BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 15 April 2009

Octave of Easter

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today the usual Wednesday General Audience is imbued with spiritual joy, that joy which no suffering or sorrow can erase because it is a joy that springs from the certainty that Christ, with his death and Resurrection, has triumphed over evil and death once and for all. *"Christ is risen! Alleluia!",* the Church sings, rejoicing. And this festive atmosphere, these characteristic sentiments of Easter are not only prolonged during this week the Octave of Easter but extend over the 50 days until Pentecost. Indeed, we can say: the Paschal Mystery embraces our whole life-span.

The biblical references and incentives to meditation offered to us in this liturgical season so that we may acquire a deeper knowledge of the meaning and value of Easter are truly numerous. The *"Via Crucis"* [Way of the Cross] to Calvary that we walked with Jesus in the Sacred Triduum has become the comforting *"Via lucis"* [way of light]. Seen from the Resurrection we can say that this way of suffering is a path of light and spiritual renewal, of inner peace and firm hope. After the weeping, after the bewilderment of Good Friday, followed by the silence laden with expectation of Holy Saturday, at dawn on the "first day after the Sabbath" the proclamation of Life that triumphed over death resounded: *"Dux vitae mortuus/regnat vivus* the Lord of life was dead; but he is now alive and triumphant!". The overwhelming newness of the Resurrection is so important that the Church never ceases to proclaim it, prolonging its commemoration especially every Sunday: every Sunday, in fact, is the "Lord's Day" and the weekly Easter of the People of God. As if to highlight this mystery of salvation that invests our daily life, our Eastern brothers and sisters call Sunday, in

Russian, "the day of the Resurrection" (*voskrescénje*).

Consequently, it is fundamental for our faith and for our Christian witness to proclaim the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as a real, historical event, attested by many authoritative witnesses. We assert this forcefully because, in our day too, there are plenty of people who seek to deny its historicity, reducing the Gospel narrative to a myth, to a "vision" of the Apostles, taking up and presenting old and already worn-out theories as new and scientific. For Jesus, of course, the Resurrection was not a simple return to his former life. Should this have been the case, in fact, it would have been something of the past: 2,000 years ago someone, such as, for example, Lazarus, was raised and returned to his former life. The Resurrection is placed in another dimension: it is the passage to a profoundly new dimension of life that also concerns us, that involves the entire human family, history and the universe. This event that introduced a new dimension of life, an opening of this world of ours to eternal life, changed the lives of the eye-witnesses as the Gospel accounts and the other New Testament writings demonstrate; it is a proclamation that entire generations of men and women down the centuries have accepted with faith and to which they have borne witness, often at the price of their blood, knowing that in this very way they were entering into this new dimension of life. This year too, at Easter this Good News rings out unchanged and ever new in every corner of the earth: Jesus who died on the Cross is risen, he lives in glory because he has defeated the power of death, he has brought the human being to a new communion of life with God and in God. This is the victory of Easter, our salvation! And therefore we can sing with St Augustine: "Christ's Resurrection is our hope!", because it introduces us into a new future.

It is true: our firm hope is founded on the Resurrection of Jesus that brightens the whole of our earthly pilgrimage, including the human enigma of pain and death. Faith in the Crucified and Risen Christ is the heart of the entire Gospel message, the central core of our "Creed". We may find an authoritative expression of this essential "Creed" in a well-known Pauline passage contained in the First Letter to the Corinthians (15: 3-8), in which, to respond to some of the communities of Corinth which were paradoxically proclaiming Jesus' Resurrection but denying the resurrection of the dead our hope the Apostle faithfully hands on what he Paul had received from the first apostolic community concerning the Lord's death and Resurrection.

He begins with an almost peremptory affirmation: "Brothers, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and in which you stand firm. You are being saved by it at this very moment if you hold fast to it as I preached it to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain" (vv. 1-2). He immediately adds that he has transmitted to them what he himself had received. This is followed by the passage we heard at the beginning of our meeting. St Paul first of all presents Jesus' death and in this pithy text makes two additions to the information: "Christ died". The first addition is: died "for our sins"; the second is: "in accordance with the Scriptures" (v. 3). The words: "in accordance with the Scriptures" place the event of the Lord's Resurrection in relation to the Old Testament history of God's Covenant with his People, and make us understand that the death of

the Son of God belongs to the fabric of salvation history and indeed makes us understand that this history receives from it both its logic and its true meaning. Until that moment Christ's death had remained as it were an enigma, whose outcome was still uncertain. In the Paschal Mystery the words of Scripture are fulfilled, that is, this death which comes about "in accordance with the Scriptures" is an event that bears within it a *logos,* a logic: the death of Christ testifies that the Word of God was made "flesh", was made human "history", through and through. How and why this should have happened can be understood from St Paul's other addition: Christ died "for our sins". With these words the Pauline text seems to take up Isaiah's prophecy contained in the *Fourth Song of the Servant of God* (cf. Is 53: 12). The Servant of God the *Song* says "surrendered himself to death"; he bore "the guilt of many" and, by interceding for the "wicked", was able to bring the gift of the reconciliation of men and women with one another and of men and women with God. Thus, his is a death that puts an end to death; the Way of the Cross leads to Resurrection.

In the verses that follow, the Apostle then reflects on the Lord's Resurrection. He says that Christ "was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures". Once again, "in accordance with the Scriptures"! Many exegetes see the words: "he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" as an important reference to what we read in Psalm 16[15] in which the Psalmist proclaims: "Because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption" (*ibid.,* v. 10). This is one of the texts of the Old Testament, cited frequently in early Christianity to prove Jesus' messianic character. Since according to the Jewish interpretation corruption began after the third day, the words of Scripture are fulfilled in Jesus who rose on the third day, that is, before corruption began. St Paul, faithfully passing on the teaching of the Apostles, emphasizes that Christ's victory over death happens through the creative power of the Word of God. This divine power brings hope and joy: this is ultimately the liberating content of the Paschal revelation. At Easter God reveals himself and the power of Trinitarian love that annihilates the destructive forces of evil and death.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us allow ourselves to be illumined by the splendour of the Risen Lord. Let us welcome him with faith and adhere generously to his Gospel, as did the privileged witnesses of his Resurrection; and as, some years later, did St Paul who encountered the divine Teacher in an extraordinary manner on the Road to Damascus. We cannot keep for ourselves alone the proclamation of this Truth that changes the life of all. And with humble trust let us pray: "Jesus, who in rising from the dead anticipated our Resurrection, we believe in You!". I would like to end with an exclamation that Sylvan of Mount Athos used to like to repeat: "Rejoice my soul. It is always Easter, for the Risen Christ is our Resurrection!". May the Virgin Mary help to cultivate within us and around us this climate of Easter joy, so that we may be witnesses of divine Love in every situation of our existence. Once again, Happy Easter to you all!

To special groups

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims present at today's audience. I extend particular greetings to the groups from England, Scotland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Malta, Australia, Indonesia, Canada and the United States of America. May your pilgrimage to the Eternal City strengthen your faith and renew your love for the Lord, the Giver of Life. I wish all of you a Happy Easter!

I greet you, dear *young people,* among whom I have a special thought for those from the Archdiocese of Milan who are preparing for the profession of faith, a stage that follows the sacrament of Confirmation. May the Lord accompany you on your way. I greet you, dear *sick people,* and lastly you, dear *newly weds.* I warmly hope that each one of you will let yourself be enlightened by the light of the Risen Christ to be able to experience the joy of his presence within you.

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