



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 11 April 2007

Octave of Easter

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

After the solemn Easter celebrations we are meeting again today for our customary Wednesday gathering, and I would like first of all to renew to each one of you my warmest good wishes. I thank you for coming here in such numbers and I thank the Lord for the beautiful sunshine he has given us today.

This proclamation rang out at the Easter Vigil: "The Lord has risen indeed, Alleluia!". It is now he himself who speaks to us: "I will not die", he proclaims, "I will remain alive".

To sinners he says: "Receive forgiveness for your sins. Indeed, I am your forgiveness". Lastly, to all he repeats: "I am the Passover of your salvation, I am the Lamb which was sacrificed for you, I am your ransom, I am your life, I am your resurrection, I am your light, I am your Saviour, I am your King. I will show you the Father". These are the words of Melito of Sardis, a second-century writer (cf. *On Easter*, 102-103).

In these days, the liturgy recalls Jesus' various encounters after his Resurrection: with Mary Magdalene and the other women who went to the tomb at the crack of dawn the day after the Sabbath; with the Apostles who gathered unbelieving in the Upper Room; with Thomas and other disciples.

Christ's different apparitions are also an invitation to us today to deepen the fundamental message of Easter: they are an incentive to us to retrace the spiritual journey of those who encountered Christ and recognized him in those first days following the Paschal events.

The Evangelist John recounts that when Peter and he heard Mary Magdalene's news, they ran to the sepulchre each trying as it were to outstrip the other (cf. Jn 20: 3ff.). The Fathers of the Church have seen in their haste to reach the empty tomb an exhortation to compete in the only legitimate race between believers: the competition in seeking Christ.

And what can be said of Mary Magdalene? She stood weeping by the empty tomb with the sole desire to know where they had taken her Lord. She encounters him and only recognizes him when he calls her by name (cf. Jn 20: 11-18). If we seek the Lord with a simple and sincere mind, we too will find him; indeed, he himself will come to meet us; he will make us recognize him, he will call us by name, that is, he will admit us to the intimacy of his love.

Today, Wednesday in the Octave of Easter, the liturgy has us meditate on another unique encounter with the Risen One, that of the two disciples at Emmaus (cf. Lk 24: 13-35).

While they were going home, distressed by the death of their Master, the Lord kept them company on the way without their recognizing him. His words, as he commented on the Scriptures that concerned him, made the hearts of the two disciples burn within them, and on reaching their destination they asked him to stay with them. When finally he "took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them" (v. 30), their eyes were opened.

Yet, at that very instant Jesus vanished from their sight. Thus, they recognized him when he disappeared.

Commenting on this Gospel episode, St Augustine observes: "Jesus broke the bread, they recognized him. Then we should no longer say that we do not know Christ! If we believe, we know him! Indeed, if we believe we have him! They had Christ at their table, we have him in our souls!". And he concludes: "Having Christ in one's own heart is far more than having him in one's house: in fact, our hearts are more intimate to us than our homes" (*Sermon 232, VII, 7*). Let us truly seek to carry Jesus in our heart.

In the Prologue to the Acts of the Apostles, St Luke said that the Risen Lord "presented himself [to the Apostles] alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days" (1: 3). It is necessary to understand properly that when the sacred author says "he presented himself alive", he does not mean that Jesus returned to the same life that he had lived before, like Lazarus.

The Pasch that we celebrate, St Bernard remarks, means "passing" and not "returning", for Jesus

did not return to his previous situation but "crossed a boundary to a more glorious condition", new and definitive. For this reason he adds, "Christ has now truly passed over to a new life" (cf. *Homily on Easter*).

To Mary Magdalene the Lord said: "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (Jn 20: 17). These words surprise us, especially if we compare them to what, on the other hand, happened to Doubting Thomas. There in the Upper Room, the Risen One himself presented his hands and his side to the Apostle so that he could touch them and thereby be sure that it was truly he (cf. Jn 20: 27).

In fact, the two episodes are not contradictory. On the contrary, the one helps us to understand the other.

Mary Magdalene would have wanted to have her Lord as he was before, considering the Cross a tragic memory to be forgotten. Henceforth, however, there was no longer room for a merely human relationship with the Risen One. To meet him, we must not turn back but relate to him in a new way. We must move ahead! St Bernard underlines this: Jesus "invites us all to this new life, to this passing.... We will not see Christ with a backward glance" (*Homily on Easter*).

This is what happened with Thomas. Jesus showed him his wounds, not to make him forget the Cross but to make it unforgettable in the future, too.

It is towards the future, in fact, that we now turn our gaze. The disciple's task is to witness to the death and Resurrection of his Master and to his new life. For this reason Jesus invited his unbelieving friend to "touch him": he wanted him to witness directly to his Resurrection.

Dear brothers and sisters, we too, like Mary Magdalene, Thomas and the other Apostles, are called to be witnesses of Christ's death and Resurrection. We cannot keep this important news to ourselves. We must convey it to the whole world: "We have seen the Lord!" (Jn 20: 25).

May the Virgin Mary help us to savour to the full the joy of Easter, so that, sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit, we may become capable of spreading it in turn wherever we live and work. Once again, a Happy Easter to you all!

To special groups

I greet all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, including the groups from Britain and Ireland, Sweden, Australia and the United States. I extend a special welcome to the newly ordained deacons and the Golden Jubilarians from Ireland. I pray that the Risen Lord will fill your hearts with joy and that he will inspire you to proclaim to the world the Good News of the

Lord's Resurrection! Happy Easter to you all!

Lastly, my thoughts go to the *sick*, to the *newly-weds* and the *young people*, especially the many teenagers who have come from the Archdiocese of Milan. Dear young friends, the Risen Christ also repeats to you, as he did to the first disciples: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.... Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20: 21-22). Respond to him with joy and love, grateful for the immense gift of faith, and you will be authentic witnesses everywhere of his joy and peace.

For you, dear *sick people*, may Christ's Resurrection be an inexhaustible source of comfort, consolation and hope. And you, dear *newly-weds*, make the Risen One actively present in your family with daily prayer, which will nourish your conjugal love.

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