



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
ORGANIZED TO COMMEMORATE THE 40th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION
ON DIVINE REVELATION "DEI VERBUM"***

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Friday, 16 September 2005

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer my most cordial greeting to all of you who are taking part in the Congress on *Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church*, an event organized by the Catholic Biblical Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. I congratulate you on this initiative, connected with one of the most important Documents of the Second Vatican Council.

I greet the Cardinals and Bishops, who are the first witnesses of the Word of God, the theologians who investigate, explain and translate it into today's language, the Pastors who seek in it appropriate solutions for the problems of our time.

I warmly thank all who work in the service of the translation and circulation of the Bible, providing the means for explaining, teaching and interpreting its message. In this regard, my special thanks go to the Catholic Biblical Federation for its activity, the biblical ministry it promotes and its faithful support of the directives of the Magisterium as well as to its spirit of openness to ecumenical collaboration in the biblical context.

I express my deepest joy at the presence at this Congress of "Fraternal Delegates" of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of East and West, and I greet with cordial respect the representatives who have spoken on behalf of the great world Religions.

The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, whose drafting I personally witnessed as a young theologian, taking part in the lively discussions that went with it, begins with a deeply meaningful sentence: "*Dei Verbum religiose audiens et fidenter proclamans, Sacrosancta Synodus...*" ["Hearing the Word of God with reverence, and proclaiming it with faith, the Sacred Synod..."] (n. 1).

With these words the Council points out a descriptive aspect of the Church: she is a community that listens to and proclaims the Word of God.

The Church does not live on herself but on the Gospel, and in the Gospel always and ever anew finds the directions for her journey. This is a point that every Christian must understand and apply to himself or herself: only those who first listen to the Word can become preachers of it.

Indeed, they must not teach their own wisdom but the wisdom of God, which often appears to be foolishness in the eyes of the world (cf. I Cor 1: 23).

The Church knows well that Christ lives in the Sacred Scriptures. For this very reason - as the Constitution stresses - she has always venerated the divine Scriptures in the same way as she venerates the Body of the Lord (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 21).

In view of this, St Jerome, cited by the conciliar Document, said that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 25).

The Church and the Word of God are inseparably linked. The Church lives on the Word of God and the Word of God echoes through the Church, in her teaching and throughout her life (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 8). The Apostle Peter, therefore, reminds us that no prophecy contained in Scripture can be subjected to a personal interpretation. "Prophecy has never been put forward by man's willing it. It is rather that men impelled by the Holy Spirit have spoken under God's influence" (II Pt 1: 20).

We are grateful to God that in recent times, and thanks to the impact made by the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, the fundamental importance of the Word of God has been deeply re-evaluated. From this has derived a renewal of the Church's life, especially in her preaching, catechesis, theology and spirituality, and even in the ecumenical process. The Church must be constantly renewed and rejuvenated and the Word of God, which never ages and is never depleted, is a privileged means to achieve this goal. Indeed, it is the Word of God, through the Holy Spirit, which always guides us to the whole truth (cf. Jn 16: 13).

In this context, I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church - I am convinced of it - a new spiritual springtime.

As a strong point of biblical ministry, *Lectio divina* should therefore be increasingly encouraged, also through the use of new methods, carefully thought through and in step with the times. It should never be forgotten that the Word of God is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (cf. Ps 119[118]: 105).

In invoking God's Blessing upon your work, your projects and the Congress in which you are taking part, I join in the hope that enlivens you: *May the Word of the Lord make progress* (cf. II Thes 3: 1) to the very ends of the earth, so that through the proclamation of salvation the whole world through hearing it may believe, through belief it may hope, and through hope it may come to love (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 1). I thank you with all my heart!

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