



The Holy See

HOLY MASS ON THE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH
OF THE SERVANT OF GOD JOHN PAUL II

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Peter's Basilica

Thursday, 2 April 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Four years ago today my beloved Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, ended his earthly pilgrimage after a period of great suffering that lasted for some time. We are celebrating the Blessed Eucharist in suffrage for his soul, while we thank the Lord for having given him to the Church, for so many years, as a zealous and generous Pastor.

We are united this evening by his memory that lives on in the hearts of the people, as is demonstrated by the uninterrupted pilgrimage of the faithful to his tomb in the Vatican Grottos. I therefore preside at this Holy Mass with emotion and joy, while I greet and thank you for your presence, venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, and you, dear faithful who have come from various parts of the world, especially from Poland, for this important celebration.

I would like to greet the Poles and in particular the young Poles. On the fourth anniversary of the death of John Paul II, hear his appeal: "Have no fear of entrusting yourselves to [Christ]! He will guide you, he will grant you the strength to follow him every day and in every situation" (Prayer Vigil at Tor Vergata, 19 August 2000). I hope that this thought of the Servant of God will guide you on the paths of your life, and will lead you to the happiness of the morning of the Resurrection.

I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Cardinal Archbishop of Krakow dear Cardinal Stanisław, the other Cardinals and Prelates; I greet the priests, and the men and women religious. I greet you in a special way, young people of Rome, who with this celebration are preparing yourselves for the World Youth Day that we will experience together next Sunday, Palm Sunday. Your presence

reminds me of the enthusiasm that John Paul II knew how to instil in the new generations. His memory is an incentive to all of us gathered in this Basilica, in which he celebrated the Eucharist on many occasions, to let ourselves be illuminated and called into question by the word of God that has just been proclaimed.

The Gospel on this Thursday in the fifth week of [Lent](#) proposes for our meditation the last part of chapter eight of John, which contains as we heard a long discussion on the identity of Jesus. A little earlier he had presented himself as "the light of the world" (v. 12), using at least three times (vv. 24, 28, 58) the expression "I AM", that forcefully recalls God's name as it was revealed to Moses (cf. Ex 3: 14). And he added: "If any one keeps my word, he will never see death" (Jn 8: 51), thus declaring that he had been sent by God, who is his Father, to bring men and women the radical freedom from sin and death that is indispensable for entering eternal life. However, his words wounded the pride of those with whom he was conversing and even the reference to the great Patriarch Abraham became a source of conflict. "Truly, truly, I say to you", the Lord said, "before Abraham was, I Am" (Jn 8: 58). Without mincing his words, he declared his pre-existence, hence his superiority as regards Abraham, provoking understandably a shocked reaction in the Jews. But Jesus cannot be silent about his identity; he knows that in the end the Father himself will account for him, glorifying him through his death and Resurrection because, precisely when he is raised on the Cross, he will be revealed as the Only-Begotten Son of God (cf. Jn 8: 28; Mk 15: 39).

Dear Friends, in meditating on this Gospel passage of John it comes naturally to me to consider how difficult it actually is to bear witness to Christ. And my thoughts turn to the beloved Servant of God Karol Wojtyła, John Paul II, who from his youth showed himself to be a daring and ardent champion of Christ: He did not hesitate to expend all his energy in order to spread Christ's light everywhere, he never stooped to compromises when it was a matter of proclaiming and defending his Truth; he never tired of radiating his love. [From the beginning of his Pontificate until 2 April 2005](#), John Paul II was never afraid to proclaim, to everyone and always, that Jesus alone is the Saviour and true Liberator of humankind and of the whole human being.

In the First Reading we heard the words addressed to Abraham: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful" (Gn 17: 6). If witnessing to one's adherence to the Gospel is never easy, the certainty that God makes our commitment fruitful when it is sincere and generous is certainly comforting. From this important viewpoint too the spiritual experience of the Servant of God John Paul II is apparent to us. In looking at his life, we see God's promise of fruitfulness to Abraham, as it were, realized and echoed in the First Reading from the Book of Genesis. One might say that especially in the years of his long Pontificate, he brought forth to faith many sons and daughters. You are the visible sign of it, dear young people here this evening: you, the young people of Rome and you, young people who have come from Sydney and from Madrid, to represent in spirit the throngs of young men and women who took part in the [23rd World Youth Day](#) in various parts of the world. How many vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life, how many young families

determined to live the Gospel ideal and to strive for holiness are bound to the witness and preaching of my venerable Predecessor! How many teenagers converted or persevered on their Christian journey thanks to his prayers, his encouragement, his support and his example!

