

Benedict XVI to Children: Learn Forgiveness

Shares School and 1st Communion Experiences

VATICAN CITY, JUNE 2, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is assuring children that it is possible to peacefully coexist with people of different backgrounds, especially by practicing reconciliation and forgiveness.

The Pope affirmed this Saturday in a spontaneous question-and-answer session with over 7,000 children of the Pontifical Society of the Missionary Childhood during an audience in the Paul VI Hall.

The Pontiff answered questions from three children, the first from a girl who asked his opinion on whether different cultures can live together without conflict.

The Holy Father responded with a story of his childhood experience at a primary school that "reflected highly varied social situations."

"There was communion among us," he recalled.

Benedict XVI continued: "We collaborated together well and, I must say, naturally we sometimes argued. But afterward we made up and forgot what had happened. I think this is important."

"Sometimes in human life it seems inevitable that we should argue," he acknowledged, "but what remains important is the art of reconciliation, of forgiveness, of starting anew and not letting bitterness remain in our hearts."

Christian education

The Pope explained that in school, together with others from different walks of life, he learned "to know the Bible, from the creation to Jesus' sacrifice upon the cross, and then the beginnings of the Church."

He continued: "Together we learned the catechism; together we learned to pray; together we prepared for first confession and first Communion: That was a splendid day."

"We understood that Jesus himself comes to us, that he is not a distant God. He enters into my own life, into my own heart."

The Pontiff affirmed that this Communion, as a "tangible encounter with Jesus" who "comes to all of us," contributes to forming a community.

At school, he said, "we discovered the ability to live together and be friends," and although "I have not been back to that village since 1937, we still remained friends."

"Thus," the Holy Father affirmed, "we learned to accept one another and to shoulder one another's burdens."

He added, "Despite our weakness we must accept each other and, with Jesus Christ, with the Church, together we discover the road to peace and learn to live well."

Pontifical vocation

Another child asked Benedict XVI if he had ever thought that he would become a Pope.

The Pontiff responded, "To tell the truth, I never imagined I would have become Pope because, as I said, I was a rather ingenuous boy in a small village far from large centers of population."

He explained, "Of course we knew, venerated and loved the Pope -- Pope Pius XI -- but for us he seemed to stand at an unattainable height, almost another world; a father to us but nonetheless far above us."

The Holy Father continued: "And I have to say that even now I find it difficult to understand how the Lord could have thought of me, elevated me to this ministry."

"But I accept it from his hands, even though it is surprising and I feel it far beyond my powers. Yet, the Lord helps me."

A third child asked Benedict XVI, "How can we help you to proclaim the Gospel?"

The Pope stated that the members of this Pontifical work already form "part of a great family that carries the Gospel into the world."

Evangelization

He highlighted their goals of "listening, praying, knowing, sharing and showing solidarity."

"Praying is very important," the Pontiff affirmed, "because it makes the power of God present."

He continued: "To listen is truly to learn what Jesus says, to know sacred Scripture, the Bible. In the story of Jesus, we learn to know the face of God."

"To share," the Holy Father explained, "is to want things not only for ourselves, but for everyone, sharing them with others."

Thus, he said, "we together become a family where one has respect for the other, and accepts others who are different."

"All of this simply means living in this great family that is the Church, in this great missionary family," Benedict XVI stated.

"Living the essentials," he concluded, "such as sharing, knowing Jesus, prayer, listening to one another and solidarity, is part of missionary work, because it helps to ensure that the Gospel becomes a reality in our world."

Launched in 1843, the Pontifical Society of Missionary Childhood, or Holy Childhood, gathers children in parish or school groups worldwide to train them in a missionary mindset, and organize ways for them to cooperate in the Church's task of evangelization.

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