



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 8 April 1998*

## ***Reflection on the Sacred Triduum***

1. In these days of Holy Week, the liturgy very forcefully underscores the opposition between light and darkness, between life and death, but it leaves us in no doubt as to the final outcome: the glory of the risen Christ. Tomorrow the solemn celebration "*in Cena Domini*" will lead us into the *Sacred Triduum*, which offers the central events of salvation history for the reflection of all believers. Together we will relive and deeply participate in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

2. At tomorrow's Chrism Mass, the morning prelude of *Holy Thursday*, priests will gather with their own Bishop. During a significant Eucharistic celebration, which usually takes place in diocesan cathedrals, the oils for the sick and for catechumens will be blessed, and chrism will be consecrated. These rites symbolize the fullness of Christ's priesthood and that ecclesial communion which must enliven the Christian people, gathered by the Eucharistic sacrifice and strengthened in unity by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Tomorrow evening we will celebrate with grateful hearts the institution of the Eucharist. At the Last Supper, the Lord, "*having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end*" (Jn 13:1). Precisely at the moment when Judas was preparing to betray him and night had fallen over his heart, divine mercy triumphed over hatred, life over death: "*Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said: 'Take, eat; this is my body'. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'*" (Mt 26:26-28).

God's new and eternal Covenant with man is thus written indelibly in the blood of Christ, the meek

and mild lamb, freely sacrificed to atone for the sins of the world. At the end of the celebration, the Church will invite us to remain in prolonged adoration of the Eucharist, to meditate on this extraordinary and incomparable mystery of love.

3. *Good Friday* is marked by the Passion account and by contemplation of the Cross, in which the Father's mercy is fully revealed. The liturgy has us pray in this way: "*When we were lost and could not find the way to you, you loved us more than ever: Jesus, your Son, innocent and without sin, gave himself into our hands and was nailed to a cross*" (*Roman Missal*, 1983 ed., *Eucharistic Prayer for Masses of Reconciliation*, I). So great is the emotion evoked by this mystery, that the Apostle Peter, writing to the faithful of Asia Minor, exclaimed: "*You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*" (1 Pt 1:18-19).

Therefore, after proclaiming the Passion of the Lord, the Church puts the adoration of the Cross at the centre of the Good Friday liturgy, not as a symbol of death but as a source of authentic life. On this day, charged with spiritual emotion, the Cross of Christ is lifted up upon the world as a banner of hope for all who in faith welcome its mystery into their lives.

4. Meditating on these supernatural realities, we will enter the silence of *Holy Saturday*, in expectation of Christ's glorious triumph in the Resurrection. At the tomb we will be able to reflect on the tragedy of a humanity that, deprived of its Lord, is inevitably dominated by loneliness and discouragement. Turned in on himself, man feels deprived of every breath of hope in the face of suffering, the failures of life and, especially, death. What should we do? We must wait for the resurrection. At our side, according to an ancient, widespread popular tradition, will be Our Lady, the Sorrowful Virgin and Mother of Christ sacrificed.

On Holy Saturday night, however, during the solemn Easter Vigil, "*the mother of all vigils*", the silence will be broken by joyful song: the *Exsultet*. Once again the victory of Light over darkness, of Life over death, will be proclaimed and the Church will rejoice in meeting her Lord.

Thus we will enter the atmosphere of Easter, the Resurrection, the endless day which the Lord inaugurated by rising from the dead.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us open our hearts to God's grace and prepare ourselves to follow Jesus in his Passion and Death, in order to enter with him into the joy of the Resurrection.

With these sentiments, I wish everyone a fruitful paschal Triduum, and a holy and happy Easter.

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

I extend a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at this

Audience, especially those from the Philippines and the United States of America. Upon you and your families I cordially invoke the blessings of almighty God. To all of you, a happy Easter!