

MILITARY ORDINARIES: THE VALUE OF THE PERSON AND OF PEACE

VATICAN CITY, OCT 26, 2006 (VIS) - This morning, the Holy Father received participants in the fifth international congress of Military Ordinariates. The congress marks the twentieth anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution "Spirituali Militum Curae," promulgated by Servant of God John Paul II.

In his address, Benedict XVI recalled how the Apostolic Constitution "updated canonical regulations regarding spiritual assistance to the military, in the light of Vatican Council II and bearing in mind the transformations affecting armed forces and their mission at a national and international level." With the further changes that have taken place over the last two decades, the Constitution requires "adaptation to the needs of the present moment. This is what you, with great timeliness, have sought to do during this meeting, organized by the Congregation for Bishops."

After mentioning the "two fundamental values" emphasized in the Apostolic Constitution - "the value of the person and the value of peace" - the Holy Father indicated that "the people to whom the Ordinariate is directed do not cease to be members of the faithful of the particular Church where they live, or of the rite to which they belong. This highlights a need for communion and coordination between the Military Ordinariate and the particular Churches."

"Putting people first means giving pride of place to the Christian formation of soldiers, accompanying them and their relatives as they progress in Christian initiation, along the path of vocation, of maturity in the faith and of witness. It also means favoring forms of fraternity, communion and liturgical and non-liturgical prayer that are appropriate to the military environment and lifestyle."

Going on to refer to the "value of peace," the Pope said: "If Vatican Council II calls the military ministers of peace, how much more so are the pastors to whom they are entrusted! I therefore encourage you all to ensure that military chaplains be true experts and masters of what the Church teaches and practices in terms of building peace in the world."

"The Church is called to be 'salt,' 'light' and leavening,' even in the world of the military, ... so that mentalities and structures become ever more oriented towards building peace" said Pope Benedict. "The Church's Magisterium on the question of peace represents an essential aspect of her social doctrine," he added.

The Church's "insistent calls for peace have influenced Western culture, promoting the idea that the armed forces are 'at the exclusive service of the defense, security and freedom of peoples.' Sometimes, unfortunately, other interests, economic and political interests fomented by international tensions, put obstacles and setbacks in the way of this constructive tendency, as is evident in the difficulty of disarmament processes."

The Holy Father concluded his talk by insisting that, "in order to offer people adequate pastoral care and carry out their evangelizing mission, Military Ordinaries need motivated and trained priests and deacons, as well as lay people who collaborate actively and responsibly with pastors."

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