

on my lips, an aspiration: Rome!" The name of a city, a prayer, a bond of union for all Catholics, for all men of good will.

Rome

April 19, 2005

On the election of Benedict XVI

Today is a moment of great joy for the entire Church. Catholics all over the world are giving thanks to God for the gift of a new Pope, Benedict XVI. Once again his children turn their eyes to Peter's successor, finding in him light and serenity.

In my name, and with the certainty that I am expressing the sentiments of the men and women who make up the Prelature of Opus Dei, I assure Benedict XVI of our fullest union both with him and with his teachings: a deep communion. The new Pope is well acquainted with the Prelature's mission and knows he can count on the cheerful efforts of the priests and lay people who form part of it in order to serve the Church, which was St. Josemaría Escrivá's only ambition. Along with our union with him, I also want to transmit to him my deep filial affection, joined to the prayer and affection of all the faithful of Opus Dei.

During these days of trust-filled waiting, there has been a lot of talk about the Roman Pontiff's immense responsibility, about the Church's need for his ministry, and the weight of the mission that rests on his shoulders. All

of this is true. But we are also seeing now how the Pope, besides God's help, can rely on the support of the prayer and affection of all Catholics and of so many other persons of good will.

The circumstances surrounding the death of John Paul II and the election of Benedict XVI have been a marvelous manifestation of faith on the part of millions of persons and a moving expression of unity: in a shared sorrow first of all, at the loss of our beloved John Paul II, and also in their joy at the gift of a new Pope. May John Paul II protect his successor in this moment of a new springtime!

I am also struck, as is only natural, by the Church's marvelous continuity, so clearly reflected in the joy of the People of God at the election of Peter's new successor.

La Gaceta de los Negocios (Madrid)

May 7, 2005

Faith and Unity

On the evening of April 19, when the *fumata bianca* announced the election of the new Pope, the people who had crowded into St. Peter's Square burst into uncontrollable applause. And this scene was repeated in many other cities and countries all over the world. No one knew yet who had been elected. The cries of joy were not for a particular person. They were for St. Peter's Successor and the Vicar of

Christ on earth. Thus what St. Ambrose wrote so many centuries ago was once again seen to be true: *Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*. Where Peter is, there the Church is present. The Church and all her children were rejoicing at the new Roman Pontiff. A little less than an hour later we met Pope Benedict XVI and received his apostolic blessing. And we were moved to see once again that the Successor of Peter is with the Church and the Church rejoices with his presence.

After some time had passed, we began to reflect on what we had experienced with so much joy. The conclave's brevity—scarcely 24 hours—gave rise to quite a few commentaries. In our mother the Church there are legitimate differences of language, mentality and experience. But the Holy Spirit brings all of these together when the search is made for the one who can best guide the Church in confronting the challenges that our era presents, continuing in a dynamic and creative way the work of our beloved and unforgettable John Paul II.

His last homily before being elected to the chair of Peter, and Pope Benedict XVI's first message on the morning of April 20, present us with the broad outlines of the challenges that need to be confronted and that the Pope will not fail to respond to. Faith in Christ our Lord and Redeemer is the center on which all these converge and from which an adequate response must also come. This realization leads to the petition that our Lord "give us a new shepherd according to his heart, a shepherd who will lead us to the knowledge

of Christ, to his love, to true joy," a petition from the Liturgy that heaven has heard.

Striving to attain "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (*Eph* 4:13), is the task that confronts each new Christian generation. Today anyone who decides to follow the path of faith is buffeted by strong ideological currents and intellectual fashions. Through faith we open our hearts to the saving mercy of God. God's mercy is a joyous affirmation, a positive reality that wounds no one and fills all men and women with peace and hope. But divine mercy puts a limit to evil, as John Paul II said. And the "father of lies" (*Jn* 8:44) continually searches out new means of resistance, seeking to separate us with subtle deceptions from faith in the Church's Creed. He tries to convince us that, in order to be up to date, one has to let oneself be led by any gust of human doctrine (cf. *Eph* 4:14). Only someone with a superficial view of certain aspects of contemporary culture could fail to see this reality.

