



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*St. Peter's Square*

*Wednesday, 8 October 2008*

***Saint Paul (7)***

***The Relationship with the Historical Jesus.***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

In the last Catecheses on St Paul, I spoke of his encounter with the Risen Christ that profoundly changed his life and then of his relationship with the Twelve Apostles called by Jesus - especially his relationship with James, Cephas and John - and of his relationship with the Church in Jerusalem.

The question remains as to what St Paul knew about the earthly Jesus, about his life, his teachings, his Passion. Before entering into this topic, it might be useful to bear in mind that St Paul himself distinguishes between two ways of knowing Jesus, and more generally, two ways of knowing a person. He writes in his Second Letter to the Corinthians: "from now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer" (5: 16). Knowing "from a human point of view", in the manner of the flesh, means knowing solely in an external way, by means of external criteria: one may have seen a person various times and hence be familiar with his features and various characteristics of his behaviour: how he speaks, how he moves, etc. Although one may know someone in this way, nevertheless one does not really know him, one does not know the essence of the person. Only with the heart does one truly know a person. Indeed, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were externally acquainted with Jesus, they learned his teaching and knew many details about him but they did not know him in his truth. There is a similar distinction in one of

Jesus' sayings. After the Transfiguration he asked the Apostles: "who do men say that the Son of man is?", and: "who do you say that I am?". The people know him, but superficially; they know various things about him, but they do not really know him. On the other hand, the Twelve, thanks to the friendship that calls the heart into question, have at least understood in substance and begun to discover who Jesus is. This different manner of knowing still exists today: there are learned people who know many details about Jesus and simple people who have no knowledge of these details but have known him in his truth: "Heart speaks to heart". And Paul wants to say that to know Jesus essentially in this way, with the heart, is to know the person essentially in his truth; and then, a little later, to get to know him better.

Having said this the question still remains: what did St Paul know about Jesus' practical life, his words, his Passion and his miracles? It seems certain that he did not meet him during his earthly life.

Through the Apostles and the nascent Church Paul certainly must have come to know the details of Jesus' earthly life. In his Letters, we may find three forms of reference to the pre-Paschal Jesus. In the first place, there are explicit and direct references. Paul speaks of the Jesus' Davidic genealogy (cf. Rm 1: 3), he knows of the existence of his "brethren" or kin (1 Cor 9: 5; Gal 1: 19), he knows the sequence of events of the Last Supper (cf. 1 Cor 11: 23) and he knows other things that Jesus said, for example on the indissolubility of marriage (cf. 1 Cor 7: 10 with Mk 10: 11-12), on the need for those who proclaim the Gospel to be supported by the community since the labourer deserves his wages (cf. 1 Cor 9: 14, with Lk 10: 7). Paul knows the words that Jesus spoke at the Last Supper (cf. 1 Cor 11: 24-25, with Lk 22: 19-20), and also knows Jesus' Cross. These are direct references to words and events of Jesus' life.

In the second place, we can glimpse in a few sentences of the Pauline Letters various allusions to the tradition attested to in the Synoptic Gospels. For example, the words we read in the First Letter to the Thessalonians which say that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (5: 2), could not be explained with a reference to the Old Testament prophecies, since the comparison with the nocturnal thief is only found in the Gospels of Matthew and of Luke, hence it is indeed taken from the Synoptic tradition. Thus, when we read: "God chose what is foolish in the world..." (1 Cor 1: 27-28), one hears the faithful echo of Jesus' teaching on the simple and the poor (cf. Mt 5: 3; 11: 25; 19: 30). Then there are the words that Jesus spoke at the messianic jubilee: "I thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to babes". Paul knows - from his missionary experience - how true these words are, that is, that the hearts of the simple are open to knowledge of Jesus. Even the reference to Jesus' obedience "unto death", which we read in Philippians 2: 8, can only recall the earthly Jesus' unreserved readiness to do his Father's will (cf. Mk 3: 35; Jn 4: 34). Paul is thus acquainted with Jesus' Passion, his Cross, the way in which he lived the last moments of his life. The Cross of Jesus and the tradition concerning this event of the Cross lies at the heart of the Pauline kerygma. Another pillar of Jesus' life known to St Paul is the "Sermon on the Mount", from which he cited certain elements almost literally when writing to the Romans: "love one another....

Bless those who persecute you.... Live in harmony with one another... overcome evil with good...". Therefore in his Letters the Sermon on the Mount is faithfully reflected (cf. Mt 5-7).

