



**AUDIENCE GRANTED TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF INTERNATIONAL
CONGRESS "SACRED SCRIPTURE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH"
(ROME, SEPTEMBER 14-18 , 2005)**



At noontime on September 16, 2005 in the courtyard of the Palazzo Apostolico of Castel Gandolfo, the Holy Father received in audience the participants of the International Congress Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church, which took place at the Aurelia Convention Center of Rome. This congress was co-sponsored by the Catholic Biblical Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum of the Second Vatican Council. The following is the speech given by Benedict XVI to those present at the meeting:

Message of the Holy Father

Lord Cardinals,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear brothers and sisters,

My most cordial greeting to all of you who are participating in the congress on *Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church*, convoked through the initiative of the Catholic Biblical Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, with the purpose of commemorating the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*. I congratulate you on this initiative which concerns one of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Council.

I greet the Lord Cardinals and the Bishops, who are the primary witnesses of the Word of God, the theologians who investigate, explain and convey it in the language of today, and the pastors who seek in it solutions relevant to the problems of our time. I heartily thank all those who work in the service of the translation and diffusion of the Bible, supplying the means for expounding it, teaching it and interpreting its message. In this sense, a special thanks goes to the Catholic Biblical Federation for their activities, for the biblical pastoral ministry they promote, for their faithful adherence to the direction of the Magisterium and for their spirit of openness to ecumenical collaboration in the biblical field. I express my profound joy for the presence at the Congress of the “Delegati Fraternali” of the ecclesial Churches and Communities of the East and the West and I greet with cordial deference those who are attending as representatives of the great religions of the world.

The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, whose drafting I witnessed in person, taking part as a young theologian in the lively discussions that accompanied it, opens with an expression of profound significance: “*Dei Verbum religiose audiens et fideliter proclamans, Sacrosancta Synodus...*”. By employing this expression, the Council indicates an aspect of the Church that qualifies it in its essence: it is a community that listens to and proclaims the Word of God. The Church does not live from itself but from the Gospel, and from the Gospel it draws direction for its journey ever and anew. This is a qualifying note that all Christians should accept and apply to themselves: only those who adopt the position of listeners to the Word can then become its announcers. Such persons should not in fact be teaching their own wisdom, but the wisdom of God, which often appears as foolishness to the eyes of the world (cf. 1 Cor 1:23).

The Church knows well that Christ lives in Holy Scripture. For this very reason – as the Constitution underscores – it has always given to the Divine Scriptures a veneration similar to that reserved for the Lord’s Body itself (cf. *DV* 21). It was precisely in consideration of this fact that Saint Jerome made the pointed statement, cited by the Conciliar document, that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ (cf. *DV* 25).

Church and Word of God are indissolubly connected with one another. The Church lives from the Word of God and the Word of God resounds in the Church, in its teaching and in its whole life (cf. *DV* 8). This is why the Apostle Peter reminds us that “no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Pet 1:20).

We are grateful to God that in these last times, thanks among other things to the impulse given it by the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, the fundamental importance of the Word of God has been more profoundly revalued. And as a consequence of this a renewal has taken place in the life of the Church, above all in preaching, in catechesis, in theology, in spirituality and on the path of ecumenism itself. The Church should continuously renew and rejuvenate itself, and the Word of God, which never grows old and is never exhausted, is a privileged means of attaining this goal. It is in fact the Word of God which, through the Holy Spirit, is continuously guiding us anew into the whole truth (cf. Jn 16:13).

In this connection, I would like especially to recall and to recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio Divina*: the assiduous reading of Holy Scripture accompanied by prayer realizes that intimate colloquy where, by reading, we listen to God who speaks and, in prayer, we respond to Him with confident openness of heart (cf. *DV* 25). This

practice, if effectively promoted, will bring to the Church – of this I am convinced – a new spiritual spring. As a firm point of biblical pastoral ministry, *Lectio divina* should for this reason be further encouraged, through the use, too, of new methods, carefully considered, that are fully up-to-date. We ought never to forget that the Word of God is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (cf. Ps 118/119:105).

As I invoke the blessing of God on your work, on your initiatives and on the congress in which you are participating, I join you in the wish that animates you: “*That the Word of God may speed on*” (cf. 2 Thess 3:1) to the ends of the earth, so that through the proclamation of salvation the whole world may be brought from hearing to faith, from faith to hope, and from hope to love (cf. DV 1).

I thank you with all my heart!