



The Holy See

CELEBRATION OF PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF OUR LORD

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*St Peter's Square
25th World Youth Day
Sunday, 28 March 2010*

(Video)

Images of the celebration

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Dear Young People,*

The Gospel of the blessing of the palms that we have heard gathered here in St Peter's Square, begins with the sentence: "[Jesus] went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem" (Lk 19: 28). At the very beginning of today's Liturgy, the Church anticipates her response to the Gospel saying: "Let us follow the Lord". This clearly expresses the theme of Palm Sunday. It is the sequela. Being Christian means considering the way of Jesus Christ as the right way for being human as that way which leads to our destination, to a completely fulfilled and authentic humanity. In a special way I would like to repeat to all young people on this 25th World Youth Day that being Christian is a path or, better, a pilgrimage; it is to travel with Jesus Christ, to journey in the direction he has pointed out and is pointing out to us.

But what direction is this? How do we find it? Our Gospel passage offers two clues in this regard. In the first place it says that it is an ascent. This has first of all a very concrete meaning. Jericho, where the last part of Jesus' pilgrimage began, is 250 metres below sea-level, whereas Jerusalem the destination is located at 740 to 780 metres above sea level: a climb of almost 1,000 metres. But this external route is above all an image of the internal movement of existence that occurs in the following of Christ: it is an ascent to the true heights of being human. Man can choose an easy

path and avoid every effort. He can also sink to the low and the vulgar. He can flounder in the swamps of falsehood and dishonesty. Jesus walks before us and towards the heights. He leads us to what is great, pure. He leads us to that healthy air of the heights: to life in accordance with the truth; to courage that does not let itself be intimidated by the gossip of prevalent opinions; to patience that bears with and sustains the other. He guides people to be open towards the suffering, to those who are neglected. He leads us to stand loyally by the other, even when the situation becomes difficult. He leads us to the readiness to give help; to the goodness that does not let itself be disarmed, even by ingratitude. He leads us to love he leads us to God.

Jesus "went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem". If we interpret these words of the Gospel in the context of the way Jesus took in all its aspects a journey which, precisely, continues to the end of time in the destination, "Jerusalem", we can discover various levels indicated. Of course, first of all, it must be understood that this simply means the place, "Jerusalem": it is the city in which God's Temple stood, whose uniqueness must allude to the oneness of God himself. This place, therefore, proclaims two things: on the one hand it says that there is only one God in all the world, who exceeds by far all our places and times; he is that God to which the entire creation belongs. He is the God whom all men and women seek in their own depths, and of whom, in a certain way, they all have some knowledge. But this God gave himself a Name. He made himself known to us, he initiated a history with human beings; he chose a man Abraham as the starting point of this history. The infinite God is at the same time the close God. He, who cannot be confined to any building, nevertheless wants to dwell among us, to be totally with us.

If Jesus, with the pilgrim Israel, goes up to Jerusalem, he goes there to celebrate with Israel the Passover: the memorial of Israel's liberation a memorial which, at the same time, is always a hope of definitive freedom, which God will give. And Jesus approaches this feast in the awareness that he himself is the Lamb in which will be accomplished what the *Book of Exodus* says in this regard: a lamb without blemish, a male, who at sunset, before the eyes of the children of Israel, is sacrificed "as an ordinance for ever" (cf. Ex 12: 5-6, 14). And lastly, Jesus knows that his way goes further: the Cross will not be his end. He knows that his journey will rend the veil between this world and God's world; that he will ascend to the throne of God and reconcile God and man in his Body He knows that his Risen Body will be the new sacrifice and the new Temple; that around him, from the hosts of Angels and Saints the new Jerusalem will be formed, that is in Heaven and yet also on the earth, because by his Passion he was to open the frontier between Heaven and earth. His way leads beyond the summit of the Mountain of the Temple to the heights of God himself: this is the great ascent to which he calls us all. He always remains with us on earth and he has always already arrived with God. He guides us on earth and beyond the earth.

Thus, the dimensions of our sequela become visible in the ascent of Jesus the goal to which he wants to lead us: to the heights of God, to communion with God, to being-with-God. This is the true destination and communion with him is the way to it. Communion with Christ is being on the way, a permanent ascent toward the true heights of our call. Journeying on together with Jesus is

at the same time also a journeying on in the "we" of those who want to follow him. It introduces us into this community. Since the way to true life, to being people in conformity with the model of the Son of God Jesus Christ, surpasses our own strength, this journey always means being carried. We find ourselves, so to speak, roped to Jesus Christ together with him on the ascent towards God's heights. He pulls and supports us. It is part of following Christ that we allow ourselves to be roped together; that we acknowledge we cannot do it alone. This act of humility, entering into the "we" of the Church is part of it; holding tight to the rope, the responsibility of communion not breaking the rope through stubbornness or self-importance. Humbly believing, with the Church, like being a roped-party on the ascent towards God, is an essential condition for the following of Christ. This being roped together also entails not behaving as masters of the Word of God, not running after a mistaken idea of emancipation. The humility of "being with" is essential for the ascent. The fact that in the Sacraments we always let the Lord once again take us by the hand is also part of it; that we let ourselves be purified and strengthened by him; that we accept the discipline of the ascent, even when we are weary.

Lastly, we must say again: the Cross is also part of the ascent towards the heights of Jesus Christ, of the ascent to the heights of God. Just as in the affairs of this world it is impossible to achieve great results without self-sacrifice and hard work; just as joy in a great discovery of knowledge or in a true operational skill is linked to discipline, indeed, to the effort of learning, so the way toward life itself, to the realization of one's own humanity, is linked to communion with the One who ascended to God's heights through the Cross. In the final analysis, the Cross is an expression of what love means: only those who lose themselves find themselves.

