



BISHOPS: CUSTODIANS OF THE CHURCH

VATICAN CITY, 13 SEP 2010 (VIS) - A hundred and twenty recently-appointed bishops from various countries, currently participating in an annual congress promoted by the Congregation for Bishops, were received today by the Holy Father who began his remarks to them by greeting Cardinal Marc Ouellet P.S.S., the new prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, and Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

In his address to them the Pope referred to the "important custom" of new bishops making a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Peter, "who conformed himself to Christ, Teacher and Shepherd, until death and death on the cross". And he quoted Jesus' words from the Gospel of St. John: "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep".

Thus, the Holy Father went on, "the mission of the bishop cannot be understood with a mindset of efficiency and effectiveness in which attention is primarily focused on what has to be done; rather, it is important to concentrate on the ontological dimension, which acts as foundation for the functional level. The bishop, in fact, by the authority of Christ with which he is invested, when he sits on the Cathedra is 'above' and 'in front of' the community, in that he is 'for' the community towards which his pastoral solicitude is directed".

Reflecting then on the words used when consigning the ring during episcopal consecrations - "Take this ring, the seal of your fidelity. With integrity of faith and purity of life protect the bride of God, His Holy Church" - Benedict explained: "The concept of 'protecting' does not only mean conserving what has already been established (though this must not be lacking); rather, in its essence it also includes the dynamic aspect: a perpetual and concrete tendency towards perfection, in complete harmony with, and continually adapting to, the new requirements that arise with the development and progress of that living organism which is the community.

"The bishop has responsibility for the good of his diocese, but also for that of society", the Pope added. "He is called to be 'strong and determined, just and serene' in order to be able exercise that wise discernment of people, facts and events which is required of him in his duty to be 'father, brother and friend' along the Christian and human journey".

And Pope Benedict concluded: "The ministry of the bishop - who is not a mere governor or bureaucrat, or a simple moderator or organiser of diocesan life - is part of a profound perspective that is not simply human, administrative or sociological, but a perspective of faith. It is paternity and fraternity in Christ that enable the bishop to create a climate of trust, acceptance and affection, but also of frankness and justice".