



***“... to bring the flame of
Jesus' love,
even if it is a small one, to
the hearts of children,
and through the children to
their parents, thus reopening
the places of faith of our
time.”***

ZENIT, The world seen from Rome
News Agency

Considers Sacraments and Non-practicing Youth.

BRESSANONE, Italy, AUG. 22, 2008 Zenit.org- FEAST OF THE QUEENSHIP OF MARY,

Benedict XVI is encouraging pastors to fan the smallest of flames of faith in children who approach the sacraments, even when parents do not help the youth form a friendship with Jesus.

The Pope affirmed this Aug. 6 when he met with priests, deacons and seminarians of the Diocese of Bolzano-Brasenose and answered in German six questions they asked him. The Holy Father was on vacation in the Dolomites, where he stayed at the major seminary of Brasenose.

A parish priest and theology teacher, Father Paolo Rizzio, asked the Holy Father what to do about children and youth who approach the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation without a habit of participation in Sunday Mass.

Father Rizzio described his own evolution in thought on the matter, progressing from amore restrictive view to a reconsideration of the best pastoral approach.

The Pontiff began by saying that he had no infallible answer, and that he, too, had undergone a similar evolution in thought.

"When I was younger, I was rather severe. I said: The sacraments are sacraments of faith, and where faith does not exist, where the practice of faith does not exist, the sacrament cannot be conferred either," he explained.

Benedict XVI went on to say that during his years as archbishop of Munich, in discussions with parish priests, and with the passing of time: "I too, with time, came to realize that we must follow, rather, the example of the Lord, Who was very open even with people on the margins of Israel of that time. He was a Lord of mercy, too open -- according to many official authorities -- with sinners, welcoming them or letting them invite Him to their dinners, drawing them to Him in his communion."

The sacraments are sacraments of faith, the Pope affirmed, and "when First Communion is no more than a great lunch with beautiful clothes and beautiful gifts, it can no longer be a sacrament of faith."

"Yet, on the other hand," he added, "if we can still see a little flame of desire for communion in the faith, a desire even in these children who want to enter into communion with Jesus, it seems to me that it is right to be rather broad-minded."

Reaching parents

The Holy Father said that children must be taught in catechism that First Communion requires "a continuity of friendship with Jesus, a journey with Jesus."

But, he lamented: "I know that children often have the intention and desire to go to Sunday Mass but their parents do not make this desire possible."

"If we see that children want it, that they have the desire to go, this seems to me almost a sacrament of desire, the 'will' to participate in Sunday Mass. In this sense, we naturally must do our best in the context of preparation for the sacraments to reach the parents as well, and thus to -- let us say -- awaken in them too a sensitivity to the process in which their child is involved."

The Pope said parents' "social desire" to have their kids participate in a First Communion celebration should be extended into a religious one: "to make a journey with Jesus possible."

The Bishop of Rome added that the catechesis of children is an opportunity that must be availed of to reach parents.

"The parents themselves can relearn the faith from the children and understand that this great solemnity is only meaningful, true and authentic if it is celebrated in the context of a journey with Jesus, in the context of a life of faith," he said. "Thus, one should

endeavour to convince parents, through their children, of the need for a preparatory journey that is expressed in participation in the mysteries and that begins to make these mysteries loved.

"The moment when we are convinced the heart is touched -- it has felt a little of Jesus' love, it has felt a little the desire to move along these lines and in this direction -- that is the moment when, it seems to me, we can say that we have made a true catechesis. The proper meaning of catechesis, in fact, must be this:

to bring the flame of Jesus' love, even if it is a small one, to the hearts of children, and through the children to their parents, thus reopening the places of faith of our time."