



The Holy See

AUDIENCE WITH THE COLLEGE OF CARDINALS

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER POPE FRANCIS

Clementine Hall

Friday, 15 March 2013

Video

Dear Brother Cardinals,

The period of the conclave has been a momentous time not only for the College of Cardinals, but also for all the faithful. In these days we have felt almost tangibly the affection and the solidarity of the universal Church, as well as the concern of so many people who, even if they do not share our faith, look to the Church and the Holy See with respect and admiration. From every corner of the earth fervent prayers have been offered up by the Christian people for the new Pope, and my first encounter with the thronging crowd in Saint Peter's Square was deeply moving. With that evocative image of the people gathered in joyful prayer still impressed on my memory, I want to express my sincere thanks to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons, young people, families, and the elderly for their spiritual closeness, so touching and so deeply felt.

I want to express my sincere and profound gratitude to all of you, my dear venerable brother Cardinals, for your ready cooperation in the task of leading the Church during the period of the Sede Vacante. I greet each one of you warmly, beginning with the Dean of the College of Cardinals, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, whom I thank for his devoted words and his fervent good wishes addressed to me on behalf of all of you. I also thank Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Camerlengo of Holy Roman Church, for his attentive service during this transitional period, as well as our dear friend Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, who led us during the conclave: thank you very much! My thoughts turn with particular affection to the Cardinals who, on account of age or ill health, made their contribution and expressed their love for the Church by offering up their sufferings and their prayers. And I should tell you that the day before yesterday, Cardinal Meija had a heart attack and was taken to the *Pio XI* Hospital. But they think his condition is stable, and

he has sent us his greetings.

Nor can I omit to thank all those who carried out various tasks in the preparation and the conduct of the conclave, providing the Cardinals with security and peace of mind in this period of such importance for the life of the Church.

My thoughts turn with great affection and profound gratitude to my venerable Predecessor Benedict XVI, who enriched and invigorated the Church during the years of his Pontificate by his teaching, his goodness, his leadership, his faith, his humility and his meekness. All this remains as a spiritual patrimony for us all. The Petrine ministry, lived with total dedication, found in him a wise and humble exponent, his gaze always firmly on Christ, the risen Christ, present and alive in the Eucharist. We will always accompany him with fervent prayers, with constant remembrance, with undying and affectionate gratitude. We feel that Benedict XVI has kindled a flame deep within our hearts: a flame that will continue to burn because it will be fed by his prayers, which continue to sustain the Church on her spiritual and missionary path.

Dear brother Cardinals, this meeting of ours is intended to be, as it were, a prolongation of the intense ecclesial communion we have experienced during this period. Inspired by a profound sense of responsibility and supported by a great love for Christ and for the Church, we have prayed together, fraternally sharing our feelings, our experiences and reflections. In this atmosphere of great warmth we have come to know one another better in a climate of mutual openness; and this is good, because we are brothers. Someone said to me: the Cardinals are the priests of the Holy Father. That community, that friendship, that closeness will do us all good. And our acquaintance and mutual openness have helped us to be docile to the action of the Holy Spirit. He, the Paraclete, is the ultimate source of every initiative and manifestation of faith. It is a curious thing: it makes me think of this. The Paraclete creates all the differences among the Churches, almost as if he were an Apostle of Babel. But on the other hand, it is he who creates unity from these differences, not in “equality”, but in harmony. I remember the Father of the Church who described him thus: “*Ipse harmonia est*”. The Paraclete, who gives different charisms to each of us, unites us in this community of the Church, that worships the Father, the Son, and Him, the Holy Spirit.

On the basis of the authentic affective collegiality that unites the College of Cardinals, I express my desire to serve the Gospel with renewed love, helping the Church to become increasingly, in Christ and with Christ, the fruitful vine of the Lord. Inspired also by the celebration of the Year of Faith, all of us together, pastors and members of the faithful, will strive to respond faithfully to the Church’s perennial mission: to bring Jesus Christ to mankind and to lead mankind to an encounter with Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, truly present in the Church and also in every person. This meeting leads us to become new men in the mystery of Grace, kindling in the spirit that Christian joy that is the hundredfold given by Christ to those who welcome him into their lives.

As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us so many times in his teachings, and at the end by his courageous and humble gesture, it is Christ who leads the Church through his Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church through his life-giving and unifying force: out of many, he makes one single body, the Mystical Body of Christ. Let us never yield to pessimism, to that bitterness that the devil offers us every day; let us not yield to pessimism or discouragement: let us be quite certain that the Holy Spirit bestows upon the Church, with his powerful breath, the courage to persevere and also to seek new methods of evangelization, so as to bring the Gospel to the uttermost ends of the earth (cf. *Acts* 1:8). Christian truth is attractive and persuasive because it responds to the profound need of human life, proclaiming convincingly that Christ is the one Saviour of the whole man and of all men. This proclamation remains as valid today as it was at the origin of Christianity, when the first great missionary expansion of the Gospel took place.

Dear brother Cardinals, take courage! Half of us are advanced in age. Old age is – as I like to say – the seat of life's wisdom. The old have acquired the wisdom that comes from having journeyed through life, like the old man Simeon, the old prophetess Anna in the Temple. And that wisdom enabled them to recognize Jesus. Let us pass on this wisdom to the young: like good wine that improves with age, let us give life's wisdom to the young. I am reminded of a German poet who said of old age: *Es is ruhig, das Alter, und fromm*: it is a time of tranquillity and prayer. And also a time to pass on this wisdom to the young. You will now return to your respective sees to continue your ministry, enriched by the experience of these days, so full of faith and ecclesial communion. This unique and incomparable experience has enabled us to grasp deeply all the beauty of the Church, which is a glimpse of the radiance of the risen Christ: one day we will gaze upon that beautiful face of the risen Christ!

I entrust my ministry and your ministry to the powerful intercession of Mary, our Mother, Mother of the Church. Under her maternal gaze, may each one of you continue gladly along your path, attentive to the voice of her divine Son, strengthening your unity, persevering in your common prayer and bearing witness to the true faith in the constant presence of the Lord. With these sentiments, which I really mean, I impart a heartfelt Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to your co-workers and to all those entrusted to your pastoral care.