



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 3 May 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. At the end of the Gospel account of Christ's death, the voice of the Roman centurion rings out, anticipating the Church's profession of faith: "Truly this man was the Son of God" (*Mk 15: 39*). During the last hours of Jesus' earthly life, the supreme manifestation of the Trinity takes place in darkness. The Gospel account of Christ's passion and death records that his intimate relationship with the heavenly Father continues even in the abyss of pain.

Everything begins on the evening of the Last Supper inside the quiet walls of the Upper Room where, however, the shadow of betrayal already looms. John has preserved for us those farewell discourses which wonderfully stress the deep bond and reciprocal immanence between Jesus and the Father: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.... He who has seen me has seen the Father.... The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me" (*Jn 14: 7, 9-11*).

In saying this, Jesus is repeating the words he had spoken a little earlier when he declared concisely: "I and the Father are one.... the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (*Jn 10: 30, 38*).

And in the prayer that seals the discourses in the Upper Room, he addresses the Father in contemplation of his glory, saying: "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one" (*Jn 17: 11*). With this perfect trust in the Father, Jesus prepares to make his supreme act of love (cf. *Jn 13: 1*).

2. In the passion the bond that unites him to the Father is manifested in a particularly intense and, at the same time, dramatic way. The Son of God lives his humanity to the full, penetrating the obscurity of suffering and death that are part of our human condition. In Gethsemane, during a prayer similar to a struggle, an "agony", Jesus addresses the Father with an Aramaic term expressing filial intimacy: "Abba, Father! All things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will" (*Mk 14: 36*).

Shortly afterwards, when human hostility is unleashed against him, he reminds Peter that this hour of darkness is part of the Father's divine plan: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" (*Mt 26: 53-54*).

3. At his trial the dialogue with the high priest is also transformed into a revelation of the messianic and divine glory that surrounds the Son of God. "The high priest said to him, 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God'. Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (*Mt 26: 63-64*).

When he is on the Cross, the spectators will sarcastically remind him of his declaration: "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (*Mt 27: 43*).

But at that hour the Father was silent in his regard, so that he could show his full solidarity with sinners and redeem them. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: "Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he himself had sinned. But in the redeeming love that always united him to the Father, he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin" ([n. 603](#)).

4. On the cross Jesus actually continues his intimate dialogue with the Father, living it with the full force of his lacerated and suffering humanity, never losing the trusting attitude of the Son who is "one" with the Father. On the one hand, there is the Father's mysterious silence, accompanied by cosmic darkness and pierced by the cry: "'Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?', that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (*Mt 27: 46*).

On the other hand, Psalm 22, quoted here by Jesus, ends with a hymn to the sovereign Lord of the world and of history; this aspect is highlighted in Luke's account, in which the last words of the dying Christ are a clear citation of a psalm, to which is added an invocation to the Father: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (*Lk 23: 46*; cf. *Ps 31: 6*).

5. The Holy Spirit also takes part in this continual dialogue between the Father and the Son. We are told this by the Letter to the Hebrews, when it describes Christ's sacrificial offering in a somewhat Trinitarian formula, stating that "through the eternal Spirit [he] offered himself to God" (*Heb 9: 14*). In his passion, Christ fully opened his anguished human existence to the action of the

Holy Spirit, who gave him the necessary force to make his death a perfect offering to the Father.

For its part, the fourth Gospel closely links the gift of the Paraclete with Jesus' "departure", that is, with his passion and death, when it recounts these words of the Saviour: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (*Jn* 16: 7). After Jesus' death on the cross, the water that flows from his pierced side (cf. *Jn* 19: 34) can be seen as a symbol of the gift of the Spirit (cf. *Jn* 7: 37-39). The Father then glorifies his Son, giving him the capacity to communicate the Spirit to all human beings.

Let us contemplate the Trinity, which is also revealed on the day of pain and darkness, as we reread the words of the spiritual "testament" of St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein): "It is not human activity alone which can help us, but Christ's passion: my true desire is to take part in it. From now on I accept the death that God has destined for me, in perfect union with his holy will.

Accept, O Lord, my life and my death for the intentions of the Church, to your glory and your praise. May the Lord be welcomed among his own and may his kingdom come to us in glory" (*The Power of the Cross*).

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In the joy of Easter, I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially the group led by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services. I welcome the visitors who have come from England, Uganda, Trinidad and Tobago, Japan and the United States of America. May the peace of the Risen Christ fill your hearts.

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