



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II *GENERAL AUDIENCE* Wednesday 4 February 1998

Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many

1. Christ reveals himself throughout his earthly life as the Saviour sent by the Father for the salvation of the world. His very name, “Jesus”, expresses this mission. It actually means: “God saves”. It is a name he was given as a result of heavenly instruction: both Mary and Joseph (*Lk* 1:31; *Mt* 1:21) receive the order to call him by this name. In the message to Joseph the meaning of the name is explained: “for he will save his people from their sins”.

2. Christ defines his saving mission as a service whose highest expression will be the sacrifice of his life for mankind: “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (*Mk* 10:45; *Mt* 20:28). These words, spoken to counter the disciples’ tendency to seek the first place in the kingdom, are primarily meant to awaken in them a new mentality, which conforms more closely to that of the Teacher. In the Book of Daniel, the figure described as “one like a son of man” is shown surrounded by the glory due to leaders who receive universal veneration: “all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (*Dn* 7:14). Jesus contrasts this figure with the Son of man who puts himself at the service of all. As a divine person, he would be fully entitled to be served. But in saying he had “come to serve”, he shows a disturbing aspect of God’s behaviour: although he has the right and the power to make himself served, he puts himself “at the service” of his creatures. Jesus expresses this desire to serve in an eloquent and moving way at the Last Supper when he washes his disciples’ feet: a symbolic act which will be impressed as a rule of life on their memory for ever: “You also ought to wash one another’s feet” (*Jn* 13:14).

3. In saying that the Son of man came to give his life as a ransom for many, Jesus is referring to the prophecy of the suffering Servant who “makes himself an offering for sin” (*Is* 53:10). It is a personal sacrifice, very different from the animal sacrifices used in ancient worship. It is a life given “as a ransom for many”, that is, for the immense multitude of humanity, for “all”. Jesus thus appears as the *universal Saviour*: all human beings, according to the divine plan, are ransomed, freed and saved by him. Paul says: “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they

are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (*Rom 3:24*). Salvation is a gift that can be received by each one to the extent of his free consent and voluntary co-operation.

4. As universal Saviour, Christ is the *only Saviour*. Peter affirms this clearly: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Acts 4:12*). At the same time, he is also proclaimed the *only mediator* between God and men, as the First Letter to Timothy affirms: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (*1 Tm 2: 5-6*). As the God-man, Jesus is the perfect mediator who unites men with God, obtaining for them the goods of salvation and divine life. This is a unique mediation which excludes any competing or parallel mediation, although it is compatible with participated forms of mediation (cf. *Redemptoris missio*, n. 5). Consequently, any other autonomous sources or ways of salvation cannot be admitted apart from Christ. Thus in the great religions, which the Church considers with respect and esteem in the way indicated by the Second Vatican Council, Christians recognize the presence of saving elements, which nevertheless operate in dependence on the influence of Christ's grace. Therefore these religions can contribute, by virtue of the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit who "blows where he wills" (*Jn 3:8*), to helping men on their way to eternal happiness, but this role is also the fruit of Christ's redemptive activity. Thus with regard to other religions, Christ the Saviour is also mysteriously at work. In this task he unites to himself the Church, which is in a way the "sacrament of communion with God and of unity among all men" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 1).

5. I would like to conclude with a wonderful passage from the *Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, by St Louis de Montfort, which proclaims the Christological faith of the Church: "Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of everything.... He is the only teacher from whom we must learn; the only Lord on whom we should depend; the only Head to whom we should be united and the only model that we should imitate. He is the only Physician that can heal us; the only Shepherd that can feed us; the only Way that can lead us; the only Truth that we can believe; the only Life that can animate us. He alone is everything to us and he alone can satisfy all our desires.... Each one of the faithful who is not united to him is like a branch broken from the stem of the vine. It falls and withers and is fit only to be burnt. If we live in Jesus and Jesus lives in us, *we need not fear damnation*. Neither angels in heaven nor men on earth, nor devils in hell, no creature whatever can harm us, for no creature *can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus*. Through him, with him and in him we can do all things and render all honour and glory to the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit; we can become perfect and be for our neighbour a fragrance of eternal life" (n. 61).

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I extend a special welcome to the Marist Brothers and I encourage them to continue to give faithful witness to their special charism. I greet the participants in the Gregorian Chant Study Week and the students from Loyola University.

Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors I cordially invoke the blessings of almighty God.