



## HOMILY FINAL CELEBRATION (25 September 2005)

*The final Eucharist in an international Congress, such as the one we have just experienced, must speak to our hearts in a profound and meaningful way.*

*The theme of the Congress has centred on communion (koinonia) and this is intended as a synthesis of Christian life in the light of the Regula Benedicti, yet – also I must add – in the light of monasticism tout court. You know that one of the meanings of the word “monk” is “one” in the sense of “unified”. Unification of the heart was an ideal to aspire to and monks were very fond of the line in Psalm 85.11 “Unify my heart in your holy fear”, or (in the Italian Bishops Conference tradition) “give me a simple heart which fears your name”.*

*In the Greek translation by Aquila that line is rendered by “Give me a monk’s heart (monachichon)...”! The monk’s heart is that of the believer who reads everything (him/herself, others, history) unified in the holy fear of God. We know all the significance of this concept, which unfortunately many Christians do not fully understand, mistaking this for the fear of God, due partly to a certain type of preaching which has presented God as a harsh dealer of justice or a “carabiniere”, who “sees” you always (in the sense of strict control). There is a different sense in the stupendous meditation in Psalm 138 – “Lord, you who watch me and know me...(in Hebrew the word is jadà which is the knowledge of love!), you know when I walk and when I rest... You guard my shoulders and my brow and place your hand on me”. This is the loving care God has for us. The fear of God is the complete relationship of man with God and the entire experience of faith. This involves different degrees and signifies an entire journey to be embarked on, one which goes from awareness of the tremendum of God (Take off your sandals and cover your face – God is God!), from reverence and maximum respect, up and up as far as the fascinatum of God (God who attracts us) and finally to the union of love. This is why Benedict places fear of God as the first step (basic platform) in the entire journey of humility which leads to perfect charity. Here truly is the beginning of knowledge ( Pr 1.7, Psalms 110.10)*

*The unification of the heart! This is the great issue of our time, we see how difficult it is to make a synthesis in ourselves and in our affairs, we are led to see everything in “individual compartments” – our spiritual life, family, community, work... Here then is the issue of relationships - going to school to learn communion, beginning with our families, our concrete communities, then widening gradually to the work place, the entire world, the cosmos itself.*

*All this seems to me marvellously summarised in the Congress logo, which recalls Benedict’s vision at the end of his life - *omnis mundus velut sub uno solis radio collectus ante oculos eius adductus est* – the whole world was presented before his eyes gathered as it were under one beam of the sun”.*



*What does this mean? Gregory the Great explains (and this is one of the most admirable parts of the Dialoghi and a superb synthesis of the spiritual path) - «Videnti Creatorem angusta est omnis creatura... – All creatures are, as it were, nothing to that soul that beholds the Creator. For though it sees but a glimpse of that light which is in the Creator, yet all things that are created seem very small. By means of that supernatural light, the capacity of the inward soul is enlarged, and is so extended in God, that it is far above the world. The soul of one who sees in this manner, is also above itself; for being rapt up in the light of God, it is inwardly in itself enlarged above itself. When it is so exalted and looks downward, it comprehends how little all creation is. The soul, in its former baseness, could not so comprehend.... The soul of the beholder was more enlarged, rapt in God, so that it might see without difficulty that which is under God». (Dial. II,35).*

*This is what it means to climb the holy mountain (“Lord, who will live in your tent? Who will dwell on your holy mountain?” is Psalm 14 quoted by Saint Benedict in the prologue), and, in the contemplation of God (Eucharist, Divine office, Divine reading, Silent prayer) to find in God everything: oneself – others- history – the world – the cosmos. What a great ideal! But who can manage to do this?!*

*The prophet comforts us – “I will purify you... I will bring you back... “. Let us apply his words to us – the Lord will give us a new heart. If this was true for the Jews on their return from exile, this is even more true in the full sense of the word (the complete sense, “pleniore”) of the NT. We have truly received a new heart, because “Christ, our Easter has been sacrificed”. And the call of Jesus to the mountain is also valid for us. He, the Resurrected Christ, to whom has been given every power in heaven and earth (the Pantocrator of the great basilicas) now sends us also to announce the good news and make disciples of all people. He continues to invite his friends to the mountain – here we are together. The Evangelist writes - “however some doubted”. This is the struggle of faith, the difficulty of the sequel. There is nothing to be surprised about. The apostles had witnessed the greatest failure in history, they saw the defeat of the cross, it was really too difficult to believe in the resurrection... The fire and power of the Holy Spirit was necessary to dissolve every doubt and introduce them to the fullness of the mystery of Christ who died and came back from death. We too are still grappling with the difficulty. Today, as always throughout history and maybe more than ever, evil seems to dominate, great misery and the defeat of the cross blaze before our eyes. However He, the Resurrected Christ, is still there and, and faced with our doubts and discouragement, smiles at us and encourages us – “I am with you until the end of time”. He is present, here, now, with the power of His spirit, which we have all received.*

*Dear brothers and sisters, monks and nuns, Oblates men and women, we will go forth from this symbolic mountain (despite being here on low ground) with a new heart announced by the prophet and realised in the Easter of Christ and we will proclaim God’s love in Jesus Christ, the source of communion with all of us and with everything. Amen.*