

## **POPE: WE MUST RENEW OUR WAY OF BEING CHRISTIANS**

VATICAN CITY, 22 DEC 2011 (VIS) - This morning the Holy Father received cardinals along with members of the Roman Curia and of the Governance of the Vatican City State for the traditional exchange of Christmas and New Year's greetings. Speaking for those present, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals, greeted the Pontiff.

In his following address, Benedict XVI reviewed the major events of this year, which has been marked by "an economic and financial crisis that is ultimately based on the ethical crisis looming over the Old Continent. Even if such values as solidarity, commitment to one's neighbour and responsibility towards the poor and suffering are largely uncontroversial, still the motivation is often lacking for individuals and large sectors of society to practise renunciation and make sacrifices". That is why "the key theme of this year, and of the years ahead, is this: how do we proclaim the Gospel today?" in a way that the faith may be the living force that is absent today.

In this respect, the Pope noted that "the ecclesial events of the outgoing year were all ultimately related to this theme. There were the journeys to Croatia, to the World Youth Day in Spain, to my home country of Germany, and finally to Africa - Benin - for the consignment of the Post-Synodal document on justice, peace, and reconciliation ... Equally memorable were the journeys to Venice, to San Marino, to the Eucharistic Congress in Ancona, and to Calabria. And finally there was the important day of encounter in Assisi for religions and for people who in whatever way are searching for truth and peace".

Other important steps in the same direction were the establishment of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, which points "towards next year's Synod on the same theme", and the proclamation of the Year of Faith.

Without Revitalizing the Faith, Church Reform Will Remain Ineffective

To all of this is joined the reflection on the need for reform within the Church. "Faithful believers ... are noticing with concern that regular churchgoers are growing older all the time and that their number is constantly diminishing; that recruitment of priests is stagnating; that scepticism and unbelief are growing. ... There are endless debates over what must be done in order to reverse the trend. There is no doubt that a variety of things need to be done. ... The essence of the crisis of the Church in Europe ... is the crisis of faith. If we find no answer to this, if faith does not take on new life, deep conviction and real strength from the encounter with Jesus Christ, then all other reforms will remain ineffective".

In contrast to the European situation, Benedict XVI asserted that during his trip to Benin "none of the faith fatigue that is so prevalent here ... was detectable there. Amid all the problems, sufferings and trials that Africa clearly experiences, one could still sense the people's joy in being Christian, buoyed up by inner happiness at knowing Christ and belonging to His Church. From this joy comes also the strength to serve Christ in hard-pressed situations of human suffering, the strength to put oneself at his disposal, without looking round for one's own advantage. Encountering

this faith that is so ready to sacrifice and so full of happiness is a powerful remedy against the fatigue with Christianity such as we are experiencing in Europe today".

Another sign of hope is seen in the World Youth Days where "again and again ... a new, more youthful form of Christianity can be seen", one possessing five main characteristics. "Firstly, there is a new experience of catholicity, of the Church's universality. This is what struck the young people and all the participants quite directly: we come from every continent, but although we have never met one another, we know one another" because "the same inner encounter with Jesus Christ has stamped us deep within with the same structure of intellect, will, and heart. ... In this setting, to say that all humanity are brothers and sisters is not merely an idea: it becomes a real shared experience, generating joy".

Secondly, "from this derives a new way of living our humanity, our Christianity. For me, one of the most important experiences of those days was the meeting with the World Youth Day volunteers: about 20,000 young people, all of whom devoted weeks or months of their lives" to the preparations. "At the end of the day, these young people were visibly and tangibly filled with a great sense of happiness: the time that they had given up had meaning; in giving of their time and labour, they had found time, they had found life. ... These young people did good, even at a cost, even if it demanded sacrifice, simply because it is a wonderful thing to do good, to be there for others. All it needs is the courage to make the leap. Prior to all of this is the encounter with Jesus Christ, inflaming us with love for God and for others, and freeing us from seeking our own ego". The Pope recalled having found the same attitude in Africa from the Sisters of Mother Teresa "who devote themselves to abandoned, sick, poor, and suffering children, without asking anything for themselves, thus becoming inwardly rich and free. This is the genuinely Christian attitude".

### The Joy of Knowing We Are Loved by God

The third element characterizing the World Youth Days is adoration. Benedict XVI remarked on the crowds' silence before the Blessed Sacrament in Hyde Park, Zagreb, and Madrid. "God is indeed ever-present", he said. "But again, the physical presence of the risen Christ is something different, something new. ... Adoration is primarily an act of faith - the act of faith as such. God is not just some possible or impossible hypothesis concerning the origin of all things. He is present. And if He is present, then I bow down before him. ... We enter this certainty of God's tangible love for us with love in our own hearts. This is adoration, and this then determines my life. Only thus can I celebrate the Eucharist correctly and receive the body of the Lord rightly".

Confession is another essential characteristic of the World Youth Days because, with this sacrament "we recognize that we need forgiveness over and over again, and that forgiveness brings responsibility. Openness to love is present in man, implanted in him by the Creator, together with the capacity to respond to God in faith. But also present, in consequence of man's sinful history ... is the tendency ... towards selfishness, towards becoming closed in on oneself, in fact towards evil. ... Therefore we need the humility that constantly asks God for forgiveness, that seeks

purification and awakens in us the counterforce, the positive force of the Creator, to draw us upwards".

Fifthly, and finally, the Pope mentioned the joy that above all depends on the certainty, based on faith that "I am wanted; I have a task; I am accepted, I am loved. ... Man can only accept himself if he is accepted by another. ... This sense of being accepted comes in the first instance from other human beings. But all human acceptance is fragile. Ultimately we need a sense of being accepted unconditionally. Only if God accepts me, and I become convinced of this, do I know definitively: it is good that I exist. ... If ever man's sense of being accepted and loved by God is lost, then there is no longer any answer to the question whether to be a human being is good at all. ... Only faith gives me the conviction: it is good that I exist. It is good to be a human being, even in hard times. Faith makes one happy from deep within".

In conclusion, the Pontiff thanked the Curia for "for shouldering the common mission that the Lord has given us as witnesses to His truth" and them wished all a blessed Christmas.

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