



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Apostolic Nuncio's Homily at Feltham Young Offenders Institution

Archbishop Antonio Mennini

21 NOVEMBER 2012

Dear friends in Christ,

I come today as the Representative of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, and I am happy that Father Roger invited me to be here, especially to celebrate the Eucharist together with you, because in the Eucharist, wherever we are and whatever our circumstances, we all experience what it is to be “at home,” for we are one family, united around the altar in the presence of Almighty God. Thank you, dear Father Roger for your kind invitation.

Today is the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and we are reminded just how close God is to each and every one of us. At the time Zechariah was writing the first reading, times were hard for God's chosen people. They were suffering and they were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. *“Sing, rejoice... It is the Lord who speaks... I am coming to dwell in the middle of you.”* And as we know, it was through Our Lady's cooperation that Jesus came among us as the visible presence of God and of his love for you and for me. Then in the Gospel we are reminded that to be Jesus' “brothers and sister and mother,” what we have to try to do is *“the will of his Father in heaven.”*

During the Holy season of Lent this year, Pope Benedict visited a prison near Rome to lead the Way of the Cross, which focuses on the sufferings of our Blessed Lord. On that occasion the Holy Father said: *“I know that this Way of the Cross is also meant to be a sign of reconciliation. Indeed, as one of the detainees said during our meeting, imprisonment serves to enable one to rise again after having fallen, to reconcile with oneself, with others and with God, so as to be able to re-enter society. When in the Way of the Cross, we see Jesus who falls to the ground – one, two, three times – we understand that he shares our human condition, the weight of our sins caused him to fall; but three times Jesus rose again and continued on the road to Calvary; and like this, with his help, we too can rise after falling, and perhaps help another, a brother, to rise again.”*

Perhaps, as the Holy Father said in reflecting on the three falls of Jesus, the secret that all of us need to be reminded of is that when we fall, and in different ways we all do, the important thing is to get up, to rise again, ask forgiveness and trusting in the Lord, to start anew. We are all God's children and none of us are perfect, so it is a consolation to know that God does truly love us and that, even the disciples in the Gospels did not always get things right and that even they needed to be forgiven too. And, if I may quote from another prophet, Isaiah, one of the names he gives to the Messiah is *“Emanuel,”* which means *“God is with us.”* So for all of us, never forget that God is very close.

If I may I should like to share something a little personal, when I was young, I remember how often my mother used to watch from the window of our apartment, when all I wanted to do was play football, daydream or chat with my friends, and she would call to me and remind me that I needed to study hard and that I should stop wasting my time. Although I didn't always do as she asked, I knew that she was right and that what she said was important. In fact, her words have stayed with me till now but, in a different context, I should like to suggest that you should deliberately try to waste a little time each day – waste it with God in quiet prayer. Then you will come to know ever more deeply his love for you and discover *“the will of his Father in heaven.”* You will also know Our Lord's closeness and even grow stronger, not just in coping with difficulties but also in sharing your faith with those persons you meet.

May I also pay tribute to the work of your Catholic chaplains and the help and encouragement that they try to give you at this difficult, but very challenging and hopeful time in your lives. Their task is an important and very worthwhile one.

And finally, please pray for the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI and for me, his representative and be assured that I will pray for you too.

Amen