Fortunately there are also many positive signs today. Benedict XVI reminds us of what was evident to everyone: "John Paul II's funeral was a truly extraordinary experience in which we glimpsed the power of God, who, through his Church, wants to make a great family of all peoples by means of the unifying power of Truth and Love." All those who spontaneously poured into Rome, including non-

Catholics and non-believers, putting up with long waits and much discomfort to bid a final farewell to the one who for nearly three decades guided us on the path of faith, were the fruit of John Paul II's generous self-giving, giving himself in the sight of all right to his last breath. We couldn't have a clearer example of holiness, calling us to give our life with generosity in order to bring Christ to every corner of the world. "We must be enlivened by a holy restlessness," we heard from then Cardinal Ratzinger in his homily on April 18, "a restlessness to bring to everyone the gift of faith, of friendship with Christ. Truly, the love and friendship of God was given to us so that it might also be shared with others. We have received the faith to give it to others." And with the faith we should also offer our availability to cooperate, with a readiness to dialogue, in the construction of a truly just society, built on freedom and peace.

Benedict XVI has sketched out the broad outlines of his pontificate. The Church, during this third millennium, needs to continue illuminating human life with the light of the Gospel, which has been applied to our times, with the Holy Spirit's help, by the Second Vatican Council, whose teachings need to continue to be carried out. Especially during this year, the Eucharist, the heart of the Church's life and the source of her evangelizing mission, will be the permanent center of the Petrine ministry to which the new Roman Pontiff has been called. With the power of the Eucharist we have to seek diligently, within the one truth, for full unity with all those who be-

lieve in Christ, pressing on in theological dialogue and taking the specific steps needed to move people's hearts towards union. Above all there is a need for interior conversion—a necessary prerequisite for true progress on the path of ecumenism. No effort will be spared in fostering peace and dialogue among cultures, so that mutual understanding will lead to the seeds of a better future for all. Benedict XVI will continue to foster the solicitous attention to youth shown by John Paul II, because they are the future and hope of the Church and of humanity. The Holy Father declared that his primary task consists in making Christ's light shine forth before the men and women of today, including those of other religions and those seeking an answer to the most pressing problems of human existence.

Benedict XVI is preparing to undertake these tasks, trusting in the help of God and in our prayers and our own fidelity to Christ. He is placing the many gifts God has granted him entirely at the service of his demanding mission. These include his deep theological knowledge and strong piety, the experience acquired during so many years working closely beside John Paul II in the service to the Church, and his clear vision of the dramas of secularism and relativism. All those who know him well recognize his refinement and ability to listen to and appreciate others' views (so far removed from the caricature spread by a few thoughtless people) and his broad intellectual outlook, which has led some of the most important European intellectu-

als of our time to seek to dialogue publicly with him.

In these first days of his pontificate, he has more than once referred to the fragility of the inadequate instruments that God deigns to employ. We who are sons and daughters of God and of the Church know that this is a time for unity, of which Peter's successor is the visible source and foundation. He has a right to the gratitude and affectionate loyalty of all Catholics for his efforts in the exercise of his universal ministry, which is now beginning. Personally I am frequently saying, and asking others to do so, a short prayer that I so often heard from the lips of St. Josemaría Escrivá: *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam*. All with Peter, to Jesus, through Mary.

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*Your most important business is
your children*

From ancient times there has been a kind of dichotomy between "big history" and "little history," between the unusual and the everyday. On the one hand are the grand gestures (real or imagined) of kings and heroes; on the other hand, the ongoing tasks, often tiring, that occupy ordinary people most of each day as they work to support their families.

Even in Christian lands, people often regarded work as a punishment from God. Those words of Yahweh when he cast our first parents out of the Garden of Eden after they committed the original sin are familiar enough: "You shall eat your bread in the sweat of your brow." But many seem to have forgotten the divine command, "Increase and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it," when the Lord made man and woman in his image and likeness.

For many centuries work (especially manual, but not only that) was considered something that lacked dignity, and people tried to be free of it when good fortune, a noble birth, or an important position in society made that possible. Today, what wounds human dignity is not work but precisely the contrary—unemployment. In this sense, the changed perspective has a positive side. The social teaching of the Church, beginning with the 19th-century popes, has played a role in bringing about that change.

The popes' social teaching has also influenced the life and writings of spiritual authors who find it congenial with their own insights. Several writers of the 20th century come to mind, especially St. Josemaría Escrivá. In a commentary on God's command to Adam to till the earth, the Founder of Opus Dei asserted that work is dignified and holy, "a human necessity God has entrusted to us here on earth, filling our days and making us partakers of his creative power, that we might harvest 'fruits for eternal life' (*Jn* 4:36) while earning our living" (*Friends of God*, 57).