



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 27 March 2002

1. The *Easter Triduum* which will make us relive the central event of our salvation begins tomorrow. These will be days of more intense prayer and meditation in which, with the help of the moving rites of Holy Week, we will reflect on the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.

The meaning and fulfilment of human history lies in the Paschal Mystery. "Therefore", the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasizes, "Easter is not simply one feast among others, but the 'Feast of Feasts', the 'Solemnity of Solemnities', just as the Eucharist is the 'Sacrament of Sacraments' (the great Sacrament). St Athanasius calls Easter 'the Great Sunday' (Easter Letter 329) and the Eastern Churches call Holy Week 'the Great Week'. The mystery of the Resurrection, in which Christ crushed death, permeates with its powerful energy our old time until all is subjected to him" (n. 1169).

2. Tomorrow, *Holy Thursday*, we will contemplate Christ who in the Upper Room, on the eve of his Passion, made a gift of himself to the Church, instituted the ministerial priesthood and left to his disciples the new commandment, the commandment of love. Thus he wished to remain with us in the sacrament of the Eucharist, making himself the food of our salvation. After the moving Mass of the *Lord's Supper*, we will keep a vigil of adoration with the Lord, obeying the desire that he expressed to the Apostles in the Garden of Olives: "*Remain here and keep watch with me*" (Mt 26,38).

On *Good Friday*, we will revisit the tragic chain of events of the Passion of our Redeemer leading to his crucifixion on Golgotha. The Adoration of the Cross will enable us to understand more acutely the infinite mercy of God. By willingly experiencing that immense sorrow, the Only-Begotten Son of God became the definitive proclamation of salvation for humanity. The way of the

Cross is difficult indeed! Yet it is only there that we receive the mystery of the Death that gives life. Then the prayerful, silent atmosphere of *Holy Saturday* will offer us the opportunity to await the glorious event of the Resurrection, in prayer with Mary, already beginning to savour its deep joy.

During the *Easter Vigil*, singing the "Gloria" the splendour of our destiny will be revealed: to forge a new humanity, redeemed by Christ who died and rose for us.

When on *Easter Day*, in the Churches in every corner of the earth rings out the "*Dux vitae mortuus regnat vivus*", "the Lord of life was dead, now alive he triumphs" (*Sequence*), we will be able to understand and love the Cross of Christ forever; on it Christ overcame sin and death forever!

3. In the Easter *Triduum*, we will fix our gaze more intensely on the *face of Christ*, a face of suffering and agony, that helps us understand better the drama of the events and situations that are afflicting humanity even in these days. His is a Face radiant with light that gives renewed hope to our lives.

In my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* I wrote: "Two thousand years after these events, the Church relives them as if they had happened today. Gazing on the face of Christ, the Bride contemplates her treasure and her joy. "*Dulcis Iesu memoria, dans vera cordis gaudia*": how sweet is the memory of Jesus, the source of the heart's true joy!" (n. 28).

At Gethsemane we will especially be one with those who stagger beneath the burden of anxiety and loneliness. In meditating on the trial to which Jesus was subjected, we will remember all who are persecuted for their faith and for the sake of justice.

As we go with Christ on the sorrowful way to Golgotha, we will also raise our confident prayer for those who are burdened in body and soul by the weight of evil and sin.

At the supreme hour of the sacrifice of the Son of God, let us confidently lay at the foot of the Cross the longing that dwells in every heart: the desire for peace!

The *Blessed Virgin Mary*, who faithfully followed her Son all the way to the cross, will lead us after we have contemplated together with her the *suffering face* of Christ, to enjoy the light and joy that radiate from the splendour of the face of the *Risen Christ*.

This is my hope: may it be a really holy Triduum, full of the joys and consolations of Easter!

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors here today, especially those from England, Norway and the United States of America. May these holy days be a time of peace for you and your families. May it be a time of peace for the whole world! Happy Easter to you all!