



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall*

*Wednesday, 26 November 2008*

This morning I greet with great joy His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia of the Armenians, together with the distinguished delegation accompanying him, and the Armenian pilgrims from various countries. This fraternal visit is a significant occasion for strengthening the bonds of unity already existing between us, as we journey towards that full communion which is both the goal set before all Christ's followers and a gift to be implored daily from the Lord.

For this reason, Your Holiness, I invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit on your pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and I invite all present to pray fervently to the Lord that your visit, and our meetings, will mark a further step along the path towards full unity.

Your Holiness, I wish to express my particular gratitude for your constant personal involvement in the field of ecumenism, especially in the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and in the World Council of Churches.

On the exterior façade of the Vatican Basilica is a statue of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, founder of the Armenian Church, whom one of your historians has called "our progenitor and father in the Gospel". The presence of this statue evokes the sufferings he endured in bringing the Armenian people to Christianity, but it also recalls the many martyrs and confessors of the faith whose witness bore rich fruit in the history of your people. Armenian culture and spirituality are pervaded by pride in this witness of their forefathers, who suffered with fidelity and courage in communion with the Lamb slain for the salvation of the world.

Welcome, Your Holiness, dear Bishops and dear friends! Together let us invoke the intercession of Saint Gregory the Illuminator and above all the Virgin Mother of God, so that they will enlighten our way and guide it towards the fullness of that unity which we all desire.

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***Saint Paul (14):***

***The Doctrine of Justification: The Apostle's Teaching on Faith and Works***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

In the Catechesis last Wednesday I spoke of how man is justified before God. Following St Paul, we have seen that man is unable to "justify" himself with his own actions, but can only truly become "just" before God because God confers his "justice" upon him, uniting him to Christ his Son. And man obtains this union through faith. In this sense, St Paul tells us: not our deeds, but rather faith renders us "just". This faith, however, is not a thought, an opinion, an idea. This faith is communion with Christ, which the Lord gives to us, and thus becomes life, becomes conformity with him. Or to use different words faith, if it is true, if it is real, becomes love, becomes charity, is expressed in charity. A faith without charity, without this fruit, would not be true faith. It would be a dead faith.

Thus, in our last Catechesis, we discovered two levels: that of the insignificance of our actions and of our deeds to achieve salvation, and that of "justification" through faith which produces the fruit of the Spirit. The confusion of these two levels has caused more than a few misunderstandings in Christianity over the course of centuries. In this context it is important that St Paul, in the same Letter to the Galatians radically accentuates, on the one hand, the freely given nature of justification that is not dependent on our works, but which at the same time also emphasizes the relationship between faith and charity, between faith and works: "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love" (Gal 5: 6). Consequently, there are on the one hand "works of the flesh", which are "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry..." (Gal 5: 19-20): all works that are contrary to the faith; on the other, there is the action of the Holy Spirit who nourishes Christian life, inspiring "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5: 22-23). These are the fruits of the Spirit that blossom from faith.

*Agape*, love, is cited at the beginning of this list of virtues and self-control at the conclusion. In fact, the Spirit who is the Love of the Father and the Son pours out his first gift, *agape*, into our hearts (cf. Rm 5: 5); and to be fully expressed, *agape*, love, requires self-control. In my first Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, I also treated of the love of the Father and the Son which reaches us and profoundly transforms our existence. Believers know that reciprocal love is embodied in the love of God and of Christ, through the Spirit. Let us return to the Letter to the Galatians. Here St Paul

says that by bearing one another's burdens believers are fulfilling the commandment of love (cf. Gal 6: 2).

