



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE - HOLY WEEK

Wednesday, 26 March 1997

We relive saving events of Redemption

1. *“Vexilla Regis prodeunt / fulget Crucis mysterium...”*.

We are in Holy Week, days in which we venerate the mystery of the Cross. With deep emotion, the Church proclaims the ancient liturgical hymn, passed on from generation to generation and repeated by believers down the centuries. “Holy Week”, the centre of the liturgical year, enables us to relive the fundamental events of the Redemption linked with the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. These are poignant, moving days filled with a special atmosphere which touches all Christians, days of inner silence, intense prayer and deep meditation on the extraordinary events that have changed the history of humanity and give true value to our lives.

Today, on the eve of the Sacred Triduum, I would like to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with you, in my mind and in my heart. The liturgy of the next few days will guide us: it will bring us to the Upper Room, it will take us to Calvary and finally, to the new tomb dug out of the rock.

2. On Holy Thursday we will find bread and wine in the Upper Room of Jerusalem. That day brings us to the institution of the Eucharist, the supreme gift of God’s love in his plan of redemption. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians in the years 53-56, confirmed the first Christians in the truth of the “Eucharistic mystery”, telling them what he himself had learned: “The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me’. In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’” (1 Cor 11:23-26).

These words clearly show Christ's intention: under the appearances of bread and wine he becomes present with his body "given" and his blood "shed" as the sacrifice of the New Covenant. At the same time, he appoints the Apostles and their successors ministers of this sacrament which he gives his Church as the supreme proof of his love.

This is the essential content of Holy Thursday. May the Son of God enable us to live this day according to the words of the lovely Byzantine prayer: "O Son of God, make me share today in your mystical Supper: I will not reveal the Mystery to your enemies, nor will I give you the kiss of Judas, but like the good thief I will confess to you: Remember me, O Lord, when you are in your Kingdom!" (Liturgy of St Basil for Holy Thursday, *Communion Hymn*).

3. On Good Friday we will contemplate the Cross on Calvary. "*Ecce lignum Crucis*": "*Behold the wood of the Cross on which hung Christ the Saviour of the world*". We will relive the "sorrowful mysteries" of Jesus' Passion and Death. Before the Crucified One, the words he uttered during the Last Supper acquire dramatic importance. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (cf. Mk 14:24; Mt 26:28; Lk 22:20). Jesus wanted to offer his life in sacrifice for the forgiveness of the sins of humanity, choosing for this end the cruelest and most humiliating death, crucifixion.

Just as with the Eucharist, so with the Passion and Death of Jesus on the Cross the mystery is unfathomable to human reasoning. The climb to Calvary was indescribable suffering, resulting in the terrible torment of crucifixion. What a mystery! God, made man, suffers to save man, taking the tragedy of humanity upon himself.

Good Friday reminds us of the constant succession of trials in history, among which we cannot forget the tragedies of our own day. In this regard, how can we forget the tragic events which are still staining some of the world's nations with blood? The Lord's Passion is continued in the suffering of humanity. It particularly continues in the martyrdom of priests, religious and lay people serving in the front lines of proclaiming the Gospel. Precisely the day before yesterday, we celebrated the *Day of Prayer and Fasting for Missionary Martyrs*: the Christian community is invited to meditate on this heroic witness and to remember in their prayers these brothers and sisters who paid the price of their fidelity to Christ with their lives.

The Christian must learn to carry his cross with humility, trust and abandonment to God's will, finding in Christ's Cross support and comfort amid life's troubles. May the Father grant that at every difficult moment we will be able to pray: "*Adoramus Te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi*" "*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world*".

4. And after the expectation of Holy Saturday, we will experience the joy of Holy Easter. The Sacred Triduum ends in the radiant "glorious mystery" of Christ's Resurrection. He had foretold:

“On the third day I will rise again”! It is the definitive victory of life over death.

The most solemn and greatest of Christian celebrations, the Easter Vigil, will take place at night. A night of expectation ... rich in light: the night of the blessed fire, the night of the baptismal water, the night of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. Easter night, a night of passage: Christ's passage from death to life; our passage from the slavery of sin to the freedom of the children of God. May the Holy Spirit grant us the exultation of the women disciples of the Lord, who — as the Byzantine liturgy emphasizes — said to the Apostles: “Death is overcome; Christ our God has risen, bestowing his great mercy on the world!” (Byzantine liturgy, *Troparion for Holy Saturday*, tone IV).

To the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims the Holy Father said:

I am pleased to greet the Englishspeaking visitors, especially the pilgrim groups from England, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Japan and the United States. Upon you and your families I cordially invoke the joy and peace of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

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