



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE PARISH CHURCH
OF "SANTO VOLTO DI GESÙ" IN ROME'S SUBURB OF MAGLIANA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Fifth Sunday of Lent, 29 March 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel passage St John refers to an episode that occurred during the last phase of Christ's public ministry, just before the Jewish Passover, which was to be the Passover of his death and Resurrection. While Jesus was in Jerusalem, the Evangelist recounts, some Greeks, proselytes of Judaism who were curious and attracted by what he was doing, approached Philip, one of the Twelve who had a Greek name and came from Galilee. "Sir", they said to him, " we wish to see Jesus". Philip in turn went to Andrew, one of the first Apostles very close to the Lord and who also had a Greek name, and they both went and "told Jesus" (cf. Jn 12: 20-21).

In the request of these anonymous Greeks we can interpret the thirst to see and to know Christ which is in every person's heart; and Jesus' answer orients us to the mystery of Easter, the glorious manifestation of his saving mission. "The hour has come", he declared, "for the Son of man to be glorified (Jn 12: 23). Yes! The hour of the glorification of the Son of man is at hand, but it will entail the sorrowful passage through his Passion and death on the Cross. Indeed the divine plan of salvation which is for everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike will only be brought about in this manner. Actually, everyone is invited to be a member of the one people of the new and definitive Covenant. In this light, we also understand the solemn proclamation with which the Gospel passage ends: "and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12: 32), and likewise the Evangelist's comment: "He said this to show by what death he was to die" (Jn 12: 33). The Cross: the height loftiness of love is the loftiness of Jesus and he attracts all to these heights.

Very appropriately, the liturgy brings us to meditate on this text of John's Gospel today, on this Fifth Sunday of Lent, while the days of the Lord's Passion draw near in which we will immerse ourselves spiritually as from next Sunday which is called, precisely, Palm Sunday and the Sunday of the Lord's Passion. It is as if the Church were encouraging us to share Jesus' state of mind, desiring to prepare us to relive the mystery of his Crucifixion, death and Resurrection not as foreign spectators but on the contrary as protagonists, involved together with him in his mystery of the Cross and the Resurrection. Indeed, where Christ is his disciples called to follow him, to be in solidarity with him at the moment of the combat must also be in order to share in his victory.

What our association with his mission consists of is explained by the Lord himself. In speaking of his forthcoming glorious death, he uses a simple and at the same time evocative image: "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12: 24).

He compares himself to a "grain of wheat which has split open, to bring much fruit to others", according to an effective statement of St Athanasius; it is only through death, through the Cross that Christ bears much fruit for all the centuries. Indeed, it was not enough for the Son of God to become incarnate. To bring the divine plan of universal salvation to completion he had to be killed and buried: only in this way was human reality to be accepted, and, through his death and Resurrection, the triumph of Life, the triumph of Love to be made manifest; it was to be proven that love is stronger than death.

Yet the man Jesus who was a true man with the same sentiments as ours felt the burden of the trial and bitter sorrow at the tragic end that awaited him. Precisely since he was God-Man he felt terror even more acutely as he faced the abyss of human sin and all that is unclean in humanity which he had to carry with him and consume in the fire of his love. He had to carry all this with him and transform it in his love. "Now is my soul troubled", he confessed. "And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?" (Jn 12: 27). The temptation to ask: "Save me, do not permit the Cross, give me life!" surfaces. In the distress of his invocation we may grasp in anticipation the anguished prayer of Gethsemane, when, experiencing the drama of loneliness and fear, he implored the Father to take from him the cup of the Passion. At the same time, however, his filial adherence to the divine plan did not fail, because it is precisely this that enables him to know that his hour has come and with trust he prays: "Father, glorify your name" (Jn 12: 28). By this he means "I accept the Cross" in which the name of God is glorified, that is, the greatness of his love. Here too Jesus anticipates the words of the Mount of Olives, the process that must be fundamentally brought about in all our prayers: to transform, to allow grace to transform our selfish will and open it to comply with the divine will. The same sentiments surface in the passage of the Letter to the Hebrews proclaimed in the Second Reading. Prostrated by extreme anguish because of the death that was hanging over him, Jesus offers up prayers and supplications to God "with loud cries and tears" (Heb 5: 7). He invokes help from the One who can set him free but always remaining abandoned in the Father's hands. And precisely because of his filial trust in God, the author notes, he was heard, in the sense that he was raised, he received new and definitive life.

The Letter to the Hebrews makes us understand that these insistent prayers, of Jesus with tears and cries, were the true act of the High Priest with which he offered himself and humanity to the Father, there by transforming the world.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the demanding way of the Cross that Jesus points out to all his disciples. On several occasions he said, "If anyone wants to serve me, let him follow me". There is no alternative for the Christian who wishes to fulfil his vocation. It is the "law" of the Cross, described with the image of the grain of wheat that dies in order that new life may germinate; it is the "logic" of the Cross, recalled also in today's Gospel: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life". "To hate" one's life is a strong and paradoxical Semitic expression that clearly emphasizes the radical totality which must distinguish those who follow Christ and, out of love for him, put themselves at the service of their brethren. They lose their life and thus find it. There is no other way to experience the joy and the true fruitfulness of Love: the way of giving oneself, of self-giving, of losing oneself in order to find oneself.