Lastly, it is possible to individuate a third manner in which Jesus' words are present in St Paul's Letters: it is when he brings about a form of transposition of the pre-Paschal tradition to the situation after Easter. A typical case is the theme of the Kingdom of God. It was certainly at the heart of the historical Jesus' preaching (cf. Mt 3: 2; Mk 1: 15; Lk 4: 43). It is possible to note in Paul a transposition of this subject because, after the Resurrection, it is obvious that Jesus in person, the Risen One, is the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom therefore arrives where Jesus is arriving. Thus the theme of the Kingdom of God, in which Jesus' mystery was anticipated, is transformed into Christology. Yet, the same attitudes that Jesus requested for entering the Kingdom of God apply precisely to Paul with regard to justification through faith: both entry into the Kingdom and justification demand an approach of deep humility and openness, free from presumptions, in order to accept God's grace. For example, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (cf. Lk 18: 9-14), imparts a teaching that is found exactly as it is in Paul, when he insists on the proper exclusion of any boasting to God. Even Jesus' sentences on publicans and prostitutes, who were more willing to accept the Gospel than the Pharisees (cf. Mt 21: 31; Lk 7: 36-50,) and his decision to share meals with them (cf. Mt 9: 10-13; Lk 15: 1-2) are fully confirmed in Paul's teaching on God's merciful love for sinners (cf. Rm 5: 8-10; and also Eph 2: 3-5). Thus the theme of the Kingdom of God is reposed in a new form, but always in full fidelity to the tradition of the historical Jesus.

Another example of the faithful transformation of the doctrinal nucleus imparted by Jesus is found in the "titles" he uses. Before Easter he described himself as the Son of man; after Easter it becomes obvious that the Son of man is also the Son of God. Therefore Paul's favourite title to describe Jesus is *Kýrios*, "Lord" (cf. Phil 2: 9-11), which suggests Jesus' divinity. The Lord Jesus, with this title, appears in the full light of the Resurrection. On the Mount of Olives, at the moment of Jesus' extreme anguish, (cf. Mk 14: 36), the disciples, before falling asleep, had heard him talking to the Father and calling him "*Abbà* Father". This is a very familiar word equivalent to our "daddy", used only by children in talking to their father. Until that time it had been unthinkable for a Jew to use such a word in order to address God; but Jesus, being a true Son, at that moment of intimacy used this form and said: "Abba, Father". Surprisingly, in St Paul's Letters to the Romans and to the Galatians, this word "Abba", that expresses the exclusivity of Jesus' sonship, appears on the lips of the baptized (cf. Rm 8: 15; Gal 4: 6) because they have received the "Spirit of the Son". They now carry this Spirit within them and can speak like Jesus and with Jesus as true children to their Father; they can say "Abba" because they have become sons in the Son.

And finally, I would like to mention the saving dimension of Jesus' death that we find in the Gospel saying, according to which: "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10: 45; Mt 20: 28). A faithful reflection of these words of Jesus appears in the Pauline teaching on the death of Jesus as having been bought at a price (cf. 1 Cor 6: 20), as redemption (cf. Rm 3: 24), as liberation (cf. Gal 5: 1), and as reconciliation (cf. Rm 5: 10;

2 Cor 5: 18-20). This is the centre of Pauline theology that is founded on these words of Jesus.

To conclude, St Paul did not think of Jesus in historical terms, as a person of the past. He certainly knew the great tradition of the life, words, death and Resurrection of Jesus, but does not treat all this as something from the past; he presents it as the reality of the living Jesus. For Paul, Jesus' words and actions do not belong to the historical period, to the past. Jesus is alive now, he speaks to us now and lives for us. This is the true way to know Jesus and to understand the tradition about him. We must also learn to know Jesus not from the human point of view, as a person of the past, but as our Lord and Brother, who is with us today and shows us how to live and how to die.

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### **To special groups**

I warmly greet all the English-speaking pilgrims, and in a special way, diaconal candidates from the Pontifical North American College with their families: may the grace of Holy Orders enliven you to preach the Gospel of Christ with conviction and love! I also welcome pilgrims from the Diocese of Hamilton, members of *Christ Teens* Malaysia, ecumenical pilgrims from Norway, as well as visitors from Indonesia, China, Japan, Australia, Sweden, England, Scotland, Ireland, and The Netherlands. God bless you all!

I greet lastly the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Dear brothers and sisters, may the month of October, dedicated to the Holy Rosary, be a precious opportunity to appreciate this traditional Marian prayer. I urge you all to recite the Rosary every day, abandoning yourselves with trust in Mary's hands.

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