



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 26 March 2008

Octave of Easter

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"Et resurrexit tertia die secundum Scripturas - On the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures". Every Sunday, with the Creed, we renew our profession of faith in Christ's Resurrection, a surprising event which is the keystone of Christianity. Everything in the Church is understood on the basis of this great mystery which changed the course of history and becomes present in every Eucharistic celebration. However, there is one liturgical season in which this central reality of the Christian faith is presented more vividly to the faithful, with its doctrinal richness and inexhaustible vitality, so that they may discover it ever better and live it more faithfully: it is the Easter Season. Every year, in the "Most Holy Triduum of the Crucified, dead and Risen Christ", as St Augustine calls it, the Church relives the last events of Jesus' earthly life in an atmosphere of prayer and penance: his condemnation to death, his ascent to Calvary carrying the Cross, his sacrifice for our salvation, being laid in the tomb. Then on the "third day" the Church relives his Resurrection: it is the Passover, Jesus' passing from death to life in which the ancient prophecies were completely fulfilled. The entire liturgy of the Easter Season sings the certitude and joy of Christ's Resurrection.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must constantly renew our adherence to Christ who died and rose for us: his Passover is also our Passover because in the Risen Christ we are given the certainty of our own resurrection. The news of his being raised from the dead never ages and Jesus is alive for ever; and his Gospel is alive. "The faith of Christians", St Augustine observed, "is the Resurrection of Christ". The *Acts of the Apostles* explain it clearly: "God has given assurance to all men by raising him [Jesus] from the dead" (17: 31). Indeed, his death did not suffice to

demonstrate that Jesus is truly the Son of God, the awaited Messiah. How many people in the course of history devoted their lives to a cause they deemed right and died for it! And dead they remained. The Lord's death reveals the immense love with which he loved us, to the point of sacrificing himself for us; but his Resurrection alone is our "assurance", the certainty that what he said is the truth which also applies for us, for all times. In raising Jesus, the Father glorified him. In his *Letter to the Romans* St Paul wrote: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10: 9).

It is important to reaffirm this fundamental truth of our faith whose historical veracity is amply documented even if today, as in the past, there are many who in various ways cast doubt on it or even deny it. The enfeeblement of faith in the Resurrection of Jesus results in weakening the witness of believers. In fact, should the Church's faith in the Resurrection weaken, everything will come to a halt, everything will disintegrate. On the contrary, the adherence of heart and mind to the dead and Risen Christ changes the life and brightens the entire existence of people and peoples. Is it not the certainty that Christ is risen which instills courage, prophetic daring and perseverance in martyrs of every epoch? Is it not the encounter with the living Jesus that converts and fascinates so many men and women who from the beginnings of Christianity have continued to leave all things to follow him and put their own lives at the service of the Gospel? "If Christ has not been raised", the Apostle Paul said, "then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15: 14). But he was raised!

The proclamation we listen to constantly in these days is exactly this: Jesus is risen, he is the Living One and we can encounter him; just as the women who had gone to the tomb met him on the third day, the day after the Sabbath; just as the disciples encountered him, surprised and dismayed by what the women had told them; just as so many other witnesses met him during the days following his Resurrection. And after his Ascension, Jesus also continued to be present among his friends as he had promised: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28: 20). The Lord is with us, with his Church, until the end of time. Illumined by the Holy Spirit, the members of the early Church began to proclaim the announcement of Easter openly and fearlessly. And this announcement, passed on from one generation to the next, has come down to us and every year at Easter rings out with ever new power.

Especially in this Octave of Easter the liturgy invites us to meet the Risen One personally and to recognize his life-giving action in the events of history and in our daily lives. This Wednesday, for example, the moving episode of the two disciples of Emmaus is presented to us once again (cf. Lk 24: 13-35). After Jesus' crucifixion, immersed in sadness and disappointment, they were going home dejected. On their way, they discussed the events that had occurred in those days in Jerusalem; it was then that Jesus approached and began to talk to them and teach them: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Lk 24: 25-26). Then starting with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures.

Christ's teaching - the explanation of the prophecies - was like an unexpected revelation to the disciples of Emmaus, enlightening and comforting. Jesus gave them a new key for interpreting the Bible and everything then appeared clear, oriented to that very moment. Won over by the words of the unknown wayfarer, they invited him to stop and have supper with them. And he accepted and sat down to table with them. The Evangelist Luke says: "When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them" (Lk 24: 30). And it was at that very moment that the eyes of the two disciples were opened and they recognized him, but "he vanished out of their sight" (Lk 24: 31). And full of wonder and joy they commented: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Lk 24: 32).

Throughout the liturgical year, particularly in Holy Week and Easter Week, the Lord walks beside us and explains the Scriptures to us, makes us understand this mystery: everything speaks of him. And this should also make our hearts burn within us, so that our eyes too may be opened. The Lord is with us, he shows us the true path. Just as the two disciples recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, so today, in the breaking of the bread, let us too recognize his presence. The disciples of Emmaus recognized him and remembered the times when Jesus had broken the bread. And this breaking of the bread reminds us of the first Eucharist celebrated in the context of the Last Supper, when Jesus broke the bread and thus anticipated his death and Resurrection by giving himself to the disciples. Jesus also breaks bread with us and for us, he makes himself present with us in the Holy Eucharist, he gives us himself and opens our hearts. In the Holy Eucharist, in the encounter with his Word, we too can meet and know Jesus at this two-fold Table of the Word and of the consecrated Bread and Wine. Every Sunday the community thus relives the Lord's Passover and receives from the Saviour his testament of love and brotherly service. Dear brothers and sisters, may the joy of these days strengthen our faithful attachment to the Crucified and Risen Christ. Above all, may we let ourselves be won over by the fascination of his Resurrection. May Mary help us to be messengers of the light and joy of Easter for all our brethren. Once again, I wish you all a Happy Easter.

To special groups

I offer a warm welcome to the international group of School Sisters of St Francis gathered in Rome. I also thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Wales, Ireland, Indonesia, Japan, Canada and the United States, I cordially invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Christ.

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Dear *young people* - and especially you, boys and girls - who have come in such large numbers from the parishes and after-school prayer and recreation centres of the Archdiocese of Milan, may you be enthusiastic protagonists in the Church and in society. May you who are making your "Profession of Faith" this year strive to build the civilization of love, founded on Christ who died and rose for all. Dear *sick people*, may the

light of the Resurrection illuminate and sustain your daily suffering, making it fruitful for the benefit of all humanity. And you, dear *newly-weds*, may you every day draw from the Paschal Mystery the strength for a sincere and inexhaustible love.

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