Justified through the gift of faith in Christ, we are called to live in the love of Christ for neighbour, because it is on this criterion that we shall be judged at the end of our lives. In reality Paul only repeats what Jesus himself said and which is proposed to us anew by last Sunday's Gospel, in the parable of the Last Judgment. In the First Letter to the Corinthians St Paul pours himself out in a famous eulogy of love. It is called the "hymn to love": "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.... Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way" (1 Cor 13: 1, 4-5). Christian love is particularly demanding because it springs from Christ's total love for us: that love that claims us, welcomes us, embraces us, sustains us, to the point of tormenting us since it forces each one to no longer live for himself, closed into his own selfishness, but for him "who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5: 15). The love of Christ makes us, in him, that new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5: 17), which comes to belong to his Mystical Body that is the Church.

Seen in this perspective, the centrality of justification without works, the primary object of Paul's preaching, does not clash with faith that works through love; indeed, it demands that our faith itself be expressed in a life in accordance with the Spirit. Often there is seen an unfounded opposition between St Paul's theology and that of St James, who writes in his Letter: "as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead"(2: 26). In reality, while Paul is primarily concerned to show that faith in Christ is necessary and sufficient, James accentuates the consequential relations between faith and works (cf. Jas 2: 24). Therefore, for both Paul and James, faith that is active in love testifies to the freely given gift of justification in Christ. Salvation received in Christ needs to be preserved and witnessed to "with fear and trembling. For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.... Do all things without grumbling or questioning... holding fast the word of life", St Paul was to say further, to the Christians of Philippi (cf. Phil 2: 12-14, 16).

We are often induced to fall into the same misunderstandings that characterized the community of Corinth; those Christians thought that since they had been freely justified in Christ through faith, "they could do as they pleased". And they believed and it often seems that today's Christians also think this that it is permissible to create divisions in the Church, the Body of Christ, to celebrate the Eucharist without looking after the neediest of our brothers, to aspire to better charisms without being aware that each is a member of the other, and so forth. The consequences of a faith that is not manifested in love are disastrous, because it reduces itself to the arbitrariness and subjectivism that is most harmful to us and to our brothers. On the contrary, in following St Paul, we should gain a new awareness of the fact that precisely because we are justified in Christ, we no longer belong to ourselves but have become a temple of the Spirit and hence are called to glorify God in our body with the whole of our existence (cf. 1 Cor 6: 19). We would be underselling the inestimable value of justification, purchased at the high price of Christ's Blood, if we were not to glorify him with our body. In fact, our worship at the same time reasonable and spiritual is

exactly this, which is why St Paul exhorts us "to present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rm 12: 1). To what would a liturgy be reduced if addressed solely to the Lord without simultaneously becoming service to one's brothers, a faith that would not express itself in charity? And the Apostle often places his communities in confrontation with the Last Judgment, on the occasion of which: "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (2 Cor 5: 10; cf. also Rm 2: 16). And this idea of the Last Judgment must illumine us in our daily lives.

If the ethics that Paul proposes to believers do not deteriorate into forms of moralism and prove themselves timely for us, it is because, each time, they start from the personal and communal relationship with Christ, to be realized concretely in a life according to the Spirit. This is essential: the Christian ethic is not born from a system of commandments but is a consequence of our friendship with Christ. This friendship influences life; if it is true it incarnates and fulfils itself in love for neighbour. For this reason, any ethical decay is not limited to the individual sphere but it also weakens personal and communal faith from which it derives and on which it has a crucial effect. Therefore let us allow ourselves to be touched by reconciliation, which God has given us in Christ, by God's "foolish" love for us; nothing and no one can ever separate us from his love (cf. Rm 8: 39). We live in this certainty. It is this certainty that gives us the strength to live concretely the faith that works in love.

### To special groups

I am pleased to greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from England and the United States of America. I pray that your stay in Rome will renew your love for the Lord Jesus Christ and strengthen you in his service. Upon all of you I cordially invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Next Sunday, Advent begins, in preparation for the Birth of Christ. I urge you, dear *young people*, to live this "powerful time" with vigilant prayer and ardent apostolic action. I encourage you, dear *sick people*, to sustain with the offering of your sufferings the process of the whole Church's preparation for Christmas. I hope that you, *newlyweds*, may be witnesses of the Spirit of love that animates and sustains the whole family of God.

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