



The Holy See

CELEBRATION OF THE THIRD HOUR

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

AT THE OPENING OF THE 12th ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Synod Hall

Monday, 6 October 2008

Dear Brothers in the Episcopacy,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the beginning of our Synod the Liturgy of the Hours presents a passage from Psalm 118 on the Word of God: a praise of his Word, an expression of the joy of Israel in learning it and, in it, to recognize his will and his Face. I would like to meditate on some verses of this Psalm with you.

It begins like this: *"In aeternum, Domine, verbum tuum constitutum est in caelo... firmasti terram, et permanet"*. This refers to the solidity of the Word. It is solid, it is the true reality on which one must base one's life. Let us remember the words of Jesus who continues the words of this Psalm: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away". Humanly speaking, the word, my human word, is almost nothing in reality, a breath. As soon as it is pronounced it disappears. It seems to be nothing. But already the human word has incredible power. Words create history, words form thoughts, the thoughts that create the word. It is the word that forms history, reality.

Furthermore, the Word of God is the foundation of everything, it is the true reality. And to be realistic, we must rely upon this reality. We must change our idea that matter, solid things, things we can touch, are the more solid, the more certain reality. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount the Lord speaks to us about the two possible foundations for building the house of one's life: sand and rock. The one who builds on sand builds only on visible and tangible things, on success, on career, on money. Apparently these are the true realities. But all this one day will pass away. We

can see this now with the fall of large banks: this money disappears, it is nothing. And thus all things, which seem to be the true realities we can count on, are only realities of a secondary order. The one who builds his life on these realities, on matter, on success, on appearances, builds upon sand. Only the Word of God is the foundation of all reality, it is as stable as the heavens and more than the heavens, it is reality. Therefore, we must change our concept of realism. The realist is the one who recognizes the Word of God, in this apparently weak reality, as the foundation of all things. Realist is the one who builds his life on this foundation, which is permanent. Thus the first verses of the Psalm invite us to discover what reality is and how to find the foundation of our life, how to build life.

The following verse says: "*Omnia serviunt tibi*". All things come from the Word, they are products of the Word. "In the beginning was the Word". In the beginning the heavens spoke. And thus reality was born of the Word, it is "*creatura Verbi*". All is created from the Word and all is called to serve the Word. This means that all of creation, in the end, is conceived of to create the place of encounter between God and his creature, a place where the history of love between God and his creature can develop. "*Omnia serviunt tibi*". The history of salvation is not a small event, on a poor planet, in the immensity of the universe. It is not a minimal thing which happens by chance on a lost planet. It is the motive for everything, the motive for creation. Everything is created so that this story can exist, the encounter between God and his creature. In this sense, salvation history, the Covenant, precedes creation. During the Hellenistic period, Judaism developed the idea that the *Torah* would have preceded the creation of the material world. This material world seems to have been created solely to make room for the *Torah*, for this Word of God that creates the answer and becomes the history of love. The mystery of Christ already is mysteriously revealed here. This is what we are told in the Letter to the Ephesians and to the Colossians: Christ is the *protótypos*, the first-born of creation, the idea for which the universe was conceived. He welcomes all. We enter in the movement of the universe by uniting with Christ. One can say that, while material creation is the condition for the history of salvation, the history of the Covenant is the true cause of the cosmos. We reach the roots of being by reaching the mystery of Christ, his living word that is the aim of all creation.

"*Omnia serviunt tibi*". In serving the Lord we achieve the purpose of being, the purpose of our own existence. Let us take a leap forward: "*Mandata tua exquisivi*". We are always searching for the Word of God. It is not merely present in us. Just reading it does not mean necessarily that we have truly understood the Word of God. The danger is that we only see the human words and do not find the true actor within, the Holy Spirit. We do not find the Word in the words.

In this context St Augustine recalls the scribes and pharisees who were consulted by Herod when the Magi arrived. Herod wants to know where the Saviour of the world would be born. They know it, they give the correct answer: in Bethlehem. They are great specialists who know everything. However they do not see reality, they do not know the Saviour. St Augustine says: they are signs on the road for others, but they themselves do not move. This is a great danger as well in our

reading of Scripture: we stop at the human words, words from the past, history of the past, and we do not discover the present in the past, the Holy Spirit who speaks to us today in the words from the past. In this way we do not enter the interior movement of the Word, which in human words conceals and which opens the divine words. Therefore, there is always a need for *"exquisivi"*. We must always look for the Word within the words.

Therefore, exegesis, the true reading of Holy Scripture, is not only a literary phenomenon, not only reading a text. It is the movement of my existence. It is moving towards the Word of God in the human words. Only by conforming ourselves to the Mystery of God, to the Lord who is the Word, can we enter within the Word, can we truly find the Word of God in human words. Let us pray to the Lord that he may help us search the word, not only with our intellect but also with our entire existence.

At the end: *"Omni consummationi vidi finem, latum praeceptum tuum nimis"*. All human things, all the things we can invent, create, are finite. Even all human religious experiences are finite, showing an aspect of reality, because our being is finite and can only understand a part, some elements: *"latum praeceptum tuum nimis"*. Only God is infinite. And therefore His Word too is universal and knows no boundaries. Therefore by entering into the Word of God we really enter into the divine universe. We escape the limits of our experience and we enter into the reality that is truly universal. Entering into communion with the Word of God, we enter a communion of the Church that lives the Word of God. We do not enter into a small group, with the rules of a small group, but we go beyond our limitations. We go towards the depths, in the true grandeur of the only truth, the great truth of God. We are truly a part of what is universal. And thus we go out into the communion of all our brothers and sisters, of all humanity, because the desire for the Word of God, which is one, is hidden in our heart. Therefore even evangelization, the proclamation of the Gospel, the mission are not a type of ecclesial colonialism, where we wish to insert others into our group. It means going beyond the individual culture into the universality that connects all, unites all, makes us all brothers. Let us pray once again that the Lord may help us to truly enter the "breadth" of His Word and thus to open ourselves to the universal horizon that unites us with all our differences.

At the end, we return to a preceding verse: *"Tuus sum ego: salvum me fac"*. The text translates as: "I am yours". The Word of God is like a stairway that we can climb and, with Christ, even descend into the depths of his love. It is a stairway to reach the Word in the words. *"I am yours"*. The word has a Face, it is a person, Christ. Before we can say "I am yours", he has already told us "I am yours". The Letter to the Hebrews, quoting Psalm 39, says: "You gave me a body.... Then I said, "Here I am, I am coming". The Lord prepared a body to come. With his Incarnation he said: I am yours. And in Baptism he said to me: I am yours. In the Holy Eucharist, he say ever anew: I am yours, so that we may respond: Lord, I am yours. In the way of the Word, entering the mystery of his Incarnation, of his being among us, we want to appropriate his being, we want expropriate our existence, giving ourselves to him who gave Himself to us.

"I am yours". Let us pray the Lord that we may learn to say this word with our whole being. Thus we will be in the heart of the Word. Thus we will be saved.

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