



# The Holy See

---

JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 18 February 1998*

## ***Son of God brings fullness of salvation***

1. In the programmatic speech Jesus gave in the synagogue of Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry, he applied to himself the prophecy of Isaiah in which the Messiah appears as the one sent to proclaim "release to the captives" (*Lk* 4:18; cf. *Is* 61:1-2).

Jesus comes to offer us a salvation which, although primarily a liberation from sin, also involves the totality of our being with its deepest needs and aspirations. Christ frees us from this burden and threat and opens the way to the complete fulfilment of our destiny.

2. Sin, Jesus reminds us in the Gospel, puts man in a state of slavery: "Truly, truly I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin" (*Jn* 8:34).

Jesus' listeners think of freedom primarily in external terms, proudly relying on the privilege of being the people of the Covenant: "We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one" (*ibid.*, v. 33). Jesus is anxious to draw their attention to another more basic freedom, threatened not so much from the outside as from the snares found in the human heart itself. Whoever is oppressed by the dominating, destructive power of sin cannot accept Jesus' message, much less his person, the only source of true freedom: "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (*ibid.*, v. 36). It is only the Son of God who, by communicating his divine life, can make men share in his filial freedom.

3. The liberation offered by Christ removes, in addition to sin, the obstacles preventing friendship and a covenant relationship with God. From this standpoint it is *a reconciliation*.

Paul wrote to the Christians of Corinth: "God ... through Christ reconciled us to himself" (2 *Cor* 5:18). This reconciliation is obtained by the sacrifice of the Cross. From it flows that peace which consists in the fundamental agreement of the human will with the divine.

This peace not only affects relations with God, but also concerns relations between human beings. Christ "is our peace", because he unites all who believe in him, reconciling them "to God in one body" (cf. *Eph* 2:14-16).

4. It is comforting to think that Jesus does not limit himself to freeing the heart from the prison of selfishness, but communicates divine love to each person. At the Last Supper he gives the new commandment which must characterize the community he founded: "Love one another as I have loved you" (*Jn* 13:34; 15:12). The newness of this precept of love consists in the words: "as I have loved you". The "as" points to the Teacher as the model who must be imitated by his disciples, but at the same time it points to the origin or source of mutual love in him. Christ communicates to his disciples the power to love as he loved, he raises their love to the superior level of his own, and urges them to tear down the barriers that divide people.

His desire to put an end to all discrimination and exclusion can be powerfully seen in the Gospel. He overcomes the obstacles preventing contact with lepers, who are subjected to a painful segregation. He violates the customs and rules which tend to isolate those considered "sinners". He does not accept the prejudices which put women in an inferior position, but accepts them among his followers and has them serve his kingdom.

The disciples must imitate his example. The entry of God's love into human hearts is expressed in a special way in the obligation to love our enemies: "I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (*Mt* 5:44-45).

5. Starting from the heart, the salvation brought by Jesus is extended to the various areas of human life: spiritual and physical, personal and social. By defeating sin with his Crucifixion, Christ inaugurates a movement of integral liberation. In his public life he himself heals the sick, frees people from demons and alleviates every kind of suffering, thereby showing a sign of God's kingdom. He tells the disciples to do the same when they preach the Gospel (cf. *Mt* 10:8; *Lk* 9:2; 10:9).

If not by miracles, which depend on divine consent, then certainly by works of fraternal charity and the commitment to promoting justice, Christ's disciples are called to make an active contribution to eliminating the causes of suffering which humiliate and sadden man.

It is, of course, impossible for pain to be entirely overcome in this way. On every human being's

path the anguish of death remains. But everything receives new light from the paschal mystery. Suffering endured with love and united to Christ's bears fruits of salvation: it becomes "salvific pain". Even death, if faced with faith, takes on the reassuring aspect of a passage to eternal life, in expectation of the resurrection of the flesh. We can thus understand how rich and deep is the salvation brought by Christ. He came to save not only every person, but also the whole person.