the Lord, before whom our only possible greatness is that which is expressed in filial obedience: “Let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). Mary entrusted herself: she is the “blessed one” (cf. Lk 1:42), who is such for having believed (cf. Lk 1:45), to the point of having so put on Christ as to enter the “seventh day”, sharing in the repose of God. The dispositions of her heart: the listening, welcome, humility, the faithfulness, praise and waiting — correspond to the inner attitude and gestures that shape Christian life. The Church nourishes herself on them, aware that they express what God expects from her.

On the bronze Holy Door of this Basilica a representation of the Council of Ephesus is engraved. This building, dating back in its original nucleus to the fifth century, is linked to that ecumenical assembly, celebrated in the year 431. At Ephesus the whole Church defended and confirmed for Mary the title of *Theotokos*, Mother of God: a title of Christological content, which refers to the mystery of the Incarnation, and expresses in the Son the unity of his human nature with the divine. Moreover, it is the person and advent of Jesus of Nazareth which illuminates the Old Testament and the very face of Mary herself. In her one finds the homogeneous design that interweaves the two Testaments. In the personal events of her life there is the synthesis of the history of an entire people, placing the Church in continuity with ancient Israel. Within this perspective, the meaning of individual events make sense, starting from those stories of the great women of the Old Testament, in whose life a humiliated, defeated and deported people is represented. These are the same women, however, who personify hope; they are the “the holy remnant”, the sign that God’s plan is not an abstract idea, but that it finds its counterpart in a pure response, in a freedom that gives itself without holding anything back, in a “yes” which is full acceptance and perfect gift. Mary is the highest expression of this. On her, Virgin, the creative power of the Holy Spirit descends, the same Spirit which “in the beginning” hovered over the formless abyss (cf. Gen 1:1) and through which God called being out of nothingness, the Spirit which renders fruitful and shapes creation. By opening herself to his action, Mary gives birth to the Son, the presence of God

who comes to dwell within history and who opens it to a new and definitive beginning, that is the possibility for every human being to be reborn from above, to live the will of God and therefore to realize his or her potential completely.

Faith, in fact, is not alienation; the experiences that defile human dignity and the quality of social life are quite different! In every historical period the encounter with the ever new word of the Gospel has been a well spring of civilization, has built bridges between peoples and has enriched the fabric of our cities, expressing itself in culture, the arts and, not least, in myriad forms of charity. Italy, now celebrating 150 years of political unity, can be rightly proud of the presence and action of the Church. The Church does not seek privileges nor aims to replace the responsibility of political institutions; she respects the legitimate secularity of the State, is careful to support the fundamental human rights. These include, first of all, ethical requirements and hence openness to transcendence, which together constitute values prior to any state jurisdiction, insofar as they are written into the nature of the human person. In this perspective, the Church — made firm by collegial reflection and direct, practical experience — continues to make her own contribution to the construction of the common good, reminding everyone of their duty to promote and protect human life in all its stages and actively to support the family; this remains, in fact, the first reality in which free and responsible people can grow up, shaped by those core values that open us to fraternity and which help us to deal with life's trials. Not least among these is the difficulty today to find to full-time and decent employment: I join, therefore, with all who call on the political and business world to make every effort to overcome the widespread lack of job security, which hinders young people from planning a normal family life, with serious damage to the authentic and harmonious development of society.

Dear Brother Bishops, the anniversary of this foundational event of the united State has found you quick to recall the details of a shared memory and sensitive in pointing out the elements of a future perspective. Do not hesitate to encourage the lay faithful to overcome any spirit of closure, distraction and indifference, and to participate personally in public life. Encourage training initiatives inspired by the social teaching of the Church, so that those who are called to political and administrative responsibilities do not fall victim to the temptation to exploit their position for personal gain or the thirst for power. Support the vast network of social groups and associations that promote all kinds of cultural, social and charitable works. Renew opportunities for the North and South to meet, as a sign of their mutual cooperation. Help the North to recover the original motivations behind this vast cooperative, Christian inspired movement which has promoted a culture of solidarity and economic development. In the same way, stir up the South to put into circulation, for the benefit of all, the resources and the qualities it has and those traits of warmth and hospitality that characterize it. Continue to cultivate a spirit of sincere and loyal cooperation with the State, knowing that this rapport is beneficial both for the Church and the whole Country. Your words and actions are to be a source of encouragement and inspiration to those called to manage the complexities that characterize the present time. In a time when the demand for solid spiritual benchmarks is emerging with ever greater force, you need to know how to pass on to all

what is distinctive in Christian experience: God's victory over evil and death as a horizon that shines a light of hope on the present. By adopting education as the main area for the pastoral commitment of this decade, you wished to express the assurance that Christian life — the upright life of the Gospel — is in fact the testimony of a fulfilled life. In this perspective you are ensuring a service which is not only religious or ecclesial, but also social, helping in the construction of the human city. Take heart, then! Despite all the difficulties, "with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1:37), to the One who continues to do "great things" (Lk 1:49) by means of those who, like Mary, know how to surrender themselves to him with unconditional availability.

Let us place all the Italian people under the protection of the *Mater Unitatis*, that the Lord might grant them the valuable gifts of peace and brotherhood, and, therefore, of joint development. Help the political leaders to live this anniversary of Unity as an opportunity to reinforce the national bond and to overcome any type of prejudiced opposition: the diverse and legitimate sensibilities, experiences and perspectives can be recomposed in a broader framework in order to seek together what really leads to the good of the Nation. The example of Mary opens the way to a more just, mature and responsible society, one which is able to rediscover the deep values of the human heart. May the Mother of God encourage young people, support families, comfort the sick, implore for everyone a renewed outpouring of the Spirit, helping us even in these times to recognize and follow the Lord, who is the true good of life, because he is life itself.

I wholeheartedly bless you and your community.