



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 28 January 2009

Saint Paul (19):

Theological vision of Pastoral Letters

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The last of the Pauline Letters, which I would like to talk about today, are known as "Pastoral Letters", because they were sent to individual Pastors of the Church: two to Timothy and one to Titus, both close collaborators of St Paul. In Timothy, the Apostle saw almost an "alter ego"; in fact he entrusted him with important missions (to Macedonia: cf. Acts 19: 22; to Thessalonica: cf. 1 Thes 3: 6-7; to Corinth: cf. 1 Cor 4: 17; 16: 10-11), and then wrote a flattering eulogy on him: "I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare" (Phil 2: 20). According to the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Caesarea, a fourth century historian, Timothy was the first Bishop of Ephesus (cf. 3: 4). Titus, too, must have been very dear to the Apostle, who explicitly describes him as "full of zeal... my partner and fellow worker" (2 Cor 8: 17-23), and further "my true son in the common faith" (Ti 1: 4). He had been assigned a few very delicate missions in the Church of Corinth, whose results heartened Paul (cf. 2 Cor 7: 6-7, 13; 8: 6). After this, according to the tradition handed down to us, Titus joined Paul in Nicopolis in Epirus, in Greece (cf. Ti 3: 12), and was then sent by him to Dalmatia (cf. 2 Tm 4: 10). The Letter sent to him suggests that he was later made Bishop of Crete (cf. Ti 1: 5).

The Letters addressed to these two Pastors occupy a very particular place within the New Testament. Most exegetes today are of the opinion that these Letters would not have been written

by Paul himself, but would have come from the "Pauline School", and that they reflect his legacy for a new generation, perhaps including some words or brief passages written by the Apostle himself. Some parts of the Second Letter to Timothy, for example, appear so authentic that they could have come only from the heart and mouth of the Apostle.

Without a doubt, the situation of the Church as it emerges from these Letters is very different from that of Paul's middle years. He now, in retrospect, defines himself as the "herald, apostle, and teacher" of faith and truth to the Gentiles (cf. 1 Tm 2: 7; 2 Tm 1: 11); he presents himself as one who has received mercy he writes "so that in me, as an extreme case, Jesus Christ might display all his patience, and that I might become an example to those who would later have faith in him and gain everlasting life" (1 Tm 1: 16). So it is of essential importance that in Paul, a persecutor converted by the presence of the Risen One, the Lord's magnanimity is really shown to encourage us, and lead us to hope and to have faith in the Lord's mercy who, notwithstanding our littleness, can do great things. The new cultural contexts that are assumed here go beyond the middle years of Paul's life. In fact reference is made to the appearance of teachings that must be considered quite erroneous and false (cf. 1 Tm 4: 1-2; 2 Tm 3: 1-5), such as those [teachings] which held that marriage was not a good thing (cf. 1 Tm 4: 3a). We can see a modern equivalent of this worry, because today, too, the Scriptures are sometimes read as an object of historical curiosity and not as the word of the Holy Spirit, in which we can hear the voice of the Lord himself and recognize his presence in history. We could say that, with this brief list of errors presented in the three Letters, there are some precocious early traces of that later erroneous movement which goes by the name of Gnosticism (cf. 1 Tm 2: 5-6; 2 Tm 3: 6-8).

