



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF STS PETER AND PAUL *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI* *St Peter's Basilica*

Wednesday, 29 June 2005 Dear Brothers and Sisters, The Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul is at the same time a grateful memorial of the great witnesses of Jesus Christ and a solemn confession for the Church: *one, holy, catholic and apostolic*. It is first and foremost a feast of *catholicity*. The sign of Pentecost - the new community that speaks all languages and unites all peoples into one people, in one family of God -, this sign has become a reality. Our liturgical assembly, at which Bishops are gathered from all parts of the world, people of many cultures and nations, is an image of the family of the Church distributed throughout the earth. Strangers have become friends; crossing every border, we recognize one another as brothers and sisters. This brings to fulfilment the mission of St Paul, who knew that he was the "minister of Christ Jesus among the Gentiles, with the priestly duty of preaching the Gospel of God so that the Gentiles [might] be offered up as a pleasing sacrifice, consecrated by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15: 16). The purpose of the mission is that humanity itself becomes a living glorification of God, the true worship that God expects: this is the deepest meaning of *catholicity* - a *catholicity* that has already been given to us, towards which we must constantly start out again. *Catholicity* does not only express a horizontal dimension, the gathering of many people in unity, but also a vertical dimension: it is only by raising our eyes to God, by opening ourselves to him, that we can truly become one. Like Paul, Peter also came to Rome, to the city that was a centre where all the nations converged and, for this very reason, could become, before any other, the expression of the universal outreach of the Gospel. As he started out on his journey from Jerusalem to Rome, he must certainly have felt guided by the voices of the prophets, by faith and by the prayer of Israel. The mission to the whole world is also part of the proclamation of the Old Covenant: the people of Israel were destined to be a light for the Gentiles. The great Psalm of the Passion, Psalm 22[21], whose first verse Jesus cried out on the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", ends with the vision: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; all the families of the nations shall bow down before him" (Ps 22[21]: 28). When Peter and Paul came to Rome, the Lord on the Cross who had uttered the first line of that Psalm was risen; God's victory now had to be proclaimed to all the nations, thereby fulfilling the promise with which the Psalm concludes. *Catholicity* means *universality* - a multiplicity that becomes unity; a unity that nevertheless remains multiplicity. From Paul's words on the Church's *universality* we have already seen that the ability of nations to get the better of themselves in order to look towards the one

God, is part of this *unity*. In the second century, the founder of Catholic theology, St Irenaeus of Lyons, described very beautifully this bond between catholicity and unity and I quote him. He says: "The Church spread across the world diligently safeguards this doctrine and this faith, forming as it were one family: the same faith, with one mind and one heart, the same preaching, teaching and tradition as if she had but one mouth. Languages abound according to the region but the power of our tradition is one and the same. The Churches in Germany do not differ in faith or tradition, neither do those in Spain, Gaul, Egypt, Libya, the Orient, the centre of the earth; just as the sun, God's creature, is one alone and identical throughout the world, so the light of true preaching shines everywhere and illuminates all who desire to attain knowledge of the truth" (*Adv. Haer.* I 10, 2). The *unity* of men and women in their multiplicity has become possible because God, this one God of heaven and earth, has shown himself to us; because the essential truth about our lives, our "where from?" and "where to?" became visible when he revealed himself to us and enabled us to see his face, himself, in Jesus Christ. This truth about the essence of our being, living and dying, a truth that God made visible, unites us and makes us brothers and sisters. *Catholicity* and *unity* go hand in hand. And *unity* has a content: the faith that the Apostles passed on to us in Christ's name. I am pleased that yesterday, the Feast of St Irenaeus and the eve of the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul, I was able to give the Church a new guide for the transmission of the faith that will help us to become better acquainted with and to live better the faith that unites us: the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The essential content of what is presented in detail in the complete *Catechism*, through the witness of the saints of all the ages and with reflections that have matured in theology, is summed up here in this book and must then be translated into everyday language and constantly put into practice. The book is in the form of a dialogue with questions and answers. The 14 images associated with the various areas of faith are an invitation to contemplation and meditation. In other words, a visible summary of what the written text develops in full detail. At the beginning there is a reproduction of a 6th-century icon of Christ, kept at Mount Athos, that portrays Christ in his dignity as Lord of the earth but at the same time also as a herald of the Gospel which he holds in his hand. "I am who am", this mysterious name of God presented in the Old Testament, is copied here as his own name: all that exists comes from him; he is the original source of all being. And since he is one, he is also ever present, ever close to us and at the same time, ever in the lead: an "indicator" on our way through life, especially since he himself is the Way. This book cannot be read as if it were a novel. Its individual sections must be calmly meditated upon and, through the images, its content must be allowed to penetrate the soul. I hope that it will be received as such and become a reliable guide in the transmission of the faith. We have said that the *catholicity* of the Church and the *unity* of the Church go together. The fact that both dimensions become visible to us in the figures of the holy Apostles already shows us the consequent characteristic of the Church: she is *apostolic*. What does this mean? The Lord established Twelve Apostles just as the sons of Jacob were 12. By so doing he was presenting them as leaders of the People of God which, henceforth universal, from that time has included all the peoples. St Mark tells us that Jesus called the Apostles so "to be with him, and to be sent out" (Mk 3: 14). This seems almost a contradiction in terms. We would say: "Either they stayed with him or they were sent forth and set out on their travels". Pope St Gregory