Let us sum up: the following of Christ requires, as a first step, a reawakening of the desire to be authentic human beings and thus the reawakening of oneself for God. It then requires us to join the climbing party, in the communion of the Church. In the "we" of the Church we enter into communion with the "you" of Jesus Christ and thus reach the path to God. We are also asked to listen to the Word of Jesus Christ and to live it: in faith, hope and love. Thus we are on the way toward the definitive Jerusalem and, from this moment, in a certain way, we already find ourselves there, in the communion of all God's Saints.

Our pilgrimage following Christ is not therefore bound for an earthly city, but for the new City of God that develops in the midst of this world. Yet the pilgrimage to the earthly Jerusalem can also be useful to us Christians for that more important journey. I myself linked three meanings to [my pilgrimage in the Holy Land last year](#). First of all I thought that what St John says at the beginning of his *First Letter* can happen to us on such an occasion: that what we have heard, we can in a certain manner see and touch with our hands (cf. 1 Jn 1: 1). Faith in Jesus Christ is not a legendary invention. It is based on a true story. This history we can, so to speak, contemplate and touch. It is moving to find oneself in Nazareth in the place where the Angel appeared to Mary and intimated to her the duty to become the Mother of the Redeemer. It is moving to be in Bethlehem on the spot where the Word, made flesh, came to dwell among us; to walk on the holy ground in

which God chose to become a man and a child. It is moving to climb the steps to Calvary, to the place where Jesus died for us on the Cross. And lastly, to stand before the empty sepulchre; to pray where his holy body rested and where, on the third day, the Resurrection occurred. Following the exterior ways taken by Jesus must help us walk more joyfully and with new certainty on the interior way that he pointed out to us, that is he himself.

When we go to the Holy Land as pilgrims we also go, however and this is the second aspect as messengers of peace, with the prayer for peace; with the strong invitation to all to do our utmost in that place, which includes in its name the word "peace", to make it truly become a place of peace. Thus this pilgrimage is at the same time as a third aspect an encouragement to Christians to stay in their country of origin and to work hard in it for peace.

Let us return once again to the Palm Sunday Liturgy. In the prayer with which the palms are blessed, we pray that in communion with Christ we may bear fruit with good works. Subsequent to an erroneous interpretation of St Paul, the opinion that good works are not part of being Christian or in any case are insignificant for the human being's salvation has emerged time and again in the course of history and also today. But if Paul says that works cannot justify man, with this he did not oppose the importance of right action and, if he speaks of the end of the Law, he does not say that the Ten Commandments are obsolete and irrelevant. There is no need now to reflect on the full breadth of the issue that concerned the Apostle. What is important is to point out that with the term "Law" he does not mean the Ten Commandments but rather the complex way of life Israel had adopted to protect itself against the temptations of paganism. Now, however, Christ has brought God to the pagans. This form of distinction was not imposed upon them. They were given as the Law Christ alone. However, this means love of God and of neighbour and of everything that this entails. The Commandments, interpreted in a new and deeper way starting from Christ, are part of this love, those Commandments are none other than the fundamental rules of true love: first of all, and as a fundamental principle, the worship of God, the primacy of God, which the first three Commandments express. They say: "without God nothing succeeds correctly. Who this God is and how he is we know from the person of Jesus Christ. Next come the holiness of the family (4th Commandment), the holiness of life (5th Commandment), the order of marriage (6th Commandment), the social order (7th Commandment), and lastly the inviolability of the truth (8th Commandment). Today all this is of the greatest timeliness and precisely also in St Paul's meaning if we read all his Letters. "Bear fruit with good works": at the beginning of Holy Week let us pray the Lord to grant us this fruit in ever greater abundance.

At the end of the Gospel for the blessing of the palms, we hear the acclamation with which the pilgrims greet Jesus at the Gates of Jerusalem. It takes up the words of *Psalms* 118 (117), which priests originally proclaimed to pilgrims from the Holy City but which, in the meantime had become an expression of messianic hope: "Blessed is he who enters in the Name of the Lord" (Ps 118[117]: 26; cf. Lk 19: 38). Pilgrims see in Jesus the One who is to come in the Name of the Lord. Indeed, according to St Luke's Gospel they insert one more word: "Blessed is the King who

comes in the Name of the Lord". And they continue with an acclamation that recalls the message of the Angels at Christmas, but change it in a manner that prompts reflection. The Angels spoke of the glory of God in the highest and of peace on earth among men with whom he was pleased. The pilgrims at the entrance to the Holy City say: "Peace on earth and glory be to God in the highest!". They know only too well that there is no peace on earth. And they know that the place of peace is Heaven they know that it is an essential part of Heaven to be a haven of peace. This acclamation is therefore an expression of profound suffering and, at the same time, a prayer of hope; may the One who comes in the Name of the Lord bring to the earth what there is in Heaven. May his kingship become the kingship of God, the presence of Heaven on earth. The Church, before the Eucharistic consecration, sings the words of the *Psalm* with which Jesus was greeted before his entry into the Holy City: She greets Jesus as the King who, coming from God, comes among us in the Name of God. Today too, this joyous greeting is always a supplication and hope. Let us pray the Lord that he bring to us Heaven, the glory of God and peace among men. Let us understand this greeting in the spirit of the request in the Our Father: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven". We know that Heaven is Heaven, a place of glory and peace because the will of God totally prevails there. And we know that the earth will not be Heaven as long as God's will is not done on it. Let us therefore greet Jesus who comes down from Heaven and pray him to help us to recognize and to do God's will. May God's kingship enter the world and thus be filled with the splendour of peace. Amen.

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