



# The Holy See

---

BENEDICT XVI

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 9 December 2009*

(Video)

***Rupert of Deutz***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Today we become acquainted with another 12th-century Benedictine monk. His name is Rupert of Deutz, a city near Cologne, home to a famous monastery. Rupert himself speaks of his own life in one of his most important works entitled *The Glory and Honour of the Son of Man* [*De gloria et honore filii hominis super Matthaeum*], which is a commentary on part of the Gospel according to Matthew. While still a boy he was received at the Benedictine Monastery of St Laurence at Liège as an "oblate", in accordance with the custom at that time of entrusting one of the sons to the monks for his education, intending to make him a gift to God. Rupert always loved monastic life. He quickly learned Latin in order to study the Bible and to enjoy the liturgical celebrations. He distinguished himself for his moral rectitude, straight as a die, and his strong attachment to the See of St Peter.

Rupert's time was marked by disputes between the Papacy and the Empire, because of the so-called "Investiture Controversy" with which as I have mentioned in other Catecheses the Papacy wished to prevent the appointment of Bishops and the exercise of their jurisdiction from depending on the civil authorities who were certainly not guided by pastoral reasons but for the most part by political and financial considerations. Bishop Otbert of Liège resisted the Pope's directives and exiled Berengarius, Abbot of the Monastery of St Laurence, because of his fidelity to the Pontiff. It

was in this monastery that Rupert lived. He did not hesitate to follow his Abbot into exile and only when Bishop Otbert returned to communion with the Pope did he return to Liège and agree to become a priest. Until that moment, in fact, he had avoided receiving ordination from a Bishop in dissent with the Pope. Rupert teaches us that when controversies arise in the Church the reference to the Petrine ministry guarantees fidelity to sound doctrine and is a source of serenity and inner freedom. After the dispute with Otbert Rupert was obliged to leave his monastery again twice. In 1116 his adversaries even wanted to take him to court. Although he was acquitted of every accusation, Rupert preferred to go for a while to Siegburg; but since on his return to the monastery in Liège the disputes had not yet ceased, he decided to settle definitively in Germany. In 1120 he was appointed Abbot of Deutz where, except for making a pilgrimage to Rome in 1124, he lived until 1129, the year of his death.

A fertile writer, Rupert left numerous works, still today of great interest because he played an active part in various important theological discussions of his time. For example, he intervened with determination in the Eucharistic controversy, which in 1077 led to his condemnation by Berengarius of Tours. Berengarius had given a reductive interpretation of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, describing it as merely symbolic. In the language of the Church the term "transubstantiation" was as yet unknown but Rupert, at times with daring words, made himself a staunch supporter of the Eucharistic reality and, especially in a work entitled *De divinis officiis* (On divine offices), purposefully asserted the continuity between the Body of the Incarnate Word of Christ and that present in the Eucharistic species of the bread and the wine. Dear brothers and sisters, it seems to me that at this point we must also think of our time; today too we are in danger of reappraising the Eucharistic reality, that is, of considering the Eucharist almost as a rite of communion, of socialization alone, forgetting all too easily that the Risen Christ is really present in the Eucharist with his Risen Body which is placed in our hands *to draw us out of ourselves, to incorporate us* into his immortal body and thereby *lead us* to new life. This great mystery that the Lord is present in his full reality in the Eucharistic species is a mystery to be adored and loved ever anew! I would like here to quote the words of the [\*Catechism of the Catholic Church\*](#) which bear the fruit of 2,000 years of meditation on the faith and theological reflection: "The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique and incomparable.... In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the Body and Blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ... is truly, really, and substantially contained'.... It is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present... by the Eucharistic species of the bread the wine" (cf. n. [1374](#)). Rupert too contributed with his reflections to this precise formulation.

Another controversy in which the Abbot of Deutz was involved concerns the problem of the reconciliation of God's goodness and omnipotence with the existence of evil. If God is omnipotent and good, how is it possible to explain the reality of evil? Rupert, in fact, reacted to the position assumed by the teachers of the theological school of Laon, who, with a series of philosophical arguments, distinguished in God's will the "to approve" and the "to permit", concluding that God

permits evil without approving it and hence without desiring it. Rupert, on the other hand, renounces the use of philosophy, which he deems inadequate for addressing such a great problem, and remains simply faithful to the biblical narration. He starts with the goodness of God, with the truth that God is supremely good and cannot desire anything but good. Thus he identifies the origin of evil in the human being himself and in the erroneous use of human freedom. When Rupert addresses this topic he writes pages filled with religious inspiration to praise the Father's infinite mercy, God's patience with the sinful human being and his kindness to him.

