



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 4 October 2000

1. Prominent among the many aspects of the Eucharist is that of "memorial", which is related to a biblical theme of primary importance. We read, for example, in the Book of Exodus: "God remembered his covenant with Abraham and Jacob" (*Ex* 2: 24). In Deuteronomy, however, it says: "You shall remember what the Lord your God did ..." (*7*: 18). In the Bible, the remembrance of God and the remembrance of man are interwoven and form a fundamental element in the life of God's People. However, this is not the mere commemoration of a past that is no more, but a *zikkarôn*, that is, a "memorial". It "is not merely the recollection of past events, but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real" ([CCC, n. 1363](#)). The memorial recalls the bond of an unfailing covenant: "The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us" (*Ps* 115: 12).

Biblical faith thus implies the effective recollection of the works of salvation. They are professed in the "Great Hallel", Psalm 136, which - after proclaiming creation and the salvation offered to Israel in the Exodus - concludes: "It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures for ever; and rescued us ...; he who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures for ever" (*Ps* 136: 23-25). We find similar words in the Gospel on the lips of Mary and Zechariah: "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy ... to remember his holy covenant" (*Lk* 1: 54, 72).

2. In the Old Testament, the "memorial" *par excellence* of God's works in history was the Passover liturgy of the Exodus: every time the people of Israel celebrated the *Passover*, God effectively offered them the gifts of freedom and salvation. In the Passover rite, therefore, the two remembrances converge: the divine and the human, that is, saving grace and grateful faith. "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord.... It shall be to

you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt" (*Ex* 12: 14; 13: 9). By virtue of this event, as a Jewish philosopher said, Israel will always be "a community based on remembrance" (M. Buber).

3. The interweaving of God's remembrance with that of man is also at the centre of the *Eucharist*, which is the "memorial" *par excellence* of the Christian Passover. For "anamnesis", i.e., the act of remembrance, is the heart of the celebration: Christ's sacrifice, a unique event done *ephapax*, that is, "once for all" (*Heb* 7: 27; 9: 12, 26; 10: 12), extends its saving presence in the time and space of human history. This is expressed in the last command, which Luke and Paul record in the account of the Last Supper: "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.... This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 *Cor* 11: 24-25; cf. *Lk* 22: 19). The past of the "body given for us" on the Cross is presented alive today and, as Paul declares, opens onto the future of the final redemption: "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 *Cor* 11: 26). The Eucharist is thus the memorial of Christ's death, but it is also the presence of his sacrifice and the anticipation of his glorious coming. It is the sacrament of the risen Lord's continual saving closeness in history.

Thus we can understand Paul's exhortation to Timothy: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David" (2 *Tm* 2: 8). In the Eucharist this remembrance is alive and at work in a special way.

4. The Evangelist John explains to us the deep meaning of the "memorial" of Christ's words and events. When Jesus cleanses the temple of the merchants and announces that it will be destroyed and rebuilt in three days, John remarks: "When he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken" (*Jn* 2: 22). This memorial which produces and nourishes faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, "whom the Father will send in the name" of Christ: "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (*Jn* 14: 26). Thus there is an effective remembrance: one that is interior and leads to an understanding of the Word of God, and a sacramental one, which takes place in the Eucharist. These are the two realities of salvation which Luke combined in his splendid account of the disciples of Emmaus, structured around the explanation of the Scriptures and the "breaking of the bread" (cf. *Lk* 24: 13-55).

5. "To remember" is therefore "to bring back to the heart" in memory and affection, but it is also to celebrate a presence. "Only the Eucharist, the true memorial of Christ's paschal mystery, is capable of keeping alive in us the memory of his love. It is, therefore, the secret of the vigilance of the Church: it would be too easy for her, otherwise, without the divine efficacy of this continual and very sweet incentive, without the penetrating power of this look of her Bridegroom fixed on her, to fall into forgetfulness, insensitivity and unfaithfulness" (Apostolic Letter *Patres Ecclesiae*,

III: *Ench. Vat.*, 7, 33). This call to vigilance opens our Eucharistic liturgies to the full coming of the Lord, to the appearance of the heavenly Jerusalem. In the Eucharist Christians nurture the hope of the definitive encounter with their Lord.

The Holy Father appealed for peace in West Africa and for the release of two kidnapped missionaries. He also expressed his sorrow for two other missionaries killed in Uganda and Burundi:

For several weeks there has been disturbing news of deadly attacks on the local population in Guinea and on the refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone. In God's name I ask that an end be put to this violence and that the rights of all be respected, especially those of refugees, who are already living in precarious conditions.

I also make a heartfelt appeal for the release of the two Xaverian priests, Fr Franco Manganello and Fr Victor Mosele, who were kidnapped from the Pamalap Mission in the Forecariah region on 6 September last.

Lastly, I express my sorrow and my prayer for two Gospel workers who have been brutally killed in recent days: Fr Raffaele Di Bari, a Comboni Missionary in Uganda, and Mr Antonio Bargiggia, a lay missionary of the Brothers of the Poor in Burundi. May the Lord welcome into his peace these faithful servants, who died while fulfilling the "greatest commandment", that of love.

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I warmly welcome the new students of the Pontifical Beda College, and the seminarians of the Pontifical North American College who will be ordained to the Diaconate tomorrow. I extend a special greeting to the National Jubilee pilgrimage from Scotland, led by Bishops Taylor, Devine and Logan; and to the Diocesan pilgrimages from Hamilton in Bermuda, led by Bishop Kurtz; Seattle, led by Archbishop Brunett; San Francisco, led by Archbishop Levada; Saint Thomas, led by Bishop Murry; Scranton, led by Bishop Dougherty; and Brownsville, led by Bishop Peña. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, Scotland, Japan, Bermuda and the United States of America, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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