

COLOGNE, Germany, AUG. 19, 2005: *The address Benedict XVI to Seminarians attending World Youth Day, Cologne.*

Dear Seminarians,

I greet all of you with great affection and gratitude for your festive welcome and particularly for the fact that you have come to this gathering from so many countries the world over. In a special way my heartfelt thanks go to the seminarian, the priest and the Bishop who have given us their own personal witness. I am very pleased to have this opportunity to be with you. I had asked that the program of these days in Cologne should include a special meeting with young seminarians, so that the vocational dimension which is always a part of World Youth Day would be even more clearly and strongly evident. Naturally, you are taking part in this experience in your own particular way, since you are seminarians, that is to say, young people devoting an intense period of your lives to seeking Christ and spending time with him in preparation for your important mission in the Church. This is what a seminary is: more than a place, it is a significant time in the life of a follower of Jesus. I can imagine how you yourselves relate to the theme of this Twentieth World Youth Day - "*We Have Come To Worship Him*" - and the entire Gospel account of the Magi from which the theme has been drawn. This passage has a special meaning for you, precisely because you are engaged in discerning and confirming your call to the priesthood. Let us pause and reflect on this theme.

Why did the Magi set off from afar to go to Bethlehem? The answer has to do with the mystery of the "star" which they saw "in the East" and which they recognized as the star of the "King of the Jews", that is to say, the sign of the birth of the Messiah (cf. *Mt 2:2*). So their journey was inspired by a powerful hope, strengthened and guided by the star, which led them towards the King of the Jews, towards the kingship of God himself. The Magi set out because of a deep desire, which prompted them to leave everything and begin a journey. It was as though they had always been waiting for that star. It was as if the journey had always been a part of their destiny, and was finally about to begin. Dear friends, this is the mystery of God's call, the mystery of vocation. It is part of the life of every Christian, but it is particularly evident in those whom Christ asks to leave everything in order to follow him more closely. The seminarian experiences the beauty of that call in a moment of grace, which could be defined as "falling in love". His soul is filled with amazement, which makes him ask in prayer: "Lord, why me?" But love knows no "why"; it is a free gift to which one responds with the gift of self.

The seminary years are devoted to formation and discernment. Formation, as you well know, has different strands, which converge in the unity of the person: it includes human, spiritual and cultural dimensions. Its deepest goal is to bring the student to an intimate knowledge of the God who has revealed his face in Jesus Christ. For this, in-depth study of Sacred Scripture is needed, and also of the faith and life of the Church in which the Scripture dwells as the Word of life. This must all be linked with the questions prompted by our reason and with the broader context of modern life. Such study can at

times seem arduous, but it is an indispensable part of our encounter with Christ and our vocation to proclaim him. All this is aimed at shaping a steady and balanced personality, one capable of receiving validly and fulfilling responsibly the priestly mission. The role of formators is decisive: the quality of the presbyterate in a particular Church depends greatly on that of the seminary, and consequently on the quality of those responsible for formation. Dear seminarians, for this very reason we pray today with genuine gratitude for your superiors, professors and educators, who are spiritually present at this meeting. Let us ask the Lord to help them carry out as well as possible the important task entrusted to them. The seminary years are a time of journeying, of exploration, but above all of discovering Christ. It is only when a young man has had a personal experience of Christ that he can truly understand the Lord's will and consequently his own vocation. The better you know Jesus the more his mystery attracts you. The more you discover him, the more you are moved to seek him. This is a movement of the spirit which lasts throughout life, and which makes the seminary a time of immense promise, a true "springtime".

When the Magi came to Bethlehem, "going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him" (*Mt 2:11*). Here at last was the long-awaited moment: their encounter with Jesus. "Going into the house": this house in some sense represents the Church. In order to find the Savior, one has to enter the house, which is the Church. During his time in the seminary, a particularly important process of maturation takes place in the consciousness of the young seminarian: he no longer sees the Church "from the outside", but rather, as it were, "from the inside", and he comes to sense that she is his "home", in as much as she is the home of Christ, where "Mary his mother" dwells. It is Mary who shows him Jesus her Son; she introduces him and in a sense enables him to see and touch Jesus, and to take him into his arms. Mary teaches the seminarian to contemplate Jesus with the eyes of the heart and to make Jesus his very life. Each moment of seminary life can be an opportunity for loving experience of the presence of our Lady, who introduces everyone to an encounter with Christ in the silence of meditation, prayer and fraternity. Mary helps us to meet the Lord above all in the celebration of the Eucharist, when, in the Word and in the consecrated Bread, he becomes our daily spiritual nourishment.

"They fell down and worshipped him . . . and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh" (*Mt 2:11-12*). Here is the culmination of the whole journey: encounter becomes adoration; it blossoms into an act of faith and love which acknowledges in Jesus, born of Mary, the Son of God made man. How can we fail to see prefigured in this gesture of the Magi the faith of Simon Peter and of the other Apostles, the faith of Paul and of all the saints, particularly of the many saintly seminarians and priests who have graced the two thousand years of the Church's history? The secret of holiness is friendship with Christ and faithful obedience to his will. Saint Ambrose said: "Christ is everything for us"; and Saint Benedict warned against putting anything before the love of Christ. May Christ be everything for you. Dear seminarians, be the first to offer him what is most precious to you, as Pope John Paul II suggested in his [Message for this World Youth](#)

Day: the gold of your freedom, the incense of your ardent prayer, the myrrh of your most profound affection (cf. No. 4).

The seminary years are a time of preparing for mission. The Magi “departed for their own country” and most certainly bore witness to their encounter with the King of the Jews. You too, after your long, necessary program of seminary formation, will be sent forth as ministers of Christ; indeed, each of you will return as an *alter Christus*. On their homeward journey, the Magi surely had to deal with dangers, weariness, disorientation, doubts . . . The star was no longer there to guide them! The light was now within them. Their task was to guard and nourish it in the constant memory of Christ, of his Holy Face, of his ineffable Love. Dear seminarians! One day, God willing, by the consecration of the Holy Spirit you too will begin your mission. Remember always the words of Jesus: “Abide in my love” (*Jn* 15: 9). If you abide in Christ, you will bear much fruit. You have not chosen him, he has chosen you (cf. *Jn* 15:16). Here is the secret of your vocation and your mission! It is kept in the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who watches over each one of you with a mother’s love. Have recourse to her, often and with confidence. I assure you of my affection and my daily prayers. And I bless all of you from my heart.