



The Holy See

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AND "L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO"

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Chapel of the Governorate

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Beloved Brothers and Friends in the Lord!

As in past years, you, the personnel of the Vatican Polyglot Printing House and of L'Osservatore Romano, have prepared with some days of "Spiritual Exercises" to carry out the "Easter Precept". And this morning you are gathered here to meet, as a community and personally, Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, him who is our "Pasch".

And I very willingly accepted the invitation to be with you to take part in this mystical and solemn rite, and to make relations between the Vicar of Christ and the Personnel of the various Vatican organisms more and more cordial and personal.

You are here to celebrate "Easter" according to the authoritative and motherly command of the Church. Wishing to leave you a memory that will serve as reflection and exhortation to serious and constant resolutions, I take the theme from the readings of today's Liturgy.

1. In chapter seven of the Fourth Gospel, the Evangelist John carefully notes the perplexity of many persons in Jerusalem concerning the real identity of Jesus. It was the feast of Tabernacles, in memory of the Hebrews' stay in the desert; there was a great movement of people in the Holy City, and Jesus was teaching in the temple. Some people said: "Is not this the man whom they [the religious authorities] seek to kill? Here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him. Can it be that the authorities really know, that this is the Christ? Yet we know where this man

comes from; and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from."

These statements indicate the perplexity of the Jews of that time: they are waiting for the Messiah; they know that there will be something secret and mysterious about the Messiah; they think that Jesus might even be he, in view of the miracles he works and the doctrine he teaches; but they are not sure, owing to the fact that the official religious authorities are against him and would even like to eliminate him.

And Jesus then explains the reason for their perplexity and their unawareness of his real identity: they judge only by external, civic, and family features, and do not go beyond his human nature; they do not penetrate the wrappings of his appearance. "You know me, and you know where I come from? But I have not come of my own accord; he who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me."

It is a historical event, narrated by the Gospel, but it is also the symbol of a perennial reality: many people do not know or do not want to know who Jesus Christ is, and they remain perplexed and disconcerted. In fact, just as they then tried to arrest him, after his speech then in the Temple, so some people sometimes challenge him and fight against him. You, on the other hand, know who Jesus is; you know where he came from and why he came! You knew that Jesus is the Word Incarnate, Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, who assumed a human body; he is the Son of God become man, who died on the cross for our salvation, rose again glorious, and is always present with us in the Eucharist.

What Jesus said to the Apostles at the Last Supper, also holds good for all Christians enlightened by the Magisterium of the Church: "This is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent... I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world... Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is from thee; for I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me... O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17:3-9, 25).

The great tragedy of history is that Jesus is not known, and therefore is not loved, not followed.

You know Christ! You know who he is! Yours is a great privilege! Always be worthy and aware of it!

Hence springs your "paschal" joy and your Christian responsibility. May the "paschal" meeting with Jesus in the Eucharist give you the strength to deepen this knowledge of Jesus, to make your faith a firm point of reference in spite of the indifference or hostility of a large part of the world in which we must live.

2. The book of Wisdom (Chapter Two), analysing the characteristics of the righteous man and of the wicked man, sketches in a practical way what the testimony of the responsible and consistent Christian must be. The righteous man—the book of Wisdom says—professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord; he boasts that God is his father.

To have knowledge of God! To have God as Father! These are tremendous statements, which put philosophers in a crisis! Well, the Christian knows and bears witness that he knows God as Father, as Love, as Providence.

God is the Lord of life and of history, and in his fatherly love the Christian abandons himself trustfully.

The life of the righteous man is different from that of others, and his ways are quite different, and so he ends up by being a reproof and condemnation for those who do not live righteously, blinded by wickedness, and do not want to know "God's secrets".

The Christian, in fact, is in the world, but not of the world (cf. Jn 17:16); his life must necessarily be different from the life of those who do not have faith. His behaviour, his lifestyle, his way of thinking, making choices, evaluating things and situations are different, because they take place in the light of the word of Christ, which is a message of eternal life.

Finally—still according to Wisdom—the righteous die in bliss, while the wicked do not "hope for the wages of holiness nor discern the prize for blameless souls" (Wis 2:22).

The Christian must live in the perspective of eternity. Sometimes his truly Christian life may give rise even to persecution, open or underhand: "Let us see if his words are true: let us test him with insult and torture, that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance." The certainty of the eternal happiness that awaits us makes the Christian strong against temptations and patient in tribulations. "If they persecuted me," the Divine Master said, "they will persecute you" (Jn 15:20).

My wish for you is that the paschal meeting with Jesus may bring you the joy and strength of witness, convinced that after the terrible grief of Good Friday there gushes forth the glorious joy of the Sunday of Resurrection!

3. Finally, the liturgy makes us meditate further on human weakness and frailty, and on the need of trusting completely in God's mercy: "The Lord is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit... none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned" (Ps 34).

Always, but especially in modern society, so feverish and violent, does the Christian feel the need of having recourse to the Lord with prayer and by means of the sacraments.

So continue, you too, to draw light and strength from the Sacraments of Penance and of the Eucharist, in which God "has placed the remedy for our weakness". Accept with joy the fruits of the Redemption, and manifest them in your daily life, at home, at work, in leisure, in the various activities, convinced that he who receives Christ must be transformed into him: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me" (Jn 6:56-57).

A great honour! A sublime commitment!

With these wishes, asking for the special assistance of the Blessed Virgin, I sincerely trust that the lives of you all and of your dear ones will always enjoy, and cause others to enjoy, the happiness of Christian Easter.

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