

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Those who believe are never alone – neither in life nor in death. At that moment (of death), we call upon the Saints from every age –our friends, our brothers and sisters in the faith – knowing that they would form a living procession to accompany us into the next world, into the glory of God. We know that our arrival is awaited. We are among our own and truly at home. We are surrounded, led and guided by the friends of God. All the Saints of God are there to protect us, to sustain us and to carry us.

The communion of Saints consists not only of the great men and women who went before us and whose names we know. All of us belong to the communion of Saints, we who have been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we who draw life from the gift of Christ's Body and Blood, through which he transforms us and makes us like himself.

Yes, the Church is alive – And the Church is young. She holds within herself the future of the world and therefore shows each of us the way towards the future. The Church is alive and we are seeing it: we are experiencing the joy that the Risen Lord promised his followers. The Church is alive – she is alive because Christ is alive, because he is truly risen.

The Church is alive – with these words, I greet you, men and women, witnesses of the transfiguring presence of God, immersed in the great task of building up the Kingdom of God which spreads throughout the world, in every area of life. Like a wave gathering force, our thoughts go out to all men and women of today, to believers and non-believers alike.

Our real program is not to do our own will, not to pursue our own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history.

God's yoke is God's will, which we accept. And this will does not weigh down on us, oppressing us and taking away our freedom. To know what God wants, to know where the path of life is found – this is our joy, this is our great privilege. God's will does not alienate us, it purifies us – even if this can be painful – and so it leads us to ourselves. In this way, we serve not only him, but the salvation of the whole world, of all history. The human race – every one of us – is the sheep lost in the desert which no longer knows the way. The Son of God will not let this happen; he cannot abandon humanity in so wretched a condition. He leaps to his feet and abandons the glory of heaven, in order to go in search of the sheep and pursue it, all the way to the Cross. He takes it upon his shoulders and carries our humanity; he carries us all – he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. We are all carried by Christ. But at the same time He invites us to carry one another. So many people are living in the desert. And there are so many kinds of desert. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed

love. There is the desert of God's darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction. The Church must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance. The shepherd of all humanity, the living God, himself stood on the side of those who are downtrodden and killed. He reveals himself to be the true shepherd: "I am the Good Shepherd . . . I lay down my life for the sheep" It is not power, but love that redeems us! This is God's sign: he himself is love. How often we wish that God would show himself stronger, that he would strike decisively, defeating evil and creating a better world. All ideologies of power justify themselves in exactly this way, they justify the destruction of whatever would stand in the way of progress and the liberation of humanity. We suffer on account of God's patience. And yet, we need his patience. The world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man.

We must love the people entrusted to us, as Christ loves those whom he serves. "Feed my sheep", says Christ to Peter, and now, to us as well. Feeding means loving, and loving also means being ready to suffer. Loving means giving what is truly good, the nourishment of God's truth, of God's word, the nourishment of his presence, which he gives us in the Blessed Sacrament. Let us pray for each other, that we may learn to love the Lord more and more. Pray that we may learn to love his flock more and more, each one of you and all of you together. Pray that we may not flee for fear of the wolves. Let us pray for one another, that the Lord will carry us and that we will learn to carry one another.

The Risen Lord on the shore tells His disciples to let down their nets once more, and the nets become so full that they can hardly pull them in. Today too the Church is told to put out into the deep sea of history and to let down the nets, so as to win men and women over to the Gospel - to God, to Christ, to true life. For a fish, created for water, it is fatal to be taken out of the sea, to be removed from its vital element to serve as human food. But in the mission of a fisher of men, the reverse is true. We are living in alienation, in the salt waters of suffering and death; in a sea of darkness without light. The net of the Gospel pulls us out of the waters of death and brings us into the splendour of God's light, into true life. It is really true: as we follow Christ in this mission to be fishers of men, we must bring men and women out of the sea that is salted with so many forms of alienation and onto the land of life, into the light of God. It is really so: the purpose of our lives is to reveal God to men. And only where God is seen does life truly begin. Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is. We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution.

Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him. The task of the shepherd, the task of the fisher of men, can often seem wearisome. But it is beautiful and wonderful, because it is truly a service to joy, to God's joy which longs to break into the world.

Lord, remember your promise. Grant that we may be one flock and one shepherd! Do not allow your net to be torn, help us to be servants of unity!

The mighty, the powerful of this world, fear that Christ might take away something of their power if they were to let him in, if they were to allow the faith to be free. Yes, he would certainly take something away: the dominion of corruption, the manipulation of law and the freedom to do as you please. But he would not take away anything that pertains to human freedom or dignity, or to the building of a just society. Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. With great strength and great conviction, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ - and you will find true life.