



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF "SAN PANCRAZIO"

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 22 April 1979

1. Today we are following in the footsteps of a *very ancient tradition of the Church*, that of the second Sunday of Easter, called "in Albis", which is bound up with the liturgy of Easter and particularly with the liturgy of the Easter Vigil. This Vigil, as its modern form also testifies, represented a great day for catechumens, who, during the night of Easter, by means of baptism, were buried together with Christ in death in order to be able to walk in a new life, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father (cf. Rom 6:4).

In this inspiring image St Paul presented the mystery of baptism. Catechumens received baptism precisely during the Easter Vigil, as we had the fortune to have also this year, when I conferred baptism on children and adults of Europe, Asia and Africa.

In this way the night that precedes Easter. Sunday really became for them the "Passover", that is, the Passing from sin, that is from the death of the spirit, to Grace, that is to the life of the Holy Spirit. It was the night of a real Resurrection in the Spirit. As a sign of sanctifying grace, the newly baptized received during baptism a white garment, which distinguished them for the whole octave of Easter. On this day of the second Sunday of Easter, they took off this garment; hence the very ancient name of this day: Sunday "in Albis depositis".

In Rome this tradition is linked with the church of San Pancrazio. Today the liturgical station is precisely here. We have, therefore, the fortune to unite the pastoral visit to the parish with the Roman tradition of the station of Sunday in Albis.

2. Today, therefore, we wish to *sing together* here the joy of the Resurrection of the Lord, as the liturgy of this Sunday announces:

O give thanks to the Lord, / for he is good; / his steadfast love endures for ever!... / This is the day which the Lord has made; / let us rejoice and be glad in it (Ps 117 (118):1, 24).

We wish also to *give thanks for the indescribable gift of faith*, which descended into our hearts and is constantly strengthened by means of the mystery of the Resurrection of the Lord. Today St John speaks to us of the greatness of this gift in the powerful words of his letter: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 Jn 5:4-5).

So we thank the Risen Christ with great joy in our hearts, since he lets us participate in his victory. At the same time, *we humbly beseech him* that we may never cease being participants, through faith, in this victory: particularly in difficult and critical moments, in moments of disappointment and suffering, when we are exposed to temptation and ordeals. Yet we know what St Paul writes: "Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12). And here, furthermore, are St Peter's words: "... you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:6-7).

3. The Christians of the first generations of the Church prepared for baptism for a long time and thoroughly. This was *the period of the catechumenate*, the traditions of which are still reflected today in the liturgy of Lent. These traditions were alive when adults prepared for baptism. To the extent to which the tradition of the baptism of children developed, the catechumenate in this form was to disappear. Children received baptism in the faith of the Church, for which the whole Christian community (which today is called the "parish") vouched, and in the first place their own family. The renewed liturgy of the baptism of children highlights this aspect even more. The parents with the godfathers and godmothers profess the faith, make the baptismal promises and assume responsibility for the Christian education of their child.

In this way, the catechumenate is *transferred* in a way *to a later* period, to the time of gradual growth to adulthood; then the baptized person must acquire, from those closest to him and in the parish community of the Church, a living awareness of that faith, in which he has already become a participant, by means of the grace of baptism. It is difficult to call this process "catechumenate" in the original and proper sense of the word. Nevertheless it is the equivalent of the authentic catechumenate and must take place with the same earnestness and zeal as the one that once preceded baptism. The duties of the Christian family and of the parish converge on this point. On this occasion today, we must realize this with special clarity and strength.

4. The parish, as the fundamental community of the People of God and as an organic part of the Church, *has its origin*, in a certain sense, *in the sacrament of baptism*. It is, in fact, the community of the baptized. Through every baptism, the parish participates in a special way in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Its whole pastoral and apostolic effort aims at making all parishioners aware of baptism, so that they may persevere in Grace, that is, in the state of Sons of God and enjoy the fruits of baptism in personal life as well as in family and social life. Therefore renewal of the awareness of baptism is particularly necessary. It is a fundamental value in the life of the parish to undertake this catechumenate—which is now lacking in preparation for baptism—and carry it out the various stages of life.

The function of catechesis consists precisely of this. It must extend not only to the period of the elementary school but also to higher education and to later periods of life.

In particular sacramental catechesis is indispensable as preparation for first communion and confirmation; preparation for the sacrament of marriage is of great importance.

Furthermore the baptized man, if he wishes to be a Christian "in works and in truth", must constantly remain faithful, during life, to the catechesis received. It tells him, in fact, how he must understand his Christianity and put it into practice in the various phases and environments of professional, social and cultural life. This is the vast task of catechesis for adults.

God be thanked, this activity is developing widely in the life of the diocese of Rome and in your parish.

5. I am informed, indeed, of the many initiatives of catechesis and associative life, which the parish institutions are carrying out with the help of many Religious Families, male and female, and various ecclesial movements. Special mention should be made of the well-deserving Discalced Carmelite Fathers, who dedicate their energies to the spiritual progress of this parish of San Pancrazio. The large population concentrated here is just another stimulus for an indefatigable apostolic commitment. My word, therefore, becomes exhortation and encouragement both to the parish leaders that they may continue joyfully in their service to the Body of Christ, and to all the members of the Community, that they may always and consciously find in it the best place for their growth in the faith, hope and love which they are to testify to the world.

6. On Sunday "In Albis", the liturgy of the Church makes us witnesses of the meeting of the Risen Christ with the apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. *The figure of the Apostle Thomas and Christ's talk with him* always attracts our particular attention. The Risen Master allows him in a unique way to recognize the signs of his passion and thus convince himself of the reality of the Resurrection. Then St Thomas, who at first did not want to believe, expresses his faith in the words: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28). Jesus replies: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn 20:29).

May the experience of Lent, touching in a certain sense the signs of Christ's Passion, and the solemnity of his Resurrection, renew and strengthen our faith—and also the faith of those who are mistrustful, half-hearted, indifferent and distant.

And may the blessing that the Risen Christ uttered in his conversation with Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe", remain with us all!

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