the Great says a word about angels that helps us resolve this contradiction. He says that angels are always sent out and at the same time are always in God's presence, and continues, "Wherever they are sent, wherever they go, they always journey on in God's heart" (*Homily*, 34, 13). The Book of Revelation described Bishops as "angels" in their Church, so we can state: the Apostles and their successors must always be with the Lord and precisely in this way - wherever they may go - they must always be in communion with him and live by this communion. The Church is *apostolic*, because she professes the faith of the Apostles and attempts to live it. There is a unity that marks the Twelve called by the Lord, but there is also continuity in the apostolic mission. St Peter, in his First Letter, described himself as "a fellow elder" of the presbyters to whom he writes (5: 1). And with this he expressed the principle of apostolic succession: the same ministry which he had received from the Lord now continues in the Church through priestly ordination. The Word of God is not only written but, thanks to the testimonies that the Lord in the sacrament has inscribed in the apostolic ministry, it remains a living word. Thus, I now address you, dear Brother Bishops. I greet you with affection, together with your relatives and the pilgrims from your respective Dioceses. You are about to receive the Pallium from the hands of the Successor of Peter. We had it blessed, as though by Peter himself, by placing it beside his tomb. It is now an expression of our common responsibility to the "chief Shepherd" Jesus Christ, of whom Peter speaks (I Pt 5: 4). The Pallium is an expression of our apostolic mission. It is an expression of our communion whose visible guarantee is the Petrine ministry. *Unity* as well as *apostolicity* are bound to the Petrine service that visibly unites the Church of all places and all times, thereby preventing each one of us from slipping into the kind of false autonomy that all too easily becomes particularization of the Church and might consequently jeopardize her independence. So, let us not forget that the purpose of all offices and ministries is basically that "we [all] become one in faith and in the knowledge of God's son, and from that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature", so that the Body of Christ may grow and build "itself up in love" (Eph 4: 13, 16). In this perspective, I warmly and gratefully greet the Delegation of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople, sent by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I to whom I address a cordial thought, and led by Metropolitan Ioannis, who has come for our feast day and is taking part in our celebration. Even though we may not yet agree on the issue of the interpretation and importance of the Petrine Ministry, we are nonetheless together in the apostolic succession, we are deeply united with one another through episcopal ministry and through the sacrament of priesthood, and together profess the faith of the Apostles as it is given to us in Scripture and as it was interpreted at the great Councils. At this time in a world full of scepticism and doubt but also rich in the desire for God, let us recognize anew our common mission to witness to Christ the Lord together, and on the basis of that *unity* which has already been given to us, to help the world in order that it may believe. And let us implore the Lord with all our hearts to guide us to full *unity* so that the splendour of the truth, which alone can create *unity*, may once again become visible in the world. Today's Gospel tells of the profession of faith of St Peter, on whom the Church was founded: "You are the Messiah... the Son of the living God" (Mt 16: 16). Having spoken today of the Church as *one, catholic and apostolic* but not yet of the Church as *holy*, let us now recall another profession of Peter, his response on behalf of the Twelve at the moment when so many abandoned Christ: "We have come to believe; we are convinced

that you are God's holy one" (Jn 6: 69). What does this mean? Jesus, in his great priestly prayer, says that he is consecrating himself for his disciples, an allusion to the sacrifice of his death (cf. Jn 17: 19). By saying this, Jesus implicitly expresses his role as the true High Priest who brings about the mystery of the "Day of Reconciliation", no longer only in substitutive rites but in the concrete substance of his own Body and Blood. The Old Testament term "the Holy One of the Lord" identified Aaron as the High Priest who had the task of bringing about Israel's sanctification (Ps 106[105]: 16; Vulgate: Sir 45: 6). Peter's profession of Christ, whom he declares to be the Holy One of God, fits into the context of the Eucharistic Discourse in which Jesus announces the Day of Reconciliation through the sacrificial offering of himself: "the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world" (Jn 6: 51). So this profession is the background of the priestly mystery of Jesus, his sacrifice for us all. The Church is not *holy* by herself; in fact, she is made up of sinners - we all know this and it is plain for all to see. Rather, she is made holy ever anew by the Holy One of God, by the purifying love of Christ. God did not only speak, but loved us very realistically; he loved us to the point of the death of his own Son. It is precisely here that we are shown the full grandeur of revelation that has, as it were, inflicted the wounds in the heart of God himself. Then each one of us can say personally, together with St Paul, I live "a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2: 20). Let us pray to the Lord that the truth of these words may be deeply impressed in our hearts, together with his joy and with his responsibility; let us pray that shining out from the Eucharistic Celebration it will become increasingly the force that shapes our lives.

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