



The Holy See

ORDINARY PUBLIC CONSISTORY
FOR THE CREATION OF NEW CARDINALS

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION WITH THE NEW CARDINALS
AND PRESENTATION OF THE CARDINAL'S RING

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Peter's Basilica
Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe
Sunday, 25 November 2007

Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe, the crown of the liturgical year, is enriched by the acceptance into the College of Cardinals of 23 new members whom, according to tradition, I have invited to concelebrate the Eucharist with me today. I address to each one of them my cordial greeting, which I extend with fraternal affection to all the Cardinals present. I am also pleased to greet the delegations from various countries and the Diplomatic Corps of the Holy See; the numerous Bishops and priests, the men and women Religious and all the faithful, especially those from Dioceses entrusted to the pastoral guidance of some of the new Cardinals.

The liturgical Feast of Christ the King gives our celebration an especially significant background, outlined and illuminated by the Biblical Readings. We find ourselves as it were facing an imposing fresco with three great scenes: at the centre, the Crucifixion according to the Evangelist Luke's account; on one side, the royal anointing of David by the elders of Israel; on the other, the Christological hymn with which St Paul introduces the Letter to the Colossians. The whole scene is

dominated by the figure of Christ, the one Lord before whom we are all brothers and sisters. The Church's entire hierarchy, every charism and ministry, everything and everyone are at the service of his Lordship.

We must begin from the central event: the Cross. Here Christ manifests his unique Kingship. On Calvary two opposite attitudes confront each other. Some figures at the foot of the Cross as well as one of the two thieves address the Crucified One contemptuously: If you are the Christ, the Messiah King, they say, save yourself by coming down from the cross. Jesus reveals instead his own glory by remaining there on the Cross as the immolated Lamb. The other thief unexpectedly sides with him, and he implicitly confesses the royalty of the innocent, just One and implores: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingly power" (Lk 23: 42). St Cyril of Alexandria comments: "You see him crucified and you call him King. You believe that he who bears scoffing and suffering will reach divine glory" (*Comment on Luke*, Homily 153). According to the Evangelist John, the divine glory is already present, although hidden by the disfiguration of the Cross. But also in the language of Luke, the future is anticipated in the present when Jesus promises the good thief: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23: 43). St Ambrose observes: "He prayed that the Lord would remember him when he reached his Kingdom, but the Lord responded: Truly, I say to you, *today* you will be with me in Paradise. Life is being with Christ, because where Christ is, there is his Kingdom" (*Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke*, 10, 121). The accusation: "This is the King of the Jews", written on a tablet nailed above Jesus' head thus becomes the proclamation of the truth. St Ambrose further notes: "The writing is correctly placed above the Cross, because even though the Lord Jesus was on the Cross, yet his royal majesty shone from the height of the Cross" (*ibid.*, 10, 113).

The Crucifixion scene in the four Gospels constitutes the moment of truth when the "veil of the Temple" is torn and the Holy of Holies appears. The maximum revelation of God possible in this world occurs in Jesus Crucified, because God is love and the death of Jesus on the Cross is the greatest act of love in all of history. Well then, on the Cardinal's ring that I will consign in a few moments to the new members of the Sacred College is portrayed precisely the Crucifixion. This, dear new Cardinal-Brothers, will always be an invitation for you to remember of what King you are servants, on what throne he has been raised and how he has been faithful to the end in overcoming sin and death with the power of divine mercy. Mother Church, Spouse of Christ, gives you this symbol in memory of her Spouse, who loved her and gave himself up for her (cf. Eph 5: 25). Thus, wearing the Cardinal's ring, you are constantly called to give your life for the Church.

If we now cast a glance at the scene of the royal anointing of David presented in the First Reading, an important aspect on royalty strikes us, namely, its "corporative" dimension. The elders of Israel go to Hebron, they seal a covenantal pact with David, declaring to consider themselves united to him and wanting to be one only with him. If we relate Christ to this image, it seems to me that this same covenantal profession applies very well precisely to you, dear Cardinal-Brothers. You too who form the "senate" of the Church can say to Jesus: "Behold, we are your bone and flesh" (II

Sam 5: 1). We belong to you, and we want to be one only with you. You are the Shepherd of the People of God, you are the Head of the Church (cf. II Sam 5: 2). In this solemn Eucharistic celebration we want to renew our pact with you, our friendship, because only in this intimate and profound relationship with you, Jesus, our King and Lord, does the dignity that has been conferred upon us and the responsibility it bears have sense and value.

