



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 26 April 2006

Communion in time: Tradition

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for your affection! In the new series of catecheses, recently begun, we are seeking to understand the original plan of the Church which the Lord desired, in order to understand better our place, our Christian life, in the great communion of the Church.

So far we have understood that ecclesial communion is inspired and sustained by the Holy Spirit and preserved and promoted by the apostolic ministry. And this communion, which we call "Church", does not only extend to all believers in a specific historical period, but also embraces all the epochs and all the generations. Thus, we have a twofold universality: a synchronic universality - we are united with believers in every part of the world - and also a so-called diachronic universality, that is: all the epochs belong to us, and all the believers of the past and of the future form with us a single great communion.

The Holy Spirit appears to us as the guarantor of the active presence of the mystery in history, the One who ensures its realization down the centuries. Thanks to the Paraclete, it will always be possible for subsequent generations to have the same experience of the Risen One that was lived by the apostolic community at the origin of the Church, since it is passed on and actualized in the faith, worship and communion of the People of God, on pilgrimage through time.

And so it is that we today, in the Easter Season, are living the encounter with the Risen One not only as something of the past, but in the present communion of the faith, liturgy and life of the Church. The Church's apostolic Tradition consists in this transmission of the goods of salvation which, through the power of the Spirit makes the Christian community the permanent actualization

of the original communion.

It is called "original" because it was born of the witness of the Apostles and of the community of the disciples at the time of the origins. It was passed on under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament writings and in the sacramental life, in the life of the faith, and the Church continuously refers to it - to this Tradition, which is the whole, ever up-to-date reality of Jesus' gift - as her foundation and her law, through the uninterrupted succession of the apostolic ministry.

In his historical life furthermore, Jesus limited his mission to the house of Israel, but already made it clear that the gift was not only destined for the People of Israel but to everyone in the world and to every epoch.

The Risen One then explicitly entrusted to the Apostles (cf. Lk 6: 13) the task of making disciples of all the nations, guaranteeing his presence and help to the end of the age (cf. Mt 28: 19 ff.).

The universalism of salvation, moreover, requires that the Easter memorial be celebrated in history without interruption until Christ's glorious return (cf. I Cor 11: 26). Who will bring about the saving presence of the Lord Jesus through the ministry of the Apostles - heads of the eschatological Israel (cf. Mt 19: 28) - and through the whole life of the people of the New Covenant? The answer is clear: the Holy Spirit. The Acts of the Apostles - in continuity with the pattern of Luke's Gospel - show vividly the interpenetration between the Spirit, those sent out by Christ and the community they have gathered.

Thanks to the action of the Paraclete, the Apostles and their successors can realize in time the mission received from the Risen One. "You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you" (Lk 24: 48 ff.).

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1: 8). And this promise, which at first seems incredible, already came true in the Apostles' time: "And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him" (Acts 5: 32).

So it is the Spirit himself, who through the laying on of hands and prayers of the Apostles, consecrates and sends out new Gospel missionaries (as, for example, in Acts 13: 3 ff. and I Tm 4: 14). It is interesting to observe that whereas in some passages it says that Paul appointed elders in every Church (cf. Acts 14: 23), elsewhere it says that it is the Spirit who has made them guardians of the flock (cf. Acts 20: 28).

The action of the Spirit and the action of Paul thus are deeply interwoven. At the time of solemn decisions for the life of the Church, the Spirit is present to guide her. This guiding presence of the

Holy Spirit was particularly acutely felt in the Council of Jerusalem, in whose conclusive words resound the affirmation: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." (Acts 15: 28); the Church grows and walks "in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9: 31). This permanent actualization of the active presence of the Lord Jesus in his People, brought about by the Holy Spirit and expressed in the Church through the apostolic ministry and fraternal communion is what, in a theological sense, is meant by the term "Tradition": it is not merely the material transmission of what was given at the beginning to the Apostles, but the effective presence of the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus who accompanies and guides in the Spirit the community he has gathered together.

Tradition is the communion of the faithful around their legitimate Pastors down through history, a communion that the Holy Spirit nurtures, assuring the connection between the experience of the apostolic faith, lived in the original community of the disciples, and the actual experience of Christ in his Church.

In other words, Tradition is the practical continuity of the Church, the holy Temple of God the Father, built on the foundation of the Apostles and held together by the cornerstone, Christ, through the life-giving action of the Spirit: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2: 19-22).

Thanks to Tradition, guaranteed by the ministry of the Apostles and by their successors, the water of life that flowed from Christ's side and his saving blood reach the women and men of all times. Thus, Tradition is the permanent presence of the Saviour who comes to meet us, to redeem us and to sanctify us in the Spirit, through the ministry of his Church, to the glory of the Father.

Concluding and summing up, we can therefore say that Tradition is not the transmission of things or words, a collection of dead things. Tradition is the living river that links us to the origins, the living river in which the origins are ever present, the great river that leads us to the gates of eternity. And since this is so, in this living river the words of the Lord that we heard on the reader's lips to start with are ceaselessly brought about: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28: 20).

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To special groups

I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims present, including the pupils and staff from Holy Faith

Convent School in Dublin. May your Easter pilgrimage be a time of deep spiritual renewal. Upon you and your families I invoke an abundance of God's blessings of peace and joy!

While we are still in the joyful atmosphere of Easter, I would like to address an affectionate thought to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. I exhort you, dear *young people*, especially you students from the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Frosinone-Veroli-Ferentino, led by your Pastor, Bishop Salvatore Boccaccio, to follow faithfully in Christ's footsteps. Dear *sick people*, I invite each one of you to accept with faith the sufferings and trials of life, glimpsing in them mysterious manifestations of divine love. Dear *newly-weds*, I hope that you will live marriage as a gift and a daily process of maturation, for yourselves personally and for the family, so that you may become generous servants of the Gospel. I thank you all!

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