



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 19 April 2006*

### **Pastor of God's Church**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

At the beginning of today's General Audience which is taking place in the joyful atmosphere of Easter, I would like to thank the Lord together with you. After calling me, exactly a year ago, to serve the Church as the Successor of the Apostle Peter - thank you for your joy, thank you for your applause - he never fails to assist me with his indispensable help.

How quickly time passes! A year has already elapsed since the Cardinals gathered in Conclave and, in a way I found absolutely unexpected and surprising, desired to choose my poor self to succeed the late and beloved Servant of God, the great Pope John Paul II. I remember with emotion my first impact with the faithful gathered in this same Square, from the central Loggia of the Basilica, immediately after my election.

That meeting is still impressed upon my mind and heart. It was followed by many others that have given me an opportunity to experience the deep truth of my words at the solemn concelebration with which I formally began to exercise my Petrine ministry: "I too can say with renewed conviction: I am not alone. I do not have to carry alone what in truth I could never carry alone" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 27 April 2005, p. 2).

And I feel more and more that alone I could not carry out this task, this mission. But I also feel that you are carrying it with me: thus, I am in a great communion and together we can go ahead with the Lord's mission. The heavenly protection of God and of the saints is an irreplaceable support to me and I am comforted by your closeness, dear friends, who do not let me do without the gift of your indulgence and your love. I offer very warm thanks to all those who in various ways support

me from close at hand or follow me from afar in spirit with their affection and their prayers. I ask each one to continue to support me, praying to God to grant that I may be a gentle and firm Pastor of his Church.

The Evangelist John says that precisely after his Resurrection Jesus called Peter to tend his flock (cf. Jn 21: 15, 23). Who could have humanly imagined then the development which was to mark that small group of the Lord's disciples down the centuries?

Peter, together with the Apostles and then their successors, first in Jerusalem and later to the very ends of the earth, courageously spread the Gospel message, whose fundamental and indispensable core consists in the Paschal Mystery: the Passion, the death and the Resurrection of Christ.

The Church celebrates this mystery at Easter, extending its joyous resonance in the days that follow; she sings the alleluia for Christ's triumph over evil and death.

The celebration of Easter in accordance with a date on the calendar, Pope St Leo the Great remarked, reminds us of the eternal feast that surpasses all human time. Today's Easter, he noted further, is the shadow of the future Easter. For this reason we celebrate it, to move on from an annual celebration to a celebration that will last for ever.

The joy of these days extends throughout the liturgical year and is renewed especially on Sunday, the day dedicated to the memory of the Lord's Resurrection. On Sunday, as it were, the "little Easter" of every week, the liturgical assembly gathered for Holy Mass proclaims in the Creed that Jesus rose on the third day, adding that we wait for "the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come".

This shows that the event of Jesus' death and Resurrection constitutes the centre of our faith and that it is on this proclamation that the Church is founded and develops.

St Augustine recalled incisively: "Let us consider, dear friends, the Resurrection of Christ: indeed, just as his Passion stood for our old life, his Resurrection is a sacrament of new life.... You have believed, you have been baptized; the old life is dead, killed on the Cross, buried in Baptism. The old life in which you lived is buried: the new life emerges. Live well: live life in such a way that when death comes you will not die (*Sermo Guelferb.* 9, 3).

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The Gospel accounts that mention the appearances of the Risen One usually end with the invitation to overcome every uncertainty, to confront the event with the Scriptures, to proclaim that Jesus, beyond death, is alive for ever, a source of new life for all who believe in him.

This is what happened, for example, in the case of Mary Magdalene (cf. Jn 20: 11-18), who found

the tomb open and empty and immediately feared that the body of the Lord had been taken away. The Lord then called her by name and at that point a deep change took place within her: her distress and bewilderment were transformed into joy and enthusiasm. She promptly went to the Apostles and announced to them: "I have seen the Lord" (Jn 20: 18).

Behold: those who meet the Risen Jesus are inwardly transformed; it is impossible *"to see"* the Risen One without *"believing"* in him. Let us pray that he will call each one of us by name and thus convert us, opening us to the *"vision"* of faith.

Faith is born from the personal encounter with the Risen Christ and becomes an impulse of courage and freedom that makes one cry to the world: "Jesus is risen and alive for ever".

This is the mission of the Lord's disciples in every epoch and also in our time: "If, then, you have been raised with Christ", St Paul exhorts us, "seek the things that are above.... Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col 3: 1-2). This does not mean cutting oneself off from one's daily commitments, neglecting earthly realities; rather, it means reviving every human activity with a supernatural breath, it means making ourselves joyful proclaimers and witnesses of the Resurrection of Christ, living for eternity (cf. Jn 20: 25; Lk 24: 33-34).

Dear brothers and sisters, in the Pasch of his Only-begotten Son, God fully revealed himself, his victorious power over the forces of death, the power of Trinitarian Love. May the Virgin Mary, who was closely associated with the Passion, death and Resurrection of the Son and at the foot of the Cross became the Mother of all believers, help us to understand this mystery of love that changes hearts and makes us experience fully the joy of Easter, so that we in turn may be able to communicate it to the men and women of the third millennium.

### **To special groups**

I offer a warm welcome to the newly-ordained deacons of the Pontifical Irish College and their families. I also greet the pilgrims from the Diocese of Kerry. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, especially those from Ireland, Switzerland, Australia, Canada and the United States, I invoke an abundance of joy and peace in the Risen Lord.

My thoughts now go to the *sick* and to the *newly-weds*. For you, dear *sick people*, may the Resurrection of Christ be an inexhaustible source of comfort and hope. And you, dear *newly-weds*, may you be witnesses of the Risen Lord with your faithful conjugal love.

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