



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday, 23 April 2003

1. During these days of the *Octave of Easter*, there is great rejoicing throughout the Church for the resurrection of Christ. After suffering his passion and death on the Cross, he now lives for ever and death has no more power over him.

From the community of the faithful, in every part of the world a canticle of praise and thanksgiving is raised to heaven, to the One who set man free; to the incarnate Word who brought about redemption from the slavery of evil and sin. This is expressed in *Psalm 135*, just proclaimed, which is a splendid hymn to the Lord's goodness. The merciful love of God is fully and definitively revealed in the Paschal Mystery.

2. After his Resurrection, the Lord appears several times to his disciples and meets them on various occasions. The Evangelists mention different episodes which communicate the wonder and joy of those who witnessed these miraculous events. John, in particular, highlights the first words that the risen Teacher addresses to his disciples.

"*Peace be with you*", he says on entering the Upper Room, and he repeats this greeting at least three times (cf. Jn 20: 19, 21, 26). We can say that these words, "*peace be with you*", in Hebrew "*shalom*", in a certain way, contain and sum up the entire Easter message. Peace is the gift that the Risen Lord offers to humanity, and it is the fruit of the new life inaugurated by his resurrection.

Peace, therefore, is identified as a "novelty" inserted into the history of the Passover of Christ. It is born from a deep renewal of the human heart. Therefore, it is not the result of human efforts nor can it be achieved only through *agreements between persons and institutions*. Rather, it is *a gift to be accepted with generosity, to be preserved with care, and to be made fruitful with maturity and responsibility*. However troubled the situation may be, however strong the tension and conflict, nothing can resist the effective renewal brought by the risen Christ. He is *our peace*. As we read in

St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, with his Cross he destroyed hostility, "*that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace*" (2: 15).

3. The Octave of Easter, pervaded with light and joy, will end next Sunday with the Second Sunday of Easter, also called *Divine Mercy Sunday*. Easter is the perfect manifestation of this mercy of God, who "*will have compassion on his servants*" (Ps 135[134]: 14).

With his death on the Cross, Christ reconciled us with God and laid the foundations in the world of a fraternal coexistence among all people. In Christ, the frail human being who yearns for happiness was redeemed from the slavery of the Evil One and from death, which brings sorrow and suffering.

The Redeemer's blood has washed away our sins. Thus, we have experienced the renewing power of his forgiveness. Divine mercy opens the heart to pardon our brothers and sisters, and it is with forgiveness offered and received that peace is built in families and in every other milieu of life.

I gladly renew my most cordial Easter wishes to you all as I entrust you, along with your families and your communities, to the heavenly protection of Mary, *Mother of Mercy and Queen of Peace*.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors

I am pleased to greet the newly ordained deacons from the Pontifical Irish College and from the Pontifical Scots College. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims present today, especially those from Australia, England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the United States of America, I cordially invoke the joy and peace of the risen Saviour. Happy Easter!

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

My thoughts now turn to the young people, the sick and the newly-weds.

Dear *young people* - and especially you who have come in such large numbers from the various parishes of the Archdiocese of Milan and this year are making your "Profession of Faith" - renew your faith in the risen Saviour, to be his enthusiastic witnesses in the Church and in society, so that with your fidelity to the Gospel you may contribute to building the civilization of love.

Dear *sick people*, may the light of the Resurrection, which is a comfort and support to believers, brighten your daily life and make it fruitful for the benefit of all humanity.

Dear *newly-weds*, may you draw spiritual strength every day from the Paschal Mystery in order to nourish your family with sincere and inexhaustible love.

I am pleased to greet the newly ordained deacons from the Pontifical Irish College and from the Pontifical Scots College. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims present today, especially those from Australia, England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the United States of America, I cordially invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Saviour. Happy Easter!