



The Holy See

WAY OF THE CROSS AT THE COLOSSEUM *ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI*

Good Friday, 21 March 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year we have also walked along the Way of the Cross, the *Via Crucis*, evoking again with faith the stages of Christ's Passion. Our eyes have seen again the sufferings and anguish that our Redeemer had to bear in the hour of great sorrow, which marked the climax of his earthly mission. Jesus dies on the Cross and lies in the tomb. The day of Good Friday, so permeated by human sadness and religious silence, closes in the silence of meditation and prayer. In returning home, we too, like those who were present at the sacrifice of Jesus, "beat our breasts", recalling what happened (cf. Lk 23: 48). Is it possible to remain indifferent before the death of God? For us, for our salvation he became man and died on the Cross.

Brothers and sisters, our gaze is frequently distracted by scattered and passing earthly interests; let us direct our gaze today toward Christ. Let us pause to contemplate his Cross. The Cross is the source of immortal life, the school of justice and peace, the universal patrimony of pardon and mercy. It is permanent proof of an oblation and infinite love that brought God to become man, vulnerable like us, even to dying crucified. His nailed arms are open to each human being and they invite us to draw near to him, certain that he accepts us and clasps us in an embrace of infinite tenderness: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12: 32).

Through the sorrowful Way of the Cross, the men and women of all ages, reconciled and redeemed by Christ's Blood, have become friends of God, sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. "Friend" is what Jesus calls Judas and he offers him the last and dramatic call to conversion. He calls each of us friend because he is the true friend of everyone. Unfortunately, we do not always manage to perceive the depth of this limitless love that God has for his creatures. For him there is no distinction of race or culture. Jesus Christ died to liberate the whole of

humanity from ignorance of God, from the circle of hate and vengeance, from the slavery to sin. The Cross makes us brothers and sisters.

Let us ask ourselves: but what have we done with this gift? What have we done with the revelation of the Face of God in Christ, with the revelation of God's love that conquers hate. Many, in our age as well, do not know God and cannot find him in the crucified Christ. Many are in search of a love or a liberty that excludes God. Many believe they have no need of God. Dear friends: After having lived together Jesus' Passion, let us this evening allow his sacrifice on the Cross to question us. Let us permit him to put our human certainties in crisis. Let us open our hearts to him. Jesus is the truth that makes us free to love. Let us not be afraid: upon dying, the Lord saved sinners, that is, all of us. The Apostle Peter wrote: Jesus "himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (I Pt 2: 24). This is the truth of Good Friday: on the Cross, the Redeemer has restored to us the dignity that belongs to us, has made us adoptive sons and daughters of God whom he has created in his image and likeness. Let us remain, then, in adoration before the Cross. O Christ, crucified King, give us true knowledge of you, the joy for which we yearn, the love that fills our heart, thirsty for the infinite. This is our prayer for this evening, Jesus, Son of God, who died for us on the Cross and was raised up on the third day.

Amen.