



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday, 16 April 2003

Comment on the Easter Triduum

God has highly exalted him!

1. Tomorrow afternoon, with the Holy Mass of *the Lord's Supper*, begins the *Easter Triduum*, the fulcrum of the liturgical year. In these days, the Church is gathered in silent recollection, praying and meditating on the mystery of the passion, death and Resurrection of the Lord.

By taking part in the rites of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil, we revisit the last hours of the earthly life of Jesus which ends in the glorious light of the Resurrection.

In the canticle just proclaimed, we heard that Christ became "*obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him*" (Phil 2: 8-9). These words sum up God's mysterious design that we relive in the coming days, a mystery that gives meaning and fulfilment to human history.

2. While the Holy Chrism Mass, which is usually celebrated on Holy Thursday morning, highlights in particular the ministerial priesthood, the rites of the Holy Mass of the *Lord's Supper* are a pressing invitation to contemplate the Eucharist, the central mystery of the faith and Christian life.

The desire to stress the importance of this Sacrament impelled me to write the Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, which I will have the joy of signing during the Mass of the *Lord's Supper*. In this text, I intend to present to every believer a systematic reflection on the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which contains the entire spiritual good of the Church.

Together with the Eucharist, the Lord in the Upper Room instituted the ministerial Priesthood, so that his one Sacrifice would be actualized down through the centuries: "*Do this in remembrance of*

me" (Lk 22: 19). He also left us the new commandment of fraternal love. By the washing of the feet, he taught the disciples that love must be expressed in humble and disinterested service to one's neighbour.

3. On *Good Friday*, a day of penance and fasting, we commemorate the passion and death of Jesus, absorbed in adoration of the Cross. "*Ecce lignum Crucis, in quo salus mundi pependit* - This is the wood of the Cross, on which hung the Saviour of the world". On Calvary, the Son of God assumed the burden of our sins, offering himself to the Father as a victim of expiation. From the Cross, the source of our salvation, new life wells up for the children of God.

Friday's drama gives place to the silence of *Holy Saturday*, a day full of expectation and hope. With Mary, the Christian community watches in prayer by the tomb, waiting for the glorious event of the Resurrection.

On the *Holy Night* of Easter, all is renewed in the risen Christ. From every corner of the earth the song of the *Gloria* and the *Alleluia* will rise to heaven, while the light will crush the darkness of the night. On *Easter Sunday*, we will rejoice with the Risen One and receive from him his greeting of peace.

4. Let us prepare ourselves, dear brothers and sisters, to celebrate these holy days with their due dignity and contemplate the marvellous work wrought by God in the humiliation and exaltation of Christ (cf. Phil 2: 6-11).

Commemorating this central mystery of the faith also involves the commitment to put it into practice in the concrete reality of our lives. It means recognizing that Christ's passion is continued in the dramatic events which, unfortunately, still in our time afflict so many men and women in every part of the earth.

The mystery of the Cross and of the Resurrection, however, assures us that hatred, violence, blood and death do not have the last word in human lives. The definitive victory is Christ's, and we must set out anew with him if we want to build a future of authentic peace, justice and solidarity for everyone.

May the Virgin, who shared intimately in the saving plan, accompany us on the way of the passion and the cross to the empty tomb, in order to meet her divine and risen Son! Let us enter into the spiritual atmosphere of the Holy Triduum with Mary as our guide.

With these sentiments, I warmly wish everyone a peaceful and holy Easter.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors

I extend a special welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including groups from Australia, Ireland, Norway, Scotland and the United States of America. Upon all of you I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I wish you a happy and holy Easter.

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

My thoughts now turn to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds* to whom I offer special good wishes for Easter.

Dear *young people*, I hope that you will not be afraid to follow Christ, even when he asks you to travel with him on the difficult way of the Cross. Dear *sick people*, may meditation on the passion of Jesus, the mystery of suffering transfigured by love, bring you comfort and consolation. And in you, dear *newly-weds*, may the death and Resurrection of the Lord renew the joy and commitment of your marriage bond.