

P A S T O R A L L E T T E R

of the bishops of the Czech Republic on the Apostolic Visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the country

Dear brothers and sisters!

At the conclusion of the Easter Week and on the election anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI, we bring you good news: the Holy Father is going to visit our country on 26th-28th September of this year. It's a great privilege for our nation and a reason for special joy to us, Catholic Christians. Our father is coming to us. The Church community in the Czech Republic is a spiritual family, and naturally, this family shall prepare to meet the Pope.

Currently we often hear about identity and its crisis, that a man is going to lose himself. People and nations are afraid of losing their identity; on the other hand, they discover their inability to answer clearly and exactly questions such as: "Who am I?" or "What's my role in society?" These questions are not easy for us. However, if we fail to answer them, our Christian self-consciousness and strength as well as our place within the society will cease. This is why the trinity of theological virtues – faith, hope, and love – was chosen as a principal theme for the papal journey. These three virtues are the corner-stones of our Christian identity. If we are not sure who we are and what is our mission, we will only timidly explain and defend the Christianity as a kind of personal weakness, asking the others to tolerate this shortcoming of us. But such an attitude is far from the task we have: to proclaim the Good News and be witnesses of God's Truth. Bearing witness of God to this world is the basis of our Christian life.

This stance is expressed in the motto and logo of the papal visit as well; it is "The Love of Christ is our strength." We do not want to push ourselves by power, we do not struggle for gaining dominance over anyone, we respect freedom of every person, but we are strong and firm, longing to win through the power of love. The latest Popes call our culture and tradition as a "civilization of love." In our efforts we are bearers of the culture founded by Ss. Cyril and Methodius as well as of the St. Wenceslaus' tradition. We are citizens of our country, the Czech Republic, and at the same time we are Christians.

We have already mentioned that a preparation is needed before meeting the Holy Father. If the visit is to bring us some benefits, we must invest a lot in it. Next Sunday

there will be a collection held in all churches to cover the expenses of the Pope's journey, but the most essential investment is the spiritual one. For this reason we begin today a spiritual preparation and it will be a great joy for us if many of you join it. Let us prepare ourselves in personal as well as common prayer. Let us prepare through thematic reading of the Bible as well as spiritual writings. You can find some inspiration in a booklet that is currently being issued. Let us prepare through personal meditations of the chosen themes and talk over them in our families and parish communities. There's also a level of action in life and it cannot be neglected. "Faith without works is dead," says St. James clearly in his letter (2:17). Let us do good!

What is most needed in the current situation? The Hope. Do we hear a silent call of a man who lives rightly and feels helpless in the face of destructive wave of evil? Do we hear cry of people, fallen to pleasures and greed, who make their best to get rid of the terrible idea that their lives are worthless? How shall we answer them? Let us give them hope, assuring them that it is not impossible to achieve good and have the true joy here and now, telling them that they needn't be afraid of the future but they can enter it bravely.

Current wave of despair is growing, because love is withering away. People often seek for love desperately, long for it but don't have it. They don't have it because they corrupted it and replaced with perishable delight of body. However, true love is a devoted care of others and its beginning rises from overcoming the lack of interest. Do we know what people around us need? Let us ask them – not because of curiosity, but of a kind concern, willing to help them. Let us overcome our laziness, convenience, selfishness, shyness and fear of refusal and talk to the others. To find courage and strength for it we must firmly rely on our faith in God and proclaim it with all our lives, through every word and act.

We start the preparation five months ahead the papal visit and don't want to delay it. Nothing can be done well hurrying in the last minute. May this work of preparation that we launch today grow and may it bring joy to us all.

We send our prayer to every one of you and bless you.

Your bishops of the Czech Republic

To be read instead of homily on Sunday, April 19, 2009.