



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 18 March 1998

***Faith response to Christ's work of salvation
and the impact this faith has on every aspect of life***

1. Looking at the primary objective of the Jubilee, which is the "strengthening of faith and of the witness of Christians" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 42), after outlining in previous catecheses the basic characteristics of the salvation offered by Christ, today we pause to reflect on the faith he expects of us.

"The obedience of faith", *Dei Verbum* teaches, "must be given to God as he reveals himself" (n. 5). God revealed himself in the Old Covenant, asking of the people he had chosen a fundamental response of faith. In the fullness of time, this faith is called to be renewed and increased, to respond to the revelation of the incarnate Son of God. Jesus expressly asks for it when he speaks to his disciples at the Last Supper: "Believe in God, believe also in me" (Jn 14:1).

2. Jesus had already asked the group of the 12 Apostles to profess their faith in his person. At Caesarea Philippi, after questioning his disciples about the people's opinion of his identity, he asks: "But who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15). The reply comes from Simon Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16).

Jesus immediately confirms the value of this profession of faith, stressing that it stems not only from human thought idea but from heavenly inspiration: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 16:17). These statements, in strongly Semitic tones, indicate the total, absolute and supreme revelation: the one that concerns the person of Christ, Son of God.

Peter's profession of faith will remain the definitive expression of Christ's identity. Mark uses this same expression to begin his Gospel (cf. *Mk* 1:1) and John refers to it at the end of his, saying that he has written his Gospel so that you may believe "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God", and that in believing you may have life in his name (cf. *Jn* 20:31).

3. In what does faith consist? The Constitution *Dei Verbum* explains that by faith, "man freely commits his entire self to God, making 'the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals'" (n. 5). Thus faith is not only the intellect's adherence to the truth revealed, but also a submission of the will and a gift of self to God revealing himself. It is a stance that involves one's entire existence.

The Council also recalls that this faith requires "the grace of God to move [man] and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth'" (ibid.). In this way we can see how, on the one hand, faith enables us to welcome the truth contained in Revelation and proposed by the Magisterium of those who, as Pastors of God's People, have received a "sure charism of truth" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 8). On the other hand, faith also spurs us to true and deep consistency, which must be expressed in all aspects of a life modeled on that of Christ.

4. As a fruit of grace, faith exercises an influence on events. This is wonderfully seen in the exemplary case of the Blessed Virgin. Her faith-filled acceptance of the angel's message at the Annunciation is decisive for Jesus' very coming into the world. Mary is the Mother of Christ because she first believed in him.

At the wedding feast in Cana, Mary, obtains the miracle through her faith. Despite Jesus' reply, which does not seem very favourable, she keeps her trustful attitude, thus becoming a model of the bold and constant faith which overcomes obstacles.

The faith of the Caananite woman was also bold and insistent. Jesus countered this woman, who had come to seek the cure of her daughter, with the Father's plan which restricted his mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The Caananite replied with the full force of her faith and obtained the miracle: "O woman! Great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire" (*Mt* 15:28).

5. In many other cases the Gospel witnesses to the power of faith. Jesus expresses his admiration for the centurion's faith: "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (*Mt* 8:10). And to Bartimaeus: "Go your way your faith has made you well" (*Mk* 10:52). He says the same thing to the woman with a haemorrhage (cf. *Mk* 5:34).

His words to the father of the epileptic who wanted his son to be cured are no less striking: "All things are possible to him who believes" (*Mk* 9:23).

The role of faith is to co-operate with this omnipotence. Jesus asks for this co-operation to the point that upon returning to Nazareth, he works almost no miracles because the inhabitants of his village did not believe in him (cf. *Mk* 6:5-6). For Jesus, faith has a decisive importance for the purposes of salvation.

St Paul will develop Christ's teaching when, in conflict with those who wished to base the hope of salvation on observance of the Jewish law, he forcefully affirms that faith in Christ is the only source of salvation: "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (*Rom* 3:28). However, it must not be forgotten that St Paul was thinking of that authentic and full faith which "works through love" (*Gal* 5:6). True faith is animated by love of God, which is inseparable from love for our brothers and sisters.

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

I warmly greet the members of the United States Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, and the members of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs who have made a joint pilgrimage to Israel and now to Rome, led by Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore. I hope and pray that our interreligious dialogue will continue in a climate of renewed openness and trust. I extend a special welcome to the representatives of the Nigerian Catholic community in Rome as I prepare to set out for your beloved country for the beatification of Fr Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi, the first Nigerian 'blessed'. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from England, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God.