



The Holy See

CELEBRATION OF VESPERS WITH THE FAITHFUL OF AOSTA (ITALY)

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Cathedral of Aosta

Friday, 24 July 2009

Your Excellency,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

First of all, I should like to say "Thank you" to you, Your Excellency, for your kind words of introduction to the great history of this Cathedral Church, thus making me feel that not only do we pray here, at this moment, but that we can pray through the centuries in this beautiful church.

And my thanks to all of you, who have come to pray with me, and in this way to manifest this network of prayer which binds us all at all times.

In this brief Homily I should like to say a few words about the prayer which concludes these Vespers as it seems to me that the excerpt from the Letter to the Romans which has just been read is interpreted and transformed here into prayer.

The prayer is composed of two parts: an address a heading, so to speak and then the prayer, which consists of two requests.

Let us begin with the address, which is also, in its turn, composed of two parts: here the "you" to whom we speak is made more specific, so that we can knock with greater force on the heart of God.

In the Italian text, we read simply: "Merciful Father". The original Latin is a little fuller; it says, "Almighty and Merciful God". In [my recent Encyclical](#), I have tried to show the prime importance of

God both in one's private life and in the life of society, of the world, of history.

Certainly the relationship with God is a profoundly personal matter, and the individual is a being in relationship with others. If the fundamental relationship that with God is not living, is not lived, then no other relationship can find its right form. But this is also true for society, for humanity as such. Here, too, if God is missing, if God is discounted, if he is absent, then the compass is lacking which would show the way forward, the direction to follow in relationships as a whole.

God! We must bring the reality of God back into our world, make him known and present. But how can we know God? During the "*ad limina*" visits I always speak with the Bishops, in particular African Bishops, but also those from Asia and Latin America where traditional religions still exist, about these religions. They differ greatly from one another in many details, but they also share common elements. They all know that God exists, one God, that "god" is a singular noun, that the gods are not God, that God exists, God. But at the same time this God seems absent, far away, he does not seem to come into our daily lives, he hides, we do not know his Face. Therefore the religions deal for the most part with objects, with powers nearer to us, with spirits, ancestors and so on, since God himself is too far away, and so we have to make do with these closer powers. And the act of evangelization consists precisely in the fact that the distant God draws near, that he is no longer far away, but is close to us, that this "known and unknown" figure now makes himself truly known, shows his Face, reveals himself: the veil covering his Face disappears and he shows his true Face. And so, since God himself is now near us, we can know him, he shows us his Face and enters our world. There is no longer any need to make do with those other powers, because he is the true power, the Omnipotent.

I do not know why the word "omnipotent" has been omitted from the Italian text, but it is true that we feel a little threatened by the word "omnipotence": it seems to limit our freedom, it seems to be too strong. But we must learn that the omnipotence of God is not an arbitrary power, because God is Good, he is Truth, and therefore he can do anything, but he cannot act against good, he cannot act against truth, love or freedom, because he himself is good, love, and true freedom. And therefore nothing he does can ever be in contrast with truth, love and freedom. The contrary is true. He, God, is the guardian of our freedom, of love and of truth. This eye which looks upon us is not an evil eye watching us; it is the presence of love which will never abandon us but rather gives us the certainty that Good is being, Good is living: it is the eye of love that gives us the air to live.

Almighty and Merciful God. A Roman prayer, connected with the text of the Book of Wisdom, says: "O God, show your omnipotence through pardon and mercy". The summit of God's power is mercy, pardon. In our modern-day worldly concept of power, we think of someone who owns large estates, who has some say in the world of economics, who has capital and can influence the world of the market. We think of someone who has military power, who can threaten. Stalin's question, "How many armed divisions does the Pope have?" still characterizes the common idea of power. Whoever has power and many worldly effects may be dangerous, as he could threaten and

destroy. But Revelations tells us. "It is not so"; true power is the power of grace and of mercy. In his mercy, God demonstrates true power.

And so the second part of this address says: "You have redeemed the world with the Passion, with the suffering of Your Son". God has suffered, and through his Son he suffers with us. This is the summit of his power, that he can suffer with us. In this way he demonstrates the true divine power: he desired to suffer with us and for us. In our suffering we are never left alone. God, through his Son, suffered first, and he is close to us in our suffering.

However a difficult question remains, one I cannot answer at length at this moment: why was it necessary to suffer to save the world? It was necessary because there exists in the world an ocean of evil, of injustice, hatred, and violence, and the many victims of hatred and injustice have the right to see justice done. God cannot ignore the cries of the suffering who are oppressed by injustice. To forgive is not to ignore, but to transform. God must enter into this world in order to set against the ocean of injustice a larger ocean of goodness and of love. And this is the event of the Cross: from that moment, against the ocean of evil, there exists a river that is boundless, and so ever mightier than all the injustices of the world, a river of goodness, truth, and love. Thus God forgives, coming into the world and transforming it so that there may be a real strength, a river of goodness wider than all the evil that could ever exist.

So our address to God becomes an address to ourselves: God invites us to join with him, to leave behind the ocean of evil, of hatred, violence, and selfishness and to make ourselves known, to enter into the river of his love.

This is precisely the content of the first part of the prayer that follows: "Let Your Church offer herself to You as a living and holy sacrifice". This request, addressed to God, is made also to ourselves. It is a reference to two passages from the Letter to the Romans. We ourselves, with our whole being, must be adoration and sacrifice, and by transforming our world, give it back to God. The role of the priesthood is to consecrate the world so that it may become a living host, a liturgy: so that the liturgy may not be something alongside the reality of the world, but that the world itself shall become a living host, a liturgy. This is also the great vision of Teilhard de Chardin: in the end we shall achieve a true cosmic liturgy, where the cosmos becomes a living host. And let us pray the Lord to help us become priests in this sense, to aid in the transformation of the world, in adoration of God, beginning with ourselves. That our lives may speak of God, that our lives may be a true liturgy, an announcement of God, a door through which the distant God may become the present God, and a true giving of ourselves to God.

Then the second request. We pray: "Let Your people know always the fullness of Your love". The Latin text reads: "Satisfy us with Your love". The text refers to the Psalm we have sung, which says: "Open your hand and satisfy the hunger of every living creature". How much hunger there is on Earth, hunger for bread in many parts of the world: Your Excellency has also spoken of the

suffering of the families here: hunger for justice, hunger for love. And with this prayer, we pray to God: "Open Your hand and satisfy fully the hunger of every living creature. Satisfy our hunger for the truth and for Your love".

So be it. Amen.

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