



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 10 May 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. The final destination of Christ's journey through life is not the darkness of the tomb, but the shining heaven of the Resurrection. Christian faith is based on this mystery (cf. 1 *Cor* 15: 1-20), as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us: "The Resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the paschal mystery along with the cross" (*CCC*, n. 638).

A 16th-century Spanish mystical writer said: "In God new seas are discovered the more one sails" (Friar Luis de León). We now intend to navigate the immensity of this mystery, towards the light of the Trinitarian presence in the Easter events. This presence extends throughout the 50 days after Easter.

2. Unlike the apocryphal writings, the canonical Gospels do not present the Resurrection event in itself, but rather the new and different presence of the risen Christ among his disciples. It is precisely this newness that characterizes the first scene on which we would like to reflect. It is the apparition which takes place in a Jerusalem still bathed in the pale light of dawn: a woman, Mary Magdalen, and a man meet in a cemetery. At first the woman does not recognize the man who has approached her: yet he is that Jesus of Nazareth whom she had listened to and who had changed her life. To recognize him she needs another source of knowledge than reason and the senses. It is the way of faith which is opened to her when she hears herself called by name (cf. *Jn* 20: 11-18).

Let us focus our attention on that scene, on the words of the Risen One. He says: "I am

ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (*Jn 20: 17*), thus revealing the heavenly Father, with whom Christ, in saying "my Father", emphasizes his special, unique bond, different from that between the Father and the disciples: "your Father". In Matthew's Gospel alone Jesus calls God "my Father" 17 times. The fourth Evangelist will use two different Greek words, one - *hyios* - to indicate Christ's full and perfect divine sonship, the other - *tekna* - to refer to our being children of God in a real but derivative way.

3. The second scene takes us from Jerusalem to a mountain in northern Galilee. There another Christophany takes place in which the Risen One reveals himself to the Apostles (cf. *Mt 28: 16-20*). It is a solemn event of revelation, recognition and mission. In the fullness of his saving powers, he gives the Church the mandate to preach the Gospel, to baptize and to teach the nations to live according to his commandments. It is the Trinity that emerges in those essential words, which are also repeated in the formula of Christian Baptism, as it will be administered by the Church: "Baptize them [all nations] in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Mt 28: 19*).

An ancient Christian writer, Theodore of Mopsuestia (fourth to fifth century), comments: "The words, *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, show who it is who gives us the blessings of Baptism: new birth, renewal, immortality, incorruptibility, impassibility, immutability, deliverance from death, slavery and all evil, enjoyment of freedom and participation in future and sublime benefits. This is why we are baptized! The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are invoked so that you can know the source of the blessings of Baptism" (*Homily II On Baptism, 17*).

4. And so we come to the third scene we would like to recall. It takes us back in time to when Jesus still walked the roads of the Holy Land, speaking and acting. During the Jewish autumn feast of Booths, he proclaims: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water"" (*Jn 7: 37-38*). The Evangelist John interprets these words precisely in the light of the glorious Easter and the gift of the Holy Spirit: "This he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (*Jn 7: 39*).

The glorification of Easter will come, and with it the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost, which Jesus will anticipate for his Apostles on the very evening of the day of the Resurrection. Appearing in the Upper Room, he will breathe on them and say: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (*Jn 20: 22*).

5. Thus the Father and the Spirit are united with the Son at the supreme moment of the Redemption. This is what Paul affirms in a particularly luminous passage in the Letter to the Romans, where he recalls the Trinity precisely in connection with the Resurrection of Christ and of us all: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ ... from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you" (*Rom*

8: 11).

The condition for this promise to be fulfilled is revealed by the Apostle in the same Letter: "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" (*Rom* 10: 9). The Trinitarian aspect of the profession of faith corresponds with the Trinitarian nature of the Easter event. In fact, "no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit" (1 *Cor* 12: 3), and those who say it, confess it "to the glory of God the Father" (*Phil* 2: 11).

Let us then accept the paschal faith and the joy that flows from it, making our own an Easter Vigil hymn of the Eastern Church: "All things are illumined by your Resurrection, O Lord, and paradise is opened again. All creation blesses you and offers you a hymn each day. I glorify the power of the Father and of the Son; I praise the authority of the Holy Spirit, Godhead undivided, uncreated, consubstantial Trinity who reigns for ever and ever" (*Easter Canon of St John Damascene*, Holy Saturday, third tone).

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I warmly welcome the members of the Uganda National Pilgrimage, as well as the many young people and the diocesan and parish groups present at today's audience. As you walk in the footsteps of the martyrs, I pray that you will be strengthened in faith and commitment to Gospel witness. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Scotland, Ireland, Uganda, the Philippines, Canada and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Saviour.

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