Dear friends, Jesus' invitation rings out with particular eloquence at today's celebration in this Parish of yours. Indeed, it is dedicated to the Holy Face of Jesus: that Face which "some Greeks", of which the Gospel speaks, wished to see; that Face which in the coming days of the Passion we shall contemplate disfigured by human sins, indifference and ingratitude; that Face, radiant with light and dazzling with glory that will shine out at dawn on Easter Day. Let us keep our hearts and minds fixed on the Face of Christ, dear faithful whom I greet with affection, starting with Fr Luigi Coluzzi, your Parish Priest, to whom I am also grateful for expressing your sentiments. Thank you for your cordial welcome: I am truly glad to be among you on the occasion of the third anniversary of the dedication of your church and I greet you all with affection. I extend a special greeting to the Cardinal Vicar, as well as to Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini, who has contributed to the realization of this new parish centre, to the Auxiliary Bishop of the Sector, to Bishop Marcello Costalunga and to the other Prelates present, to the priests who collaborate in the parish, to the praiseworthy women religious of the Congregation of the Poor Daughters of the Visitation who take care of the residents in their Rest Home for the elderly right opposite this beautiful church. I greet the catechists, the Council and the parish workers and those who collaborate in the life of the Parish; I greet the children, the young people and their families. I extend my thoughts with pleasure to the inhabitants of Magliana, especially the elderly, the sick, people who are lonely and in difficulty. I am praying for each and everyone at this Holy Mass.

Dear brothers and sisters, let yourselves be enlightened by the splendour of the Face of Christ, and your young community which can now benefit from a new parish complex, with modern and functional structures will walk united, united by the commitment to proclaim and witness to the Gospel in this neighbourhood. I know what great care you devote to liturgical formation, making the most of every resource of your community: the readers, the choir and all those who are dedicated to enlivening the celebrations. It is important to put always personal and liturgical prayer

first in our life. I am aware of the great commitment you devote to catechesis to ensure that it lives up to the expectations of the children, both those preparing to receive the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation and those who attend the After-School Prayer and Recreation Centre. You are also anxious to provide a suitable catechesis for parents, whom you invite to take a course of Christian formation together with their children. In this way you seek to help families to live the sacramental events together, educating and being educated in the faith "in the family", which must be the first and natural "school" of Christian life for all its members. I congratulate you on your open and welcoming parish. It is motivated and enlivened by a sincere love for God and for all the brethren, in imitation of St Maximilian Mary Kolbe to whom it was originally dedicated. In Auschwitz, with heroic courage, he sacrificed himself to save the life of another. In our time, marked by a general social and economic crisis, the effort you are making, above all through the parish *Caritas* and the Sant'Egidio group, in order, as far as possible, to meet the expectations of the poorest and neediest people is most praiseworthy.

I would like to say a special word of encouragement to you, dear young people: let yourselves be attracted by the fascination of Christ! Fixing his Face with the eyes of the faith, ask him: "Jesus what do you want me to do with you and for you?". Thus, keep listening. Be guided by his Spirit, second the plan he has for you. Prepare yourselves seriously and build families that are united and faithful to the Gospel and to be his witnesses in society; then, if he calls you, be ready to dedicate your whole life to his service in the Church as priests or as men and women religious. I assure you of my prayers; in particular I am expecting you next Thursday in St Peter's Basilica to prepare ourselves for the [World Youth Day](#), which as you know, is being celebrated this year at the diocesan level, next Sunday. [We shall remember together my beloved and venerable Predecessor John Paul II on the fourth anniversary of his death](#). In many circumstances he encouraged young people to encounter Christ and to follow him with enthusiasm and generosity.

Dear brothers and sisters of this parish community, may the infinite love of Christ that shines in his Face be radiant in your every attitude, and become your "daily life". As St Augustine urged in an Easter homily, "Christ has suffered; let us die to sin. Christ is risen; let us live for God. Christ has passed from this world to the Father; let us not be attached to this earth with our hearts but follow him in the things of above. Our Lord was hung on the wood of the Cross; let us crucify concupiscence of the flesh. he lay in the tomb; buried with him, let us forget past things; he is seated in Heaven; let us concentrate our longing on our desires to supreme things" (S. Agostino, *Discourse 229/D*, 1).

Heartened by this knowledge, let us continue the Eucharistic celebration, invoking the motherly intercession of Mary, so that our life may become a reflection of Christ's. Let us pray that all those whom we meet may always perceive in our gestures and in our words the pacifying and comforting goodness of his Face. Amen!

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