There now remains for us to admire the third part of our "triptych" that the Word of God places before us: the Christological hymn of the Letter to the Colossians. First of all, we make the sentiments of joy and gratitude that pour forth from it our own, for the fact that the Kingdom of Christ, the "inheritance of the saints in light", is not only something seen from a distance but a reality in which we are called to partake, into which we have been "transferred", thanks to the redemptive action of the Son of God (cf. Col 1: 12-14). This graced action opens St Paul's soul to the contemplation of Christ and his ministry in its two principal dimensions: the creation of all things and their reconciliation. The first aspect of Christ's Lordship consists in the fact that "all things were created through him and for him... in him all things hold together" (Col 1: 16-17). The second dimension centres on the Paschal Mystery: through the Son's death on the Cross, God has reconciled every creature to himself, has made peace between Heaven and earth; raising him from the dead he has made him the firstborn of the new creation, the "fullness" of every reality and "head of the [mystical] body", the Church (cf. Col 1: 18-20). We find ourselves again before the Cross, the central event of the mystery of Christ. In the Pauline vision the Cross is placed within the entire economy of salvation, where Jesus' royalty is displayed in all its cosmic fullness.

This text of the Apostle expresses a synthesis of truth and faith so powerful that we cannot fail to remain in deep admiration of it. The Church is the trustee of the mystery of Christ: She is so in all humility and without a shadow of pride or arrogance, because it concerns the maximum gift that she has received without any merit and that she is called to offer gratuitously to humanity of every age, as the horizon of meaning and salvation. It is not a philosophy, it is not a gnosis, even though it also comprises wisdom and knowledge. It is the mystery of Christ, it is Christ himself, the *Logos* incarnate, dead and risen, made King of the universe. How can one fail to feel a rush of enthusiasm full of gratitude for having been permitted to contemplate the splendour of this revelation? How can one not feel at the same time the joy and the responsibility to serve this King, to witness his Lordship with one's life and word? In a particular way this is our duty, venerable Cardinal-Brothers: to proclaim the truth of Christ, hope of every person and the entire human family. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, my Venerable Predecessors, the Servants of God Paul VI, John Paul I and John Paul II, have been authentic heralds of Christ's royalty in today's world. And it is for me a motive of consolation to be able to always count on you, both collegially and individually, to bring to fulfilment with me the Petrine Ministry's fundamental duty.

In conclusion, I would like to mention an aspect that is strongly united to this mission and that I entrust to your prayer: peace among all Christ's disciples, as a sign of the peace that Jesus came to establish in the world. We have heard the great news of the Christological hymn: it pleased God

to "reconcile" the universe through the Cross of Christ (cf. Col 1: 20)! Well then, the Church is that portion of humanity in whom Christ's royalty is already manifest, who has peace as its privileged manifestation. It is the new Jerusalem, still imperfect because it is yet a pilgrim in history, but able to anticipate in some way the heavenly Jerusalem. Lastly, we can here refer to the Responsorial Psalm 121, belonging to the so-called "Song of Ascents". It is a hymn of the pilgrims' joy who, going up toward the holy city and having reached its doors, address the peace-greeting to them: *shalom!* According to popular etymology Jerusalem is interpreted as a "city of peace", whose peace the Messiah, Son of David, would have established in the fullness of time. We recognize in Jerusalem the figure of the Church, sacrament of Christ and of his Kingdom.

Dear Cardinal-Brothers, this Psalm expresses well the ardent love song for the Church that you certainly carry in your hearts. You have dedicated your life to the Church's service, and now you are called to assume in her a duty of utmost responsibility. May the words of the Psalm find full acceptance in you: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem"! (v. 6). Prayer for peace and unity constitutes your first and principal mission, so that the Church may be "solid and compact" (v. 3), a sign and instrument of unity for the whole human race (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1). I place, or rather, let us all place your mission under the vigilant protection of the Mother of the Church, Mary Most Holy. To her, united to her Son on Calvary and assumed as Queen at his right hand in glory, we entrust the new Cardinals, the College of Cardinals and the entire Catholic community, committed to sowing in the furrows of history Christ's Kingdom, the Lord of Life and Prince of Peace.

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