



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI REGINA CAELI St Peter's Square

Seventh Sunday of Easter, 4 May 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Today the Solemnity of the Ascension of Christ into heaven is being celebrated in various countries, including Italy, a mystery of faith which the Acts of the Apostles places 40 days after the Resurrection (cf. Acts 1: 3-11) and for this reason it was celebrated last Thursday in the Vatican and in several other Nations of the world. After the Ascension, the first disciples remained together in the Upper Room gathered around the Mother of Jesus, fervently awaiting the gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus (cf. Acts 1: 14). On this first Sunday of May, the month of Mary, we too relive this experience, feeling Mary's spiritual presence more intensely. And St Peter's Square looks almost like an "Upper Room" under the open sky, packed with the faithful, most of whom belong to the Italian Catholic Action to whom I shall speak after the Marian prayer of the *Regina Caeli*. In his farewell discourses to the disciples, Jesus stressed the importance of his "return to the Father", the culmination of his whole mission: indeed, he came into the world to bring man back to God, not on the ideal level - like a philosopher or a master of wisdom - but really, like a shepherd who wants to lead his sheep back to the fold. This "exodus" toward the heavenly Homeland which Jesus lived in the first person, he faced solely for us. It was for our sake that he came down from Heaven and for our sake that he ascended to it, after making himself in all things like men, humbling himself even to death on a cross and after having touched the abyss of the greatest distance from God. For this very reason the Father was pleased with him and "highly exalted" him (Phil 2: 9), restoring to him the fullness of his glory, but now with our humanity. God in man - man in God: this is even now a reality, not a theoretical truth. Therefore, Christian hope, founded on Christ, is not an illusion but, as the Letter to the Hebrews says, "we have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Heb 6: 19), an anchor that penetrates Heaven where Christ has gone before us. And what does the human person in every epoch need other than this: a firm anchorage in life? Here once again is the wonderful meaning of Mary's presence among us. Turning our gaze to her, like the first disciples, we are immediately directed to the reality of Jesus: the Mother points to the Son who is no longer physically among us but awaits us in the Father's house. Jesus invites us not to linger looking upwards, but to be united in prayer together, to invoke the gift of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, only those who are "born from on high", that is, from God's Spirit, have access to the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Jn 3: 3-5), and the first to be "born from on high" was, precisely, the Virgin Mary. To her, therefore, let us turn in the fullness of Easter

joy.

After the prayer of the *Regina Caeli*: I greet with joy the English-speaking pilgrims who have come here today, particularly the members of the Neo-Catechumenal Way from Mumbai in India. In the course of this week we will pray with the whole Church for the coming of the Holy Spirit. May all of you receive abundant blessings of peace and joy. I wish you all a good Sunday.

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