



The Holy See

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HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Touristic airport, Freiburg im Breisgau

Sunday, 25 September 2011

(Video)

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

It is moving for me to celebrate this Eucharist, this Thanksgiving, with so many people from different parts of Germany and the neighbouring countries. We offer our thanks above all to God, in whom we live and move and have our being (cf. *Acts 17:28*). But I would also like to thank all of you for your prayers that the Successor of Peter may continue to carry out his ministry with joy and faithful hope, and that he may strengthen his brothers in faith.

“Father, you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness”, as we said in today’s Collect. In the first reading we heard how God manifested the power of his mercy in the history of Israel. The experience of the Babylonian Exile caused the people to fall into a deep crisis of faith: Why did this calamity happen? Perhaps God was not truly powerful at all?

There are theologians who, in the face of all the terrible things that happen in the world today, say that God cannot possibly be all-powerful. In response to this we profess God, the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth. And we are glad and thankful that God is all-powerful. At the same time, we have to be aware that he exercises his power differently from the way we normally do. He has placed a limit on his power, by recognizing the freedom of his creatures. We are glad and thankful for the gift of freedom. However, when we see the terrible things that happen as a result

of it, we are frightened. Let us put our trust in God, whose power manifests itself above all in mercy and forgiveness. Let us be certain, dear faithful, that God desires the salvation of his people. He desires our salvation, my salvation, the salvation of every single person. He is always close to us, especially in times of danger and radical change, and his heart aches for us, he reaches out to us. We need to open ourselves to him so that the power of his mercy can touch our hearts. We have to be ready freely to abandon evil, to raise ourselves from indifference and make room for his word. God respects our freedom. He does not constrain us. He is waiting for us to say “yes”, he as it were begs us to say “yes”.

In the Gospel Jesus takes up this fundamental theme of prophetic preaching. He recounts the parable of the two sons invited by their father to work in the vineyard. The first son responded: “‘I will not go’, but afterward he repented and went.” The other son said to the father: “‘I go, sir,’ but did not go.” When asked by Jesus which of the two sons did the father’s will, those listening rightly respond: “the first” (*Mt 21:29-31*). The message of the parable is clear: it is not words that matter, but deeds, deeds of conversion and faith. As we heard, Jesus directs this message to the chief priests and elders of the people of Israel, that is, to the religious experts of his people. At first they say “yes” to God’s will, but their piety becomes routine and God no longer matters to them. For this reason they find the message of John the Baptist and the message of Jesus disturbing. The Lord concludes his parable with harsh words: “Truly, the tax collectors and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him, and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him” (*Mt 21:32*). Translated into the language of the present day, this statement might sound something like this: agnostics, who are constantly exercised by the question of God, those who long for a pure heart but suffer on account of their sin, are closer to the Kingdom of God than believers whose life of faith is “routine” and who regard the Church merely as an institution, without letting it touch their hearts, or letting the faith touch their hearts.

These words should make all of us stop and reflect, in fact they should disturb us. However, this is by no means to suggest that everyone who lives in the Church and works for her should be considered far from Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Absolutely not! On the contrary, this is a time to offer a word of profound gratitude to the many co-workers, employees and volunteers, without whom life in the parishes and in the entire Church would be hard to imagine. The Church in Germany has many social and charitable institutions through which the love of neighbour is practised in ways that bring social benefits and reach to the ends of the earth. At this moment I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to all those working in *Caritas* Germany and in other church organizations who give their time and effort generously in voluntary service to the Church. In the first place, such service requires objective and professional expertise. But in the spirit of Jesus’ teaching something more is needed – an open heart that allows itself to be touched by the love of Christ, and thus gives to our neighbour, who needs us, something more than a technical service: it gives love, in which the other person is able to see Christ, the loving God. So let us ask ourselves, in the light of today’s Gospel, how is my personal relationship with God: in

prayer, in participation at Sunday Mass, in exploring my faith through meditation on sacred Scripture and study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church? Dear friends, in the last analysis, the renewal of the Church will only come about through openness to conversion and through renewed faith.

The Gospel for this Sunday, as we saw, speaks of two sons, but behind them, in a mysterious way, is a third son. The first son says “no,” but does the father’s will. The second son says “yes,” but does not do what he was asked. The third son both says “yes” and does what he was asked. This third son is the Only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, who has gathered us all here. Jesus, on entering the world, said: “Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God” (*Heb 10:7*). He not only said “yes”, he acted on that “yes”, and he suffered it, even to death on the Cross. As the Christological hymn in the second reading says: “Though he was in the form of God, [Jesus] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross” (*Phil. 2: 6-8*). In humility and obedience, Jesus fulfilled the will of the Father and by dying on the Cross for his brothers and sisters, for us, he saved us from our pride and obstinacy. Let us thank him for his sacrifice, let us bend our knees before his name and proclaim together with the disciples of the first generation: “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (*Phil 2:11*).

The Christian life must continually measure itself by Christ: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (*Phil 2:5*), as Saint Paul says in the introduction to the Christological hymn. And a few verses before, he exhorts us: “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (*Phil 2:1-2*). Just as Christ was totally united to the Father and obedient to him, so too the disciples must obey God and be of one mind among themselves. Dear friends, with Paul I dare to exhort you: complete my joy by being firmly united in Christ. The Church in Germany will overcome the great challenges of the present and future, and it will remain a leaven in society, if the priests, consecrated men and women, and the lay faithful, in fidelity to their respective vocations, work together in unity, if the parishes, communities, and movements support and enrich each other, if the baptized and confirmed, in union with their bishop, lift high the torch of untarnished faith and allow it to enlighten their abundant knowledge and skills. The Church in Germany will continue to be a blessing for the entire Catholic world: if she remains faithfully united with the Successors of Saint Peter and the Apostles, if she fosters cooperation in various ways with mission countries and allows herself to be “infected” by the joy that marks the faith of these young Churches.

To his exhortation to unity, Paul adds a call to humility, saying: “Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (*Phil 2:3-4*). Christian life is a life for others: existing for others, humble service of neighbour and of the common good. Dear friends, humility is

a virtue that does not enjoy great esteem in the world of today, or indeed of any time. But the Lord's disciples know that this virtue is, so to speak, the oil that makes the process of dialogue fruitful, cooperation possible and unity sincere. The Latin word for humility, *humilitas*, is derived from *humus* and indicates closeness to the earth. Those who are humble stand with their two feet on the ground, but above all they listen to Christ, the Word of God, who ceaselessly renews the Church and each of her members.

Let us ask God for the courage and the humility to walk the path of faith, to draw from the riches of his mercy, and to fix our gaze on Christ, the Word, who makes all things new and is for us "the way, the truth, and the life" (*Jn 14:6*): he is our future. Amen.

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