It is true! John Paul II succeeded in communicating a strong charge of hope founded on faith in Jesus Christ, who "is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13: 8), as the motto for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 declared. As an affectionate father and an attentive educator, he pointed out firm and reliable reference points, indispensable to all and especially to the young. And in the hour of his agony and his death, this new generation wished to show him that it had understood his teaching, gathering silently in prayer in St Peter's Square and in so many other places in the world. The young people felt his death would be a loss: it was "their" Pope, whom they saw as "their father" in the faith who had died. At the same time they were aware that as a legacy he had bequeathed to them his courage and the consistency of his witness. Had he not stressed many a time the need for radical adherence to the Gospel, urging adults and young people to take this common educational responsibility seriously? I too, as you know, have wished to take up his concern, pausing on various occasions to speak of the educational emergency that today concerns families, the Church, society and especially the new generations. While they are growing up, the young need adults who can suggest principles and values to them. They feel in need of people who can teach by their example, more than by their words, to expend themselves for high ideals.

But where can one find the light and wisdom to bring to completion this mission that involves us all together, in the Church and in society? It is certainly not enough to appeal to human resources; first of all it is also necessary to trust in divine help. "The Lord is faithful for ever": as we have just prayed in the Responsorial Psalm, sure that God never abandons those who stay faithful to him. This is recalled by the theme for the [24th World Youth Day](#) that will be celebrated at the diocesan level next Sunday. It is taken from St Paul's First Letter to Timothy: "We have set our hope on the living God" (4: 10). The Apostle speaks on behalf of the Christian community, on behalf of all who have believed in Christ and are different from "others... who have no hope" (1 Thes 4: 13). Indeed, it is precisely because they hope, that is, they have trust in the future, a trust that is not based on human ideas or predictions but on God, the "living God".

Dear young people, it is impossible to live without hope. Experience shows that all things, even our life, are at risk; they can collapse for some internal or external reason at any moment. It is normal: all that is human, hence therefore also hope, has no basis in itself but needs a "rock" to which to be anchored. This is why Paul writes that Christians are called to base human hope on the "Living God".

In him alone does it become safe and dependable. Actually, only God, who revealed the fullness of his love to us in Jesus Christ can be our firm hope. Indeed, in him, our hope, we have been saved (cf. Rm 8: 24).

However, be careful: in times like these, given the cultural and social context in which we are living, there may be a greater risk of reducing Christian hope to an ideology, to a group slogan or to outward appearances. Nothing is more contrary to Jesus' message! He does not want his disciples to "recite" a part, even that of hope. He wants them "to be" hope and they can only be hope if they remain united to him! He wishes each one of you, dear young friends, to be a small source of hope for your neighbour and, all together, to become an oasis of hope for the society in which you are integrated. Now this is possible on one condition: that you live *of* him and *in* him, through prayer and the sacraments, as [I wrote in my Message this year](#).

If Christ's words remain in us we can spread the flame of love that he kindled on earth; we can bear aloft the torch of faith and hope with which we advance towards him while we await his glorious return at the end of time. It is the torch that Pope John Paul handed on to us. He presented it to me, as his Successor; and this evening I shall present it once again, in spirit, in a special way to you, young people of Rome, so that you may continue to be dawn watchmen, alert and joyful in this dawn of the third millennium. Respond generously to Christ's call! In particular, during the Year for Priests which will begin next 19 June, make yourselves promptly available if Jesus calls you, to follow him on the path of the priesthood or the consecrated life.

"Now is the favourable time. This is the day of salvation!". At the Gospel Acclamation the liturgy urged us to renew now and every moment is a "favourable moment" our decisive will to follow Christ, certain that he is our salvation. This is basically the message that John Paul II repeats to us this evening. While we entrust his elect soul to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary whom he always loved tenderly, let us fervently hope that he will never cease to guide us and to intercede for us from Heaven. May he help each one of us to live, as he did, repeating day after day to God, through Mary with full trust: *Totus tuus*.

Amen.

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