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Francis pays homage to Benedict XVI on the 65th anniversary of his priestly ordination: "Holiness, continue to serve the Church"

Vatican City, 28 June 2016 – Tomorrow Pope emeritus Benedict XVI will celebrate the 65th anniversary of his priestly ordination, celebrated on 29 June 1951 in the German cathedral of Freising by Cardinal Faulhaber, along with his brother Georg and another 42 Bavarian presbyters. Pope Francis wished to commemorate this event in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace, along with the members of the College of Cardinals, and with the presentation of the edition in various languages of the book "Die Liebe Gottes Lehren und Lernen" ("Teaching and Learning God's Love"), a compilation of his homilies on priesthood, whose preface was written by the Holy Father.

Pope Francis dedicated the discourse he pronounced in homage to the Pope emeritus to the distinctive characteristic of Benedict XVI's long ministry, from the beginning to the present day: the search for and witness to Christ's love.

"One of the many beautiful pages you dedicated to the priesthood underlines that at the moment of the definitive call to Simon, Jesus, looking at him, in the end asks him just one thing: 'Do you love me?' How beautiful and true this is! Because it is here, you tell us, in that 'Do you love me?', that the Lord founds the shepherd, as only if there is love for the Lord can He graze His flock through us: 'Yes Lord, You know that I love You'. And this is the note that drives an entire life spent in priestly service, and of the true theology that not by chance you have defined as 'the search for the beloved'. This is what you have always borne witness to, and still bear witness to today: that the decisive thing in our days – of sun and rain – the single thing with which all the rest comes too, is that the Lord is truly present, that we wish for Him, that inside we are close to Him, that we love Him, that we truly believe deeply in Him and, by believing, we love Him truly. It is this love that genuinely fills our heart, this belief is what makes us journey safe and tranquil on the waters, even in the midst of the storm, as happened to Peter. This love and this belief are what enable us to look to the future not with fear or nostalgia, but with joy, even in the by now advanced years of our life".

"And in this way, living and bearing witness today in such an intense and luminous way to this single truly decisive fact – turning our gaze and heart to God – you, Holiness, continue to serve the Church, you do not cease to contribute truly with vigour and wisdom to her growth, and you do so from the little Mater Dei monastery in the Vatican that is thus shown to be far from one of those forgotten corners in which today's throwaway culture

tends to relegate people when, with advancing age, their strength falters. It is quite the contrary; and this enables your successor to, who chose to call himself Francis, to say so forcefully. Although the spiritual journey of St. Francis began at San Damiano, the truly beloved place, the beating heart of the Order, where he founded it and where finally he rendered his life to God, was the Porziuncola, the "little portion", the small corner beside the Mother of the Church, Mary who, for her steadfast faith and her life lived fully with love and in love of the Lord, all generations will call blessed. In this way, Providence wished that you, dear brother, would arrive in what we might consider such a Franciscan place, from which there emanates a tranquillity, peace, strength, trust, maturity, faith, dedication and fidelity that bring so much good to me, and that give strength to me and to all the Church. And if I may allow myself to say", he added, "also a healthy and joyful sense of humour".

"The hope with which I would like to conclude is, therefore, addressed to you, and along with us all, to the entire Church: that you, Holiness, may continue to feel the hand of merciful God supporting you, that you may experience and bear witness to God's love; and that, with Peter and Paul, that you may continue to rejoice as you journey towards the destination of faith".

Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, went on to address those present, affirming that over the course of the years, both with his words and his life, the Pope emeritus has reminded us that joy comes first from trustful abandonment to that mysterious and good Plan that the Risen Christ wishes to bring to fulfilment in each one of us".

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals, congratulated Benedict XVI personally and in the name of all the cardinals with the words of Psalm 133: "Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum", emphasising that in these moments there is a climate of great spiritual joy and intense fraternity, in the common bond of service to the Church and to Christ".

The Pope emeritus briefly addressed those present to express his gratitude. "Sixty-five years ago a brother who was ordained with me decided to write on the commemorative image of the first Mass just one word, aside from the name and the date, in Greek: 'Eucharistomen', convinced that this word, in its many dimensions, expresses all that one may say in this moment. 'Eucharistomen' says a human thank you, thank you to all. Thank you above all to you, Holy Father: your goodness, from the first moment of your election, in every moment of my life here, strikes me, and truly brings me, in an inner sense, more than in the Vatican Gardens, with their beauty, your goodness is the place where I live: I feel protected. Thank you also for your words of thanks, for everything. And let us hope that you will be able to continue with all of us on this path of Divine Mercy, showing the way of Jesus, to Jesus, to God".

"Eucharistomen", he continued, after thanking Cardinals Müller and Sodano, "does not refer only to the dimension of human gratitude, but naturally also to the deeper word it conceals, that appears in the liturgy, in the Scripture, in the Word: 'Gratias agens benedixit fregit deditque'. 'Eucharistomen' leads us to that reality of thanksgiving, to that new dimension that Christ gave. He transformed into thanksgiving, into blessing, the Cross, suffering, all the evil of the world. And in this way fundamentally he transubstantiated life and the world, and gave us, and gives us every day, the bread of true life, that surmounts the world thanks to the strength of His love. In the end, we wish to integrate ourselves in the 'thanks' of the Lord and thereby truly receive the novelty of life and to help in the transubstantiation of the world: that it may be a world not of death, but of life; a world in which love has conquered death".
