



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Reflect on Christ's boundless love

1. We are on the eve of the *Easter Triduum*, already immersed in the spiritual atmosphere of Holy Week. From tomorrow until Sunday we will be living the central days of the liturgy, which present to us, once again, the mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord. In their homilies, the Fathers often mention these days which - as St Athanasius observes - bring us to "a new beginning, the announcement of the blessed Passover, in which the Lord was sacrificed". Thus he describes the period in which we are living in his *Festal Letters (Letter 5, 1-2; PG 26)*. Next Sunday the Easter Preface will make us sing with full voice that "Christ's Resurrection is our rising to life".

At the heart of this sacred Triduum is the "mystery of love without limit", that is, the mystery of Jesus who "having loved his own who were in the world ... loved them to the end" (Jn 13: 1). I presented this overwhelming and sweet mystery to priests in the Letter I sent them, as I do every year, for Holy Thursday.

I also invite you to reflect on this same love, to prepare worthily to relive the last stages of Jesus' earthly life. Tomorrow we will enter the Upper Room to receive the extraordinary gift of the Eucharist, the priesthood and the new commandment. On Good Friday we will take the sorrowful way that leads to Calvary, where Christ will complete his sacrifice. On Holy Saturday we will wait in silence to enter the solemn Easter Vigil.

2. "He loved them to the end". The Evangelist John's words express and describe in a particular way the liturgy of tomorrow, Holy Thursday, contained in the Chrism Mass of the morning and in

the Evening Mass *in Cena Domini*, which opens the Holy Triduum.

The Eucharist is an eloquent sign of this total, free and gratuitous love, and offers each person the joy of the presence of the One who enables us too to love "to the end" in imitation of him. The love that Jesus proposes to his disciples is demanding.

At our meeting, we heard once again the echo of the Evangelist Matthew's words: "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Mt 5: 11-12). Today, too, loving "to the end" means being prepared to face labours and difficulties in Christ's name. It means fearing neither insults nor persecutions, and being willing to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5: 44). All this is a gift of Christ, who has offered himself for every human being as a sacrificial victim on the altar of the Cross.

3. "He loved them to the end". From the Upper Room to Golgotha: our reflection takes us to Calvary, where we contemplate a love whose fulfilment is the gift of life. The Cross is the clear sign of this mystery but at the same time, for this very reason, it becomes a symbol that challenges and troubles consciences. When next Friday we celebrate the Lord's Passion and take part in the *Via Crucis*, we will not be able to forget the power of this love which is given without measure.

In the Apostolic Letter at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I wrote: "In contemplating Christ's face, we confront the most paradoxical aspect of his mystery, as it emerges in his last hour, on the Cross. The mystery within the mystery, before which we cannot but prostrate ourselves in adoration" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 25). This is the most fitting attitude with which to prepare ourselves for living the day that commemorates the Passion, Crucifixion and Death of Christ.

4. "He loved them to the end". Sacrificed for us on the Cross, Jesus is raised and becomes the first-fruits of the new creation. We will spend Holy Saturday in silent expectation of the encounter with the Risen One, meditating on the words of the Apostle Paul: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15: 3-4). This is the best way to prepare ourselves for the solemn Easter Vigil, when the brilliant light of the risen Christ will shine out in the heart of the night.

On this last stretch of our penitential journey, may we be accompanied by Mary, the Virgin who remained ever faithful beside the Son, especially during the days of the Passion. May she teach us to love "to the end" following in the footsteps of Jesus, who saved the world through his Death and his Resurrection.

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present, especially those from Norway, Sweden and the United States. I invite all of you to intensify your prayer during these holy days, and upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Saviour. Happy Easter!

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