

Faith becomes incarnate in life

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BEING A PASTOR MEANS BEING AVAILABLE TO OTHERS

VATICAN CITY, 29 JUN 2009 (VIS) -

At 9.30 a.m. today, Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, Apostles, Benedict XVI celebrated the Eucharist in the Vatican Basilica. Concelebrating with the Holy Father were 34 new metropolitan archbishops, upon whom he imposed the pallium.

In his homily Benedict XVI commented on the First Letter of St. Peter, explaining that it focuses on the figure of Christ and highlighting how the Apostle describes Him as "shepherd and guardian of ... souls" while, in the same context, the Greek text uses the word "episcopos" (bishop).

"It is surprising the Peter should call Christ Himself bishop, bishop of souls", said the Pope. "What this means is that He sees us from God's perspective. Looking from God's standpoint gives an overall view, the dangers are evident but also the hopes and the possibilities. From God's perspective one sees the essence, one sees the inner man. If Christ is the bishop of souls, the aim is to ensure that man's soul does not become impoverished, that man does not lose his essence, his capacity for truth and love; the aim is to ensure that he comes to recognise God, that he is not lost up blind alleys, that he does not lose himself in isolation. ... In this perspective, being a bishop, being a priest, means ... making oneself available to human beings that they may find life".

"The word 'bishop' is closely related to the word 'shepherd'", said the Pope explaining how the pastor "must be capable of resisting the enemy, the wolves; he must go before, show the way, maintain the unity of the flock. ... This is what being a pastor, model to the flock, means: living the word now, in the great community of holy Church".

"As pastors of our own times we, more than others, have the duty to understand the reason of the faith; the duty not to allow it to remain mere tradition but to recognise it as the answer to our questions. ... Part of our duties as pastors is to penetrate the faith with our minds in order to show the reasons for our hope in the disputes of our age. ... Faith must not remain a theory, it must become life. ... From such a living certainty stems the capacity to communicate the faith believably to others".

At the beginning of his Letter, St. Peter "tells us that the outcome of our faith is the salvation of souls", said the Holy Father. In this context he highlighted how "lack of concern for souls, inner impoverishment of man, destroys not only the individual but threatens the destiny of all humankind. Without the healing of souls, without the healing of man from within, there can be no salvation for humanity. The true sickness of souls is defined by St. Peter as ignorance, in other words as non knowledge of God. Those who do not know God, those who do not at least seek Him sincerely, remain excluded from true life".

"It is obedience to the truth that purifies the soul, and coexistence with falsehood that pollutes it. Obedience to the truth begins with the small truths of daily life, which can often be tiring and painful. This obedience then extends to unreserved obedience towards Truth itself, which is Christ. Such obedience makes us not only pure, but above all free for service to Christ, and so to the salvation of the world".

Finally, turning to address the new metropolitan archbishops, the Pope told them that the pallium they were about to receive "reminds us of the flock of Jesus Christ, which you must feed in communion with Peter. ... It reminds us of the fact the He, supreme Pastor, made Himself a Lamb in order to assume all our destinies, to carry us and heal us from within".