



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 12 April 2006

From darkness to light! *Dear Brothers and Sisters,* Tomorrow begins the Easter Triduum, the fulcrum of the entire liturgical year. With the help of the sacred rites of Holy Thursday, of Good Friday and of the solemn Easter Vigil, we will relive the mystery of the passion, death and Resurrection of the Lord. These are fitting days for reawakening within us a deeper desire to adhere to Christ and to follow him generously, aware that he loved us to the point of giving his life for us. Indeed, what are the events that the Sacred Triduum presents to us anew, other than the sublime manifestation of God's love for man? Let us therefore prepare to celebrate the Easter Triduum by accepting St Augustine's exhortation: "Consider now with attention these three most sacred days... of the Lord's Crucifixion, rest in the grave and Resurrection. Of these three, that of which the Cross is the symbol is the business of our present life: those things which are symbolized by his rest in the grave and his Resurrection we hold by faith and hope" (*Letter 55*, 14, 24).

The Triduum of Easter begins tomorrow, *Holy Thursday*, with the evening Mass, "*in Cena Domini*", although in the morning another important liturgical celebration is usually held, the Chrism Mass, during which the entire presbyterate of every Diocese, gathered round the Bishop, renews the priestly promises and participates in the blessing of the oils of the catechumens, of the sick and of the Chrism, and we will do this too, here in St Peter's tomorrow morning. In addition to the institution of the Priesthood, the total offering that Christ made of himself to humanity in the Sacrament of the Eucharist is commemorated on this holy day. As Holy Scripture records, on that same night on which he was betrayed, he left us the "new commandment" - "*mandatum novum*" - of brotherly love with the touching gesture of the washing of the feet, which is reminiscent of the humble service of slaves. This unique day, which calls to mind great mysteries, ends with Eucharistic Adoration, in memory of the agony of the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the grip of profound anguish, the Gospel relates, Jesus asked his disciples to watch and pray with him: "Remain here, and watch with me" (Mt 26: 38), but the disciples fell asleep. Still today, the

Lord says to us: "Remain here, and watch with me"; and we realize that we too, disciples of today, are frequently dozing. For Jesus, that was the hour of abandonment and loneliness, followed by his arrest in the heart of the night and the beginning of the painful journey to Calvary.

Good Friday is focused on the mystery of the Passion. It is a day of fasting and penance, completely oriented to contemplation of Christ on the Cross. In churches, the Passion Narrative is proclaimed and the words of the Prophet Zechariah ring out: "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced" (Jn 19: 37). And on Good Friday we too desire to truly turn our gaze to the pierced heart of the Redeemer, in which, St Paul writes, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2: 3), indeed, "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2: 9). As a result, the Apostle can affirm that he wants nothing except "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (I Cor 2: 2). It is true: the Cross shows "the breadth and length and height and depth" - the cosmic dimensions is the meaning - of a love that surpasses all knowledge, a love that goes beyond what is known and fills us "with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3: 18-19). In the mystery of the Crucified One "is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 12). The Cross of Christ, Pope St Leo the Great wrote in the fifth century, "is the fount of all blessings, the source of all graces" (*Discourse 8 on the Passion of the Lord*, 6-8; *PL* 54, 340-342).

On *Holy Saturday* the Church, spiritually united with Mary, remains in prayer at the tomb, where the Body of the Son of God is lying inert as it were in a condition of repose after the creative work of redemption brought about with his death (cf. Heb 4: 1-13). Late at night the solemn Easter Vigil will begin, during which the joyful singing of the *Gloria* and *Easter Alleluia* will well up from the hearts of the newly baptized and the entire Christian community, rejoicing because Christ is risen and has conquered death. Dear brothers and sisters, for a fruitful celebration of Easter, the Church asks the faithful in these days to receive the Sacrament of Penance, which is like a sort of death and resurrection for each one of us. In the ancient Christian community, the Bishop presided at the Rite of the Reconciliation of Penitents on Holy Thursday. Historical conditions have certainly changed, but preparing oneself for Easter with a good confession continues to be an action to make the most of, because it offers us the possibility of giving our life a fresh start and of truly having a new beginning in the joy of the Risen One and in the communion of the forgiveness that he gives us. Aware that we are sinners but trusting in divine mercy, let us be reconciled by Christ, to enjoy more intensely the joy that he communicates with his Resurrection. The forgiveness which Christ gives to us in the Sacrament of Penance is a source of interior and exterior peace and makes us apostles of peace in a world where divisions, suffering and the tragedies of injustice, hatred and violence and the inability to be reconciled to one another in order to start again with a sincere pardon, unfortunately continue. However, we know that evil does not have the last word, because it was the Crucified and Risen Christ who overcame it, and his triumph is expressed with the power of merciful love. His Resurrection gives us this certainty: despite all the darkness that exists in the world, evil does not have the last word. Sustained by this certainty, we will be able, with greater courage and enthusiasm, to commit ourselves to work for the birth of a

more just world. I wholeheartedly formulate this wish for you, dear brothers and sisters, as I express the hope that you will prepare yourselves with faith and devotion for the Easter festivities that are now at hand. May you be accompanied by Mary Most Holy, who, after following her divine Son in the hour of the Passion and the Cross, shared in the joy of his Resurrection.***

To special groups: I warmly welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims present, including the pupils and staff from De Lisle Catholic College. May your Holy Week pilgrimage be a time of great spiritual encouragement and renewal. I invoke an abundance of God's Blessings upon you and your families, and I wish everyone a happy and holy Easter! Lastly, I offer a cordial greeting to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Dear friends, prepare your hearts to celebrate the Easter Mystery with deep participation, to draw from contemplation of the death and Resurrection of Christ, the light that enables you to walk faithfully in the Redeemer's footsteps. In this regard I wish you all a good Holy Week and a Holy Easter.

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