February 21st: Memorial of Saint Peter Damian, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Gospel text (*Mk* 9:14-29): When Jesus came to the place where they had left the disciples, they saw many peo¬ple around and some teachers of the Law arguing with them (...). He asked, «What are you arguing about with them?». A man answered him from the crowd, «Master, I brought my son to you for he has a dumb spirit. Whenever the spirit seizes him, it throws him down and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth and becomes stiff all over. I asked your disciples to drive the spirit out, but they could not» (...). Jesus (...) ordered the evil spirit, «Dumb and deaf spirit, I command you: Leave the boy and never enter him again». The evil spirit shook and convulsed the boy and with a terrible shriek came out.

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, «Why couldn't we drive out the spirit?». And he answered, «Only prayer can drive out this kind, nothing else».

St. Peter Damian, Bishop and Doctor of the Church (1007-1072)

EDITORIAL TEAM evangeli.net (based on texts by Benedict XVI)
(Città del Vaticano, Vatican)

Today I want to speak about Saint Peter Damian — a monk, a lover of solitude, and at the same time a courageous man of the Church, personally committed to the work of reform undertaken by the popes of his time. Alongside his solid competence in the field of law, he acquired a refined skill in the art of writing, the “ars scribendi”.

Around the year 1034, the contemplation of the absolute nature of God led him to withdraw progressively from the world and its fleeting realities, to retire to the monastery of Fonte Avellana, dedicated to the Holy Cross. And the Cross would become the Christian mystery that most fascinated Peter Damian: «He does not love Christ who does not love the cross of Christ».

He was also a fine theologian: he explained the Trinitarian doctrine with clarity and vividness, already using the three fundamental terms that would later become decisive for Western philosophy as well — “procession”, “relation”, and “person”. His meditation on the figure of Christ also had significant practical reflections: «Christ must be heard in our speech, seen in our life, and perceived in our heart». Communion with Jesus Christ creates a unity of love among Christians: not only is the whole universal Church united, but the entire Church should also be present within each one of us.

—With great sorrow and sadness, in 1057 Peter Damian left the monastery and accepted, though reluctantly, the appointment as Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, thus entering fully into collaboration with the popes in the difficult task of reforming the Church.