The writer faces these doctrines with two basic reminders. The first consists in an exhortation to a spiritual reading of Sacred Scripture (cf. 2 Tm 3: 14-17), that is to a reading which considers them truly "inspired" and coming from the Holy Spirit, so that one can be "instructed for salvation" by them. The correct way to read the Scriptures is to enter into dialogue with the Holy Spirit, in order to derive a light "for teaching for reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tm 3: 16). This, the Letter adds: is "so that the man of God may be fully complete and equipped for every good work" (2 Tm 3: 17). The other reminder is a reference to the good "deposit" (*parathéke*): a special word found in the Pastoral Letters and used to indicate the tradition of the apostolic faith which must be safeguarded with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. This "deposit" is therefore to be considered as the sum of the apostolic Tradition, and as a criterion of faithfulness to the Gospel message. And here we must bear in mind that the term "Scriptures", when used in the Pastoral Letters, as in all the rest of the New Testament, means explicitly the Old Testament, since the writings of the New Testament either had not yet been written or did not yet constitute part of the Scriptural canon. Therefore the Tradition of the apostolic proclamation, this "deposit", is the key to the reading of the Scriptures, the New Testament. In this sense, Scripture and Tradition, Scripture and the apostolic proclamation as a key, are set side by side, and almost merge to form together the "firm foundation laid by God" (cf. 2 Tm 2: 19). The apostolic proclamation that is, Tradition is necessary in order to enter into an understanding of the

Scriptures, and to hear the voice of Christ in them. We must, in fact, "hold firm to the sure word as taught" by the teaching received (Ti 1: 9). Indeed, at the basis of everything is faith in the historical revelation of the goodness of God, who in Jesus Christ materially manifested his "love for men", a love which in the original Greek text is significantly expressed as *filanthropia* (Ti 3: 4; cf. 2 Tm 1: 9-10); God loves humanity.

Altogether, it is clear that the Christian community is beginning to define itself in strict terms, according to an identity which not only stands aloof from incongruous interpretations, but above all affirms its ties to the essential points of faith, which here is synonymous with "truth" (1 Tm 2: 4, 7; 4: 3; 6: 5; 2 Tm 2: 15, 18, 25; 3: 7-8; 4: 4; Ti 1: 1, 14). In faith the essential truth of who we are, who God is, and how we must live is made clear. And of this truth (the truth of faith), the Church is described as the "pillar and bulwark" (1 Tm 3: 15). In any case, she remains an open community of universal breadth who prays for everyone of every rank and order, so that all may know the truth: God "wants all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth", because Christ Jesus "gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tm 2: 4-5). Therefore the sense of universality, even if the communities are still small, is strong and conclusive in these Letters. Furthermore, those in the Christian community "speak evil of no one", and "show perfect courtesy toward all men" (Ti 3: 2). This is the first important component of these Letters: universality and faith as truth, as a key to the reading of Sacred Scripture, of the Old Testament, thereby defining a unified proclamation of Scripture, a living faith open to all and a witness to God's love for everyone.

Another component typical of these Letters is their reflection on the ministerial structure of the Church. They are the first to present the triple subdivision into Bishops, priests and deacons (cf. 1 Tm 3: 1-13; 4: 13; 2 Tm 1: 6; Ti 1: 5-9). We can observe in the Pastoral Letters the merging of two different ministerial structures, and thus the constitution of the definitive form of the ministry in the Church. In Paul's Letters from the middle period of his life, he speaks of "bishops" (Phil 1: 1), and of "deacons": this is the typical structure of the Church formed during the time of the Gentile world.

However, as the figure of the Apostle himself remains dominant, the other ministries only slowly develop. If, as we have said, in the Churches formed in the ancient world we have Bishops and deacons, and not priests, in the Churches formed in the Judeo-Christian world, priests are the dominant structure. At the end of the Pastoral Letters, the two structures unite: now "the bishop" appears (cf. 1 Tm 3: 2; Ti 1: 7), used always in the singular with the definite article "the bishop". And beside "the bishop" we find priests and deacons. The figure of the Apostle is still prominent, but the three Letters, as I have said, are no longer addressed to communities but rather to individuals, to Timothy and Titus, who on the one hand appear as Bishops, and on the other begin to take the place of the Apostle.

This is the first indication of the reality that later would be known as "apostolic succession". Paul says to Timothy in the most solemn tones: "Do not neglect the gift you received when, as a result of prophesy, the presbyters laid their hands on you (1 Tm 4: 14). We can say that in these words

the sacramental character of the ministry is first made apparent. And so we have the essential Catholic structure: Scripture and Tradition, Scripture and proclamation, form a whole, but to this structure a doctrinal structure, so to speak must be added the personal structure, the successors of the Apostles as witnesses to the apostolic proclamation.

