

EMBARGO

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SEPTEMBER 12, 2008

VESPERS AT NOTRE DAME OF PARIS

Most Holy Father,

I am proud and happy to welcome you I this glorious cathedral, where I hope you will allow me to recall you used to be virtually at home, as a participant in the Lenten Lectures. We are gathered here today to celebrate the evening prayer service of the Church, Vespers, and your presiding tonight will allow us to penetrate deeper into the communion of the universal Church.

Inside and around this Cathedral there are several thousand priests, religious, nuns, permanent deacons with their wives, consecrated women and seminarians. With their bishops, they have come from the eight dioceses of the Ecclesiastic Province of Paris and the Diocese of the Armed Forces. Not all have been able to come, but all are united with us in thought and prayer. All are fully committed to the mission of the Church at the heart of this major Region of France. All of them give joyfully and generously give themselves so that the Good News may be announced to today's people. And all of them want to express and affection and spiritual communion.

Our joy to be gathered to pray is all the greater this evening as representatives of different Christian communities, both Orthodox and Reformed, have cared to join us. A few minutes ago, you were able to greet the members of the Council of Christian Churches in France. This means that we will also be praying tonight so that we may make progress towards visible and full unity between all the disciples of Christ.

Our meeting is surrounded and supported by thousands of young people gathered on the Cathedral Square and on the banks of the Seine. They are preparing for a night of prayer for the universal Church and her Pastor. At the heart of the sleeping city they will trace a way of light that will lead them to the Eucharistic celebration you will preside tomorrow.

Many of our contemporaries have their own ideas on the Pope, on the pontifical mission and on the personality of the man to whom this mission is entrusted. But in the family that we make up together his evening, I can tell you that we are all united with you in the communion of faith and daily prayer. This is why this evening we would like to ask you, as the disciples asked Jesus in the Gospel: "Teach us how to pray."

Most Holy Father, please lead us into prayer.

+ André Cardinal VINGT-TROIS