

Rome, 25<sup>th</sup> of February, 2009  
Ash Wednesday

To His Holiness Benedict XVI

Your Holiness,

I thank God for having you once more among us, for the fourth time celebrating in the Basilica of Santa Sabina. Even though the beginning of Lent invites us to austerity and penance, we friars cannot avoid living a festive atmosphere when we receive you in “our home”.

You know the Basilica very well. I know that this space, with its luminous beauty and simplicity, does not keep you indifferent. I heard your comments in this respect, these past years, before you returned to the Apostolic Palace. Pope Celestine I (422-432) consecrated this Paleochristian temple and 788 later, in 1220 (paradoxically also 788 years ago), Pope Honorius III entrusted it to Saint Dominic and to his friars.

During these eight centuries, many brothers have lived in this convent and have praised, blessed and preached in this extraordinary space. Saint Dominic of Guzmán, Blessed Jordan of Saxony, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Albert the Great, Saint Raymond of Penyafort, as well as your predecessors in the See of Peter – members of the Order – Blessed Innocent V, Blessed Benedict XI, Saint Pius V and Benedict XIII, lived in this community. Among the “contemporary” friars Henry Dominique Lacordaire and Blessed Hyacinth Mary Cormier stand out. These friars and many others from the Order of Preachers also point out to that which Your Holiness has reminded us: “in the discontinuity of external events the great continuity of the unity of the Church in all times is manifested”. The life and the mission of the friars, our prayer, study, and contemplation, and our preaching, yesterday as today, want to be like the “violoncello continuo” in a symphony, supporting, giving rhythm and keeping time to humanity’s steps forward...

Your Holiness, I thank you for your presence and your words on this day. As I do each year, I renew the fidelity of the Order and my own, to the successor of Peter and to the Church, by recalling the words which Saint Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church, used in her letters to the Pontiffs of her time, encouraging them with veneration and tenderness to be faithful to their Petrine ministry: “Sweet Christ on earth!”

I pray that the Lord gives you a fruitful time of Lent and a very Happy Easter of the Risen Lord, while I heartily implore your Apostolic blessing for the whole Dominican Family.

With filial love

Bro. Carlos A. Azpiroz Costa O.P.  
Master of the Order