Lastly, it is important to note that in these Letters, the Church sees herself in very human terms, analogous to the home and the family. Particularly in 1 Tm 3: 2-7 we read highly detailed instructions concerning the Bishop, like these: he must be "irreprehensible, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children under control and respectful in every way, for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's Church?.... Moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders". A special note should be made here of the importance of an aptitude for teaching (cf. also 1 Tm 5: 17), which is echoed in other passages (cf. 1 Tm 6: 2c; 2 Tm 3: 10; Ti 2: 1), and also of a special personal characteristic, that of "paternity". In fact the Bishop is considered the father of the Christian community (cf. also 1 Tm 3: 15). For that matter, the idea of the Church as "the Household of God" is rooted in the Old Testament (cf. Nm 12: 7) and is repeated in Heb 3: 2, 6, while elsewhere we read that all Christians are no longer strangers or guests, but fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God (cf. Eph 2: 19).

Let us ask the Lord and St Paul that we too, as Christians, may be ever more characterized, in relation to the society in which we live, as members of the "family of God". And we pray that the Pastors of the Church may increasingly acquire paternal sentiments tender and at the same time strong in the formation of the House of God, of the community, and of the Church.

To special groups

I am pleased to greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, including the groups from England and the United States of America. Upon you and your families I willingly invoke God's blessings of peace and joy!

* * *

Before greeting the Italian pilgrims, I have three more announcements to make.

The first: I have received with joy the news of the election of Metropolitan Kirill as the new Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. I invoke the light of the Holy Spirit upon him for a generous service to the Russian Orthodox Church, entrusting him to the special protection of the Mother of God.

The second: in the Homily pronounced on the occasion of the solemn inauguration of my Pontificate, I said that an "explicit" duty of the Pastor is the "call to unity", and commenting on the Gospel passage about the miraculous catch, I said: "although the fish were so many, the net was not torn". I then followed with these Gospel words: "Alas, beloved Lord, with sorrow we must now acknowledge that it has been torn!". I continued, "But no we must not be sad! Let us rejoice because of your promise, which does not disappoint, and let us do all we can to pursue the path towards the unity you have promised.... Do not allow your net to be torn, and help us to be servants of unity!" (Installation Mass, 24 April 2005).

Precisely in fulfillment of this service to unity, which qualifies my ministry as Successor to Peter in a specific way, I decided several days ago to grant the remission of the excommunication to which the four Bishops, ordained in 1988 by Archbishop Lefebvre without a Papal mandate, were subject. I fulfilled this act of paternal compassion because these Bishops repeatedly manifested their active suffering for the situation in which they had found themselves. I hope that this gesture of mine will be followed by an earnest commitment on their behalf to complete the necessary further steps to achieve full communion with the Church, thus witnessing true fidelity to, and true recognition of, the Magisterium and the authority of the Pope and the Second Vatican Council.

The third statement: in these days when we remember the Shoah, images come to mind from my repeated visits to Auschwitz, one of the concentration camps in which the heinous slaughter of millions of Jews occurred, innocent victims of a blind racial and religious hatred. As I affectionately renew the expression of my full and unquestionable solidarity with our fellow receivers of the First Covenant, I hope that the memory of the Shoah will lead humanity to reflect upon the unfathomable power of evil when it conquers the heart of man.

May the Shoah be a warning for all against forgetfulness, denial or reductionism, because violence committed against one single human being is violence against all. No man is an island, as a famous poet wrote. May the Shoah teach both old and new generations that only the arduous path of listening and dialogue, of love and forgiveness leads peoples, cultures and religions of the world to the desired goal of fraternity and peace in truth. May violence no longer degrade the dignity of man!

© Copyright 2009 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana