



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF ROME

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Sunday, 14 March 2010

(Video)

Images of the celebration

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to offer my warm thanks to the whole Community, your leaders, and in particular to Pastor Kruse, for having invited me to celebrate this *Laetare* Sunday with you this day on which the crucial element is hope, which sees the light spread by Christ's Resurrection dispel the darkness of our daily routine and the unresolved matters of our lives. Dear Pastor Kruse, you have interpreted St Paul's Message of hope for us. The Gospel, from the 12th chapter of John which I would like to try to explain, is also a Gospel of hope. At the same time, it is a Gospel of the Cross. These two dimensions always go together. Since the Gospel refers to the Cross it speaks of hope and, since it gives hope, it must speak of the Cross.

John tells us that Jesus was going up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and then he says: "Among those who went up to worship... were some Greeks". Without any doubt they were members of the group called *phoboumenoi ton Theon*, the "God-fearing", who, going beyond the polytheism of their world, were seeking the authentic God who is truly God, the one God to whom the whole world belongs and who is the God of all mankind. And they had found that God, whom they were seeking and asking for, and for whom every human being is silently yearning, in the Bible of Israel, recognizing him as that God who created the world. He is the God of all men and women and, at the same time, he chose a specific people and place in which to be present among us. They were searching for God and they came to Jerusalem to worship the one God, to know

something of his mystery. Furthermore, the Evangelist tells us that these people, having heard talk of Jesus, approached Philip the Apostle who came from Bethsaida, in half of which Greek is spoken and said: "We wish to see Jesus". Their desire to know God impels them to want to see Jesus and through him to become more closely acquainted with God. "We wish to see Jesus": we are moved by these words since we all long ever more ardently to see and to know him. I think there are two reasons why these Greeks interest us: on the one hand their situation is the same as ours; we too are pilgrims asking about God, in search of God. And we too would like to know Jesus better and truly to see him. Yet it is also true that, like Philip and Andrew, we should be Jesus' friends, friends who know him and can show others the way that leads to him. I therefore think that at this time we should pray like this: Lord, help us to be people journeying towards you. Lord, grant that we may see you ever more clearly. Help us to be your friends, who open to others the door to you. Whether or not this effectively led to an encounter between Jesus and those Greeks, St John does not tell us. Jesus' answer, which he does report to us, goes far beyond that chance moment. It is a twofold response. He speaks of the glorification of Jesus that was then beginning: "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified" (Jn 12: 23). The Lord explains this concept of glorification with the Parable of the Grain of Wheat: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (v. 24). Indeed the grain of wheat must die, it must sink in the ground in order to absorb energy from the earth and thus develop a stem and become an ear of wheat. With regard to the Lord, this is the parable of his own mystery. He himself is the grain of wheat which came from God, the divine grain that lets itself fall to the ground, that lets itself sink, be broken down in death and precisely by so doing germinates and can thus bear fruit in the immensity of the world. It is not merely a fleeting encounter with some person or another. Now, as the Risen One, he is "new" and goes beyond the limits of space and time. Now, he truly reaches the Greeks. Now, he shows himself to them and speaks to them and they speak to him; so it is that faith is born. The Church grows from all peoples, the community of the Risen Jesus Christ which will become his living Body, the ear of the grain of wheat. In this parable we also find a reference to the mystery of the Eucharist. He, who is the grain of wheat, falls to the ground and dies.

In this manner the holy multiplication of the "loaves" [bread] of the Eucharist comes about, in which he becomes Bread for the people of all times and places.

What the Lord says of himself here in this Christological parable is applied to us in two other verses: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (v. 25). I think that when we first hear this we do not like it. We would like to say to the Lord: "But what are you telling us, Lord? Must we even hate our life? Isn't our life a gift of God? Haven't we been created in his image and likeness? Shouldn't we be grateful and glad that he has given us life?". However, Jesus' words have another meaning. Of course the Lord has given us life and we are grateful for this. Gratitude and joy are fundamental attitudes of Christian life. Yes, we can be happy because we know that each of our lives comes from God. It is not a chance without meaning. I am wanted and loved. When Jesus says we must hate our life he means quite the

opposite. He is thinking here of two fundamental attitudes. One is the attitude of wanting to keep my life selfishly, which is why I consider my life as my own property; I consider myself as my own property, which is why I want to make the very most of this life so as to live a full life, living for myself. Whoever does this, whoever lives for himself and thinks of and desires only himself, does not find himself but is lost. What the Lord tells us is precisely the opposite: not seizing life but giving it. And it is not that in seizing life for ourselves that we receive it, but in giving it, in going beyond ourselves not in looking at ourselves but rather in giving ourselves to the other in the humility of love, giving our life to him and to others. Thus we become rich, distancing ourselves from ourselves, freeing ourselves from ourselves. It is by giving, and not by seizing life that we truly receive life.

The Lord continues and in a second verse says: "If anyone serves me he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honour him." (v. 26). This self-giving, which really is the essence of love, is identical to the Cross. In fact, the Cross is nothing other than this fundamental law of the grain of wheat that died, the fundamental law of love: that we ourselves become only when we give ourselves. But the Lord adds that this gift of self, this acceptance of the Cross, this distancing of oneself from oneself means going with him, since, in following him and in following the process of the grain of wheat, we find the way to love. This immediately seems a way fraught with difficulty and effort but for this very reason it is the way to salvation. The *sequela*, this going with him, who is himself the Way, the Truth and the Life, is inherent in the way of the Cross which is the way of love, of losing and of giving oneself. This concept also includes the fact that this *sequela* is carried out as "we", that none of us has his own Christ, his own Jesus. It implies that we can follow him only if we walk with him all together, entering this "we" and learning with him the love that he gives. The *sequela* is carried out in this "we". Being Christian means "being we" in the community of Christ's disciples. And this poses for us the question of ecumenism: sorrow at having broken this "we", at having split the one path into so many paths. As a result the witness we must give is obscured and love cannot find its full expression. What must we say in this regard? Today we hear many complaints about the fact that ecumenism has reached a stalemate and that there are mutual accusations. Yet I think we should first of all be grateful that so much unity already exists. It is wonderful that today, *Laetare* Sunday, we can pray together, sing the same hymns, listen to the same word of God, explain it and seek to understand it together; that we look to the one Christ whom we see and to whom we wish to belong and that, in this manner, we are already witnessing that he is one, the One who has called us all and to whom, in the deepest way possible, we all belong. I believe that above all it is this that we should show the world: not every sort of dispute and conflict, but joy and gratitude at the fact that the Lord is granting this to us and that real unity exists that can become ever deeper and become increasingly a testimony of Christ's word, of Christ's way in this world. Of course, this must not satisfy us, although we must be grateful for these shared dimensions. Yet the fact that in the essentials, in the celebration of the Blessed Eucharist we are unable to drink from the same cup, we are unable to gather round the same altar, cannot but fill us with sorrow for it is we who are guilty of this, we who cloud this testimony. It must make us inwardly restless on our journey

toward greater unity in the knowledge that, basically, the Lord alone can give this to us. For a unity agreed by us would be a human act, hence brittle, like everything made by the human hand. Let us give ourselves to him, let us seek to know and love him, to see him ever better. Let us therefore allow him to lead us, truly, to full unity, for which we should pray with every urgency at this moment.

Dear friends, once again I would like to thank you for extending this invitation to me, for the cordiality with which you have welcomed me, and also for your words, kind Ms. Esch. Let us give thanks for having been able to pray and sing together. Let us pray for each other, let us pray together that the Lord will grant us unity and help the world so that it may believe. Amen.

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