



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Saint Peter's Square*

*Wednesday, 11 April 2012*

[\[Video\]](#)

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

After the solemn celebrations of Easter, our meeting today is imbued with spiritual joy, although the sky is grey we carry in our hearts the joy of Easter, the certainty of the Resurrection of Christ who triumphed over death once and for all. In the first place I renew to each one of you a cordial Easter greeting: may the joyful announcement of Christ's Resurrection ring out in all homes and in all hearts so that hope may be reborn.

In this Catechesis I would like to demonstrate the transformation that the Pasch of Jesus worked in his disciples. Let us start with the evening of the day of the Resurrection. The disciples had locked the door to the house for fear of the Jews (cf. Jn 20:19). Fear caused their hearts to miss a beat, and prevented them from reaching out to others and to life. The Teacher was no longer. The memory of his Passion gave rise to uncertainty. Yet Jesus had his followers at heart and was about to fulfil the promise he had made during the Last Supper: "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you" (Jn 14: 18) and he also says this to us, even in overcast weather: "I will not leave you desolate".

With Jesus' arrival the disciple's situation of anguish changes radically. He enters through closed doors, he stands in their midst and gives them the peace that reassures: "Peace to you" (Jn 20:19b). It is a common greeting but it now acquires new significance because it brings about an inner change; it is the Easter greeting that enables the disciples to overcome all fear. The peace

that Jesus brings is the gift of salvation that he had promised in his farewell discourses: “peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (Jn 14:27).

On this day of the Resurrection he gives it in fullness and for the community it becomes a source of joy, the certainty of victory, and security in relying on God. “Let not your hearts be troubled”, (Jn 14:1), do not be afraid, he also says to us.

After this greeting, Jesus shows the disciples the wounds in his hands and in his side (cf. Jn 20:20), signs of what has occurred and will never be cancelled: his glorious humanity remains “wounded”. The purpose of this act is to confirm the new reality of the Resurrection: Christ, now among his own, is a real person, the same Jesus who three days earlier was nailed to the cross. And it is in this way that in the dazzling light of Easter, in the encounter with the Risen One, the disciples perceive the salvific meaning of his passion and his death. Then sorrow and fear turn into full joy. The sorrow and the wounds themselves become a source of joy.

The joy that is born in their hearts derives from “[having seen] the Lord” (Jn 20:20). He repeats to them: “Peace be with you” (v. 21). By then it was obvious that it was not only a greeting. It was a gift, *the* gift that the Risen One wants to offer his friends, but at the same time it is a consignment. This peace, which Christ purchased with his blood, is for them but also for all, the disciples must pass on to the whole world. Indeed, he adds: “as the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (*ibid.*). The Risen Jesus returned to his disciples to send them out. He had completed his work in the world, it was then up to them to sow faith in hearts so that the Father, known and loved, might gather all his children from the dispersion.

But Jesus knows that his followers are still fearful, even now. Thus he carries out the gesture of blowing upon them and regenerates them in his Spirit (cf. Jn 20:22); this action is the sign of the new creation. In fact, with the gift of the Holy Spirit that comes from the Risen Christ, a new world begins. The sending of the disciples on mission is the beginning of the journey in the world of the people of the New Covenant, a people who believe in him and in his work of salvation, a people who witness to the truth of the Resurrection. This newness of life that does not die, brought by Easter, must be spread everywhere so that the thorns of sin, which wound the human heart, leave room for the new shoots of Grace, of God’s presence and of his love that triumph over sin and death.

Dear friends, today too the Risen One enters our homes and our hearts, even when, at times, the doors are closed. He enters giving joy and peace, life and hope, gifts we need for our human and spiritual rebirth. Only he can roll away those stones from the tombs in which all too often people seal themselves off from their own feelings, their own relationships, their own behaviour; stones that sanction death: division, enmity, resentment, envy, diffidence, indifference. Only he, the Living One, can give meaning to existence and enable those who are weary and sad, downhearted and

drained of hope, to continue on their journey. This was the experience of the two disciples who were on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus on Easter Day (cf. Lk 24:13-35). They were talking about Jesus but their sad looks (cf. v. 17), expressed their disappointed hopes, uncertainty and melancholy. They had left their homeland to follow Jesus with his friends and had discovered a new reality in which forgiveness and love were no longer only words but had a tangible effect on life. Jesus of Nazareth had made all things new, he had transformed their life. But now he was dead and it all seemed to be over.

