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New evangelization must begin with the heart, Pope teaches

By David Kerr

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- The effort to renew the evangelization of mankind begins in the human heart, Pope Benedict XVI told the clergy, religious and laity of the Diocese of Rome, June 13.



Pope Benedict XVI. Credit: Mazur

“To be effective the proclamation of faith must begin with a heart that believes, hopes, loves, a heart that loves Christ and believes in the power of the Holy Spirit!” the Pope told those gathered at St. John Lateran Cathedral for the Rome diocese’s annual convention.

The Pope pointed to how St. Peter’s proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection at Pentecost was “not confined to a simple list of facts” but “cut to the heart” of those who heard him.

“The resurrection of Jesus was able and is able to illuminate human existence. In fact, this event has seen a

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new understanding of the dignity of man and his eternal destiny.”

Mindful of his responsibility to lead the 2.5 million Catholics in the Diocese of Rome, Pope Benedict told those in St. John Lateran that there was a real danger to the health of the Church if it downplays the divinity of Jesus Christ.

“If people forget God it is also because the person of Jesus is often reduced to that of a wise man and his divinity is weakened, if not denied. This way of thinking prevents people from grasping the radical novelty of Christianity, because if Jesus is not the only Son of the Father, then God never came to visit the history of man.”

This message was crucial to renewing Christianity within the ancient See of Rome, the Pope recalled, saying it is “the task not only of some, but all members of the Church” to proclaim it.

“In this hour of history, is this not the mission that God entrusts to us: to announce the permanent newness of the Gospel, as Peter and Paul did when they came to our city? Do we not also need to show the beauty and the reasonableness of faith, bringing the light of God to man in our time, with courage, conviction, and joy?”

He particularly urged that the teaching of the Christian faith – known as catechesis – be undertaken not only with children and young people but also with “adults who have not received baptism, or who distanced themselves from the faith and the Church.”

The consequence of people lacking such an intellectual and spiritual formation is that they can sometimes acquire a distorted view of Jesus Christ and Christianity.

Such people “do not know the beauty of Christianity, indeed, sometimes they even consider it an obstacle to happiness,” Pope Benedict said.

He finished his address by urging all present to pray to his predecessor Blessed Pope John Paul II, “who until his last strove to preach the gospel in our city and loved its young people with particular affection.”

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