Like other medieval theologians, Rupert too wondered why the Word of God, the Son of God, was made man. Some, many, answered by explaining the Incarnation of the Word by the urgent need to atone for human sin. Rupert, on the other hand, with a Christocentric vision of salvation history, broadens the perspective, and in a work entitled *The Glorification of the Trinity*, sustains the position that the Incarnation, the central event of the whole of history was planned from eternity, even independently of human sin, so that the whole creation might praise God the Father and love him as one family gathered round Christ, the Son of God. Then he saw in the pregnant woman of the Apocalypse the entire history of humanity which is oriented to Christ, just as conception is oriented to birth, a perspective that was to be developed by other thinkers and enhanced by contemporary theology, which says that the whole history of the world and of humanity is a conception oriented to the birth of Christ. Christ is always the centre of the exegetic explanations provided by Rupert in his commentaries on the Books of the Bible, to which he dedicated himself with great diligence and passion. Thus, he rediscovers a wonderful unity in all the events of the history of salvation, from the creation until the final consummation of time: "All Scripture", he says, "is one book, which aspires to the same end (the divine Word); which comes from one God and was written by one Spirit" (*De glorificatione Trinitatis et procesione Sancti spiritus* I, V, PL 169, 18).

In the interpretation of the Bible, Rupert did not limit himself to repeating the teaching of the Fathers, but shows an originality of his own. For example, he is the first writer to have identified the bride in the Song of Songs with Mary Most Holy. His commentary on this book of Scripture has thus turned out to be a sort of Mariological *summa*, in which he presents Mary's privileges and excellent virtues. In one of the most inspired passages of his commentary Rupert writes: "O most beloved among the beloved, Virgin of virgins, what does your beloved Son so praise in you that the whole choir of angels exalts? What they praise is your simplicity, purity, innocence, doctrine, modesty, humility, integrity of mind and body, that is, your incorrupt virginity" (*In Canticum Canticorum* 4, 1-6, CCL 26, pp. 69-70). The Marian interpretation of Rupert's *Canticum* is a felicitous example of harmony between liturgy and theology. In fact, various passages of this Book of the Bible were already used in liturgical celebrations on Marian feasts.

Rupert, furthermore, was careful to insert his Mariological doctrine into that ecclesiological doctrine. That is to say, he saw in Mary Most Holy the holiest part of the whole Church. For this reason my venerable Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, in his Discourse for the closure of the third session of the [Second Vatican Council](#), in solemnly pronouncing Mary Mother of the Church, even

cited a proposal taken from Rupert's works, which describes Mary as *portio maxima, portio optima* the most sublime part, the very best part of the Church (cf. *In Apocalypsem* 1, 7, PL 169, 1043).

Dear friends, from these rapid allusions we realize that Rupert was a fervent theologian endowed with great depth. Like all the representatives of monastic theology, he was able to combine rational study of the mysteries of faith with prayer and contemplation, which he considered the summit of all knowledge of God. He himself sometimes speaks of his mystical experiences, such as when he confides his ineffable joy at having perceived the Lord's presence: "in that brief moment", he says, "I experienced how true what he himself says is. *Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart*" (*De gloria et honore Filii hominis. Super Matthaeum* 12, PL 1168, 1601). We too, each one of us in our own way, can encounter the Lord Jesus who ceaselessly accompanies us on our way, makes himself present in the Eucharistic Bread and in his Word for our salvation.

---

### To special groups

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I offer a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience. I greet especially the groups from South Korea, South Africa and the United States of America. As we prepare with joy to celebrate our Saviour's birth this Christmas, let us renew our commitment to bring the light of Christ to those we meet. May God bless you all!

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception that we celebrated yesterday, reminds us of Mary's unique adherence to God's saving plan.

© Copyright 2009 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

---

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana