



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION
WITH THE COMMUNITY OF THE "CENTRO ALETTI" OF ROME
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 90th BIRTHDAY OF CARDINAL TOMÁŠ ŠPIDLÍK, S.J.

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

"Redemptoris Mater" Chapel of the Vatican Apostolic Palace
Thursday, 17 December 2009

Dear Friends,

With today's Liturgy we enter into the last stage of the Advent journey, which urges us to intensify our preparation, to celebrate the Lord's Birth with faith and joy, welcoming with deep wonder God who makes himself close to human beings, to each one of us.

The First Reading presents to us the aged Jacob who gathers his sons to give them his blessing. It is an event of great intensity and emotion. This blessing is like their seal of fidelity to the Covenant with God; but it is also a prophetic vision that looks ahead and indicates a mission. Jacob is a father who, on the paths of his own history that have not always been straight, achieves the joy of gathering his children round him and predicting the future of each one and of their descendants. Today, in particular, we heard the reference to the tribe of Judah whose royal power is exalted, represented by the lion, as well as the monarchy of David, represented by the sceptre, by the ruler's staff that alludes to the coming of the Messiah. Thus through this dual image, the mysterious future of the lion that becomes a lamb, of the king whose ruler's staff becomes the Cross, is the sign of true kingship. Jacob has gradually become aware of the primacy of God, he has realized that his journey is guided and sustained by the Lord's faithfulness, and cannot but answer with full adherence to God's Covenant and plan of salvation becoming in turn, together with his own descendants, a link in the divine plan.

The Gospel of Matthew presents to us the "genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt 1: 1), underlining and further explaining God's fidelity to the promise that he puts into practice not only through human beings but *with them*, and, as for Jacob, sometimes in tortuous and unexpected ways. The awaited Messiah, the subject of the promise, is true God but also true man; the Son of God, but also the Son born of the Virgin Mary of Nazareth, the holy flesh of Abraham in whose descendants all the peoples of the earth would be blessed (cf. Gn 22: 18). In this genealogy, in addition to Mary, four other women are recalled. They are not Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, or Rachel, that is, the great figures of the history of Israel. Instead, paradoxically they are four pagan women: Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Tamar, who seemingly "cloud" the purity of a genealogy. Yet, in these pagan women who appear at crucial points in the history of salvation, also appears the mystery of the church of the pagans, the universality of salvation. They are pagan women in whom appears the future, the universality of salvation. They are also sinful women, and thus the mystery of grace appears in them: it is not our works that redeem the world, but rather the Lord who gives us true life. They are sinful women, yes, in whom appears the greatness of the grace that we all need. Yet these women reveal an exemplary response to God's faithfulness, showing their faith in the God of Israel. And thus we see through the Church of the pagans, the mystery of grace, faith as a gift and as the way to communion with God. Matthew's genealogy, therefore, is not merely a list of generations: it is history brought about first by God, but with humanity's response. It is a genealogy of grace and faith: it is precisely on the absolute fidelity of God and on the sound faith of these women that the fulfilment of the promise made to Israel is founded.

Jacob's blessing corresponds felicitously with today's happy event of the 90th birthday of beloved Cardinal Spidlík. His long life and his unique journey of faith are proof of how God guides those who entrust themselves to him. However, he also followed a full itinerary of thought, always communicating with ardour and profound conviction that the centre of the whole Revelation is a Triune God, and that, consequently, the human being created in his image is essentially a mystery of freedom and love that is fulfilled in communion: God's way of being itself. This communion does not exist for itself but proceeds as the Christian East never tires of saying from the divine Persons who love each other freely. Freedom and love, constitutive elements of the person, cannot be grasped through rational categories, which is why it is impossible to understand the person except in the mystery of Christ, true God and true man, and in communion with him, who becomes the acceptance of the "divine humanity" also in our own existence. Faithful to this principle, in the course of the years Cardinal Spidlík has created a lively and, in many aspects, original theological vision, in which the Christian East and West converge organically in a mutual exchange of gifts. This vision is founded on life in the Spirit, the principle of knowledge: love, study, an initiation to spiritual memory, dialogue with human beings themselves: an indispensable criterion and its context: the ever-living Body of Christ which is his Church. Closely linked to this is the exercise of spiritual fatherhood which Cardinal Spidlík has always carried out and continues to carry out. Today we might say that gathered round him, in the celebration of the divine Mysteries is a small spiritual "descendant" of his, the "Centro Aletti", that wishes to gather his precious teaching,

making it fruitful with new insights and new research, also through the depictions of art. In this context, it seems to me particularly beautiful to emphasize the link between theology and art that has flowed from his thought. Indeed, it has been 10 years since the time when my venerable and beloved Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, dedicated this *Redemptoris Mater Chapel*, saying that "this work... is offered as an expression of that theology with two lungs from which the Church of the third millennium can draw new vitality". And the Pope continued, "The image of the *Redemptoris Mater*, standing out on the central wall, unveils to our eyes the mystery of the love of God, who became man in order to give us human beings the ability to become God's children... [This is the] message of salvation and the joy which Christ, born of Mary, brought to humanity" (John Paul II, *Homily for the Dedication of "Redemptoris Mater" Chapel*, 14 November 1999).

To you, dear Cardinal Spidlík, I wish you wholeheartedly an abundance of the Lord's graces, so that you may continue to enlighten with wisdom the Members of the "Centro Aletti" and all your spiritual children. As I continue the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, I entrust each one to the motherly protection of the Mother of the Redeemer, invoking from the divine Word who took our flesh, the light and peace proclaimed by the Angelus in Bethlehem.

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