Suddenly, however, they are no longer two, but three people, who are walking. Jesus joins the two disciples and walks with them, but they are unable to recognize him. They have of course heard the rumours about his resurrection, indeed they even tell him: "Some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive" (vv. 22-23). Yet all this did not suffice to convince them, because "him they did not see" (v. 24). So Jesus, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets", patiently "interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (v. 27).

The Risen One explains Sacred Scripture to the disciples, giving the fundamental key to reading it, namely, he himself and his Paschal Mystery: it is to him that the Scriptures bear witness (cf. Jn 5:39-47). The meaning of all things, of the Law, of the Prophets and of the Psalms, suddenly dawns on them and becomes clear to their eyes. Jesus had opened their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures (cf. Lk 24:45).

In the meantime, they had reached the village, probably the home of one of the two. The unknown wayfarer "appeared to be going further" (v. 28), but then he stayed with them because they asked him to so insistently: "Stay with us" (v. 29). We too must say insistently to the Lord, over and over again, "Stay with us".

"When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them" (v. 30). The reference to Jesus' gestures at the Last Supper, is evident. "And their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (v. 31). The presence of Jesus, first with words and then with the act of breaking the bread, enabled the disciples to recognize him and they could feel in a new way what they had felt while they were walking beside him: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" (v. 32). This episode points out to us two special "places" where we can encounter the Risen One who transforms our life: in listening to his word, in communion with Christ, and in the breaking of the bread; two "places" profoundly united with each other because "Word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the Word of God sacramentally takes flesh in the event of the Eucharist" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, nn. 54-55).

After this encounter, the two disciples “rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’” (v. 33-34).

In Jerusalem they hear the news of Jesus’ Resurrection and, in turn, they recount their own experience, on fire with love for the Risen One who has opened their hearts to an uncontainable joy. As St Peter says, they were “born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (cf. 1 Pet 1:3). Indeed, the enthusiasm of faith, love for the community, the need to communicate the Good News was reborn within them. The Teacher is risen and with him all life is reborn; witnessing to this event becomes an irrepressible need for them.

Dear friends, may the Easter season be for us all a favourable opportunity to rediscover the sources of faith, the presence of the Risen One among us, with joy and enthusiasm. It is a question of making the same journey that Jesus enabled the two disciples of Emmaus to make, by rediscovering the word of God and the Eucharist, that is, by walking with the Lord and letting our eyes be opened to the true meaning of Scripture and to his presence in the breaking of bread. The culmination of this journey, then as today, is Eucharistic Communion: in Communion Jesus nourishes us with his Body and his Blood, to be present in our life, to renew us, and to enliven us with the power of the Holy Spirit.

To conclude, the experience of the disciples invites us to think about the meaning of Easter for us. Let us allow ourselves to encounter the Risen Jesus! He, alive and true, is ever present in our midst; he walks with us to guide our life, to open our eyes. Let us trust in the Risen One who has the power to give life, to make us be born anew as children of God, capable of believing and of loving. Faith in him transforms our life: frees it from fear, gives it firm hope, enlivens it with God’s love which gives full meaning to existence. Many thanks.

#### **To special groups:**

I offer a warm welcome to the newly-ordained deacons from the Pontifical Irish College, together with their families and friends. Dear young deacons, may you conform your lives ever more fully to the Lord and work generously for the building up of the Church in your country. I also welcome the distinguished delegation from the NATO Defense College, with prayerful good wishes for their service to the cause of peace. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present at today’s Audience, especially those from England, Ireland, Sweden, Australia, Canada and the United States, I invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Lord. Happy Easter!

Lastly my thoughts turn to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Dear *young people*, especially you adolescents from the Diocese of Cremona, may you be ever more aware that the Lord Jesus alone can respond fully to your aspirations to happiness and to your quest for

goodness in your life; dear *sick people*, and in particular you who are members of the UNITALSI group from Teano-Calvi, there is no greater comfort for your suffering than the certainty of Christ's Resurrection; and may you, dear *newlyweds*, live your marriage in concrete adherence to Christ and to the teachings of the Gospel.

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