



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 1st August 2007*

Saint Basil (2)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

After this three-week break, we are continuing with our Wednesday meetings. Today, I would simply like to resume my last Catechesis, whose subject was the life and writings of St Basil, a Bishop in present-day Turkey, in Asia Minor, in the fourth century A.D. The life and works of this great Saint are full of ideas for reflection and teachings that are also relevant for us today.

First of all is the reference to *God's mystery*, which is still the most meaningful and vital reference for human beings. The Father is "the principal of all things and the cause of being of all that exists, the root of the living" (*Hom. 15, 2 de fide: PG 31, 465c*); above all, he is "the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Anaphora Sancti Basili*). Ascending to God through his creatures, we "become aware of his goodness and wisdom" (*Basil, Adversus Eunomium 1, 14: PG 29, 544b*).

The Son is the "image of the Father's goodness and seal in the same form" (cf. *Anaphora Sancti Basili*). With his obedience and his Passion, the Incarnate Word carried out his mission as Redeemer of man (cf. *Basil, In Psalmum 48, 8; PG 29, 452ab*; cf. also *De Baptismo 1, 2: SC 357, 158*).

Lastly, he spoke fully of the Holy Spirit, to whom he dedicated a whole book. He reveals to us that the Spirit enlivens the Church, fills her with his gifts and sanctifies her.

The resplendent light of the divine mystery is reflected in man, the image of God, and exalts his dignity. Looking at Christ, one fully understands human dignity.

Basil exclaims: "[Man], be mindful of your greatness, remembering the price paid for you: look at the price of your redemption and comprehend your dignity!" (*In Psalmum* 48, 8: *PG* 29, 452b). Christians in particular, conforming their lives to the Gospel, recognize that all people are brothers and sisters; that life is a stewardship of the goods received from God, which is why each one is responsible for the other, and whoever is rich must be as it were an "executor of the orders of God the Benefactor" (*Hom 6 de avaritia*: *PG* 32, 1181-1196). We must all help one another and cooperate as members of one body (*Ep* 203, 3).

And on this point, he used courageous, strong words in his homilies. Indeed, anyone who desires to love his neighbour as himself, in accordance with God's commandment, "must possess no more than his neighbour" (*Hom. in divites*: *PG* 31, 281b).

In times of famine and disaster, the holy Bishop exhorted the faithful with passionate words "not to be more cruel than beasts... by taking over what people possess in common or by grabbing what belongs to all" (*Hom. tempore famis*: *PG* 31, 325a).

Basil's profound thought stands out in this evocative sentence: "All the destitute look to our hands just as we look to those of God when we are in need".

Therefore, Gregory of Nazianzus' praise after Basil's death was well-deserved. He said: "Basil convinces us that since we are human beings, we must neither despise men nor offend Christ, the common Head of all, with our inhuman behaviour towards people; rather, we ourselves must benefit by learning from the misfortunes of others and must lend God our compassion, for we are in need of mercy" (Gregory Nazianzus, *Orationes* 43, 63; *PG* 36, 580b).

These words are very timely. We see that St Basil is truly one of the Fathers of the Church's social doctrine.

Furthermore, Basil reminds us that to keep alive our love for God and for men, *we need the Eucharist*, the appropriate food for the baptized, which can nourish the new energies that derive from Baptism (cf. *De Baptismo* 1, 3: [SC](#) 357, 192).

It is a cause of immense joy to be able to take part in the Eucharist (cf. *Moralia* 21, 3: *PG* 31, 741a), instituted "to preserve unceasingly the memory of the One who died and rose for us" (*Moralia* 80, 22: *PG* 31, 869b).

The Eucharist, an immense gift of God, preserves in each one of us the memory of the baptismal seal and makes it possible to live the grace of Baptism to the full and in fidelity.

For this reason, the holy Bishop recommended frequent, even daily, Communion: "Communicating even daily, receiving the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, is good and useful; for he said clearly: 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life' (Jn 6: 54). So who would doubt that communicating continuously with life were not living in fullness?" (*Ep. 93: PG 32, 484b*).

The Eucharist, in a word, is necessary for us if we are to welcome within us true life, eternal life (cf. *Moralia 21, 1: PG 31, 737c*).

Finally, Basil was of course also concerned with that chosen portion of the People of God, *the youth*, society's future. He addressed a *Discourse* to them on how to benefit from the pagan culture of that time.

He recognized with great balance and openness that examples of virtue can be found in classical Greek and Latin literature. Such examples of upright living can be helpful to young Christians in search of the truth and the correct way of living (cf. *Ad Adolescentes 3*).

Therefore, one must take from the texts by classical authors what is suitable and conforms with the truth: thus, with a critical and open approach - it is a question of true and proper "discernment"- young people grow in freedom.

With the famous image of bees that gather from flowers only what they need to make honey, Basil recommends: "Just as bees can take nectar from flowers, unlike other animals which limit themselves to enjoying their scent and colour, so also from these writings... one can draw some benefit for the spirit. We must use these books, following in all things the example of bees. They do not visit every flower without distinction, nor seek to remove all the nectar from the flowers on which they alight, but only draw from them what they need to make honey, and leave the rest. And if we are wise, we will take from those writings what is appropriate for us, and conforms to the truth, ignoring the rest" (*Ad Adolescentes 4*).

Basil recommended above all that young people grow in virtue, in the right way of living: "While the other goods... pass from one to the other as in playing dice, virtue alone is an inalienable good and endures throughout life and after death" (*Ad Adolescentes 5*).

Dear brothers and sisters, I think one can say that this Father from long ago also speaks to us and tells us important things.

In the first place, attentive, critical and creative participation in today's culture.

Then, social responsibility: this is an age in which, in a globalized world, even people who are physically distant are really our neighbours; therefore, friendship with Christ, the God with the human face.

And, lastly, knowledge and recognition of God the Creator, the Father of us all: only if we are open to this God, the common Father, can we build a more just and fraternal world.

To special groups

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience, including groups from Iceland, Japan, Canada and the United States of America. I extend a special welcome to the musicians present and to the large group from Cherry Hill, Colorado. May the peace and joy of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and may God bless you all!

I greet the group of European Scouts, who with their presence this morning desire to reaffirm their membership in the Church, after renewing their scout promise which binds them to doing their duty to God and serving others generously. My thoughts also turn to all the scouts and guides in the world who are renewing their promise this very day, the centenary of the Scout movement, founded on 1 August 1907 with the first scout camp in history on Brownsea Island. I warmly hope that this educational movement, which was born from the profound insight of Lord Robert Baden Powell, will continue to bear fruit in the spiritual and civil formation of human beings in all countries in the world.

Lastly, as usual I would like to greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*, and to express to them the wish that enlivened by Christ's charity they will lead a life that sets an example for all. May Jesus sustain you in your hope, dear *young people*, in your suffering, dear *sick people*, and in your fruitful love, dear *newly-weds*.

I impart my Blessing to you all.

After greeting the faithful, the Holy Father said:

At the end of the General Audience, I would like to record some good news about Iraq which has sparked an explosion of popular joy throughout the Country. I am referring to the victory of the Iraqi football team, which won the Asian Cup and for the first time has become the football champion of Asia. I was happily impressed by the enthusiasm that infected all the inhabitants, driving them out onto the streets to celebrate the event. Just as I have so often wept with the Iraqis, on this occasion I rejoice with them. This experience of joyful sharing shows a people's desire to have a normal, quiet life. I hope that the event may help in building in Iraq a future of authentic peace with the contribution of all, in freedom and reciprocal respect. Congratulations!

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