



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St. Peter's Square

Wednesday, 5 November 2008

Saint Paul (11)

The Importance of Christology: the Decisiveness of the Resurrection.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15: 14-17). With these strong words from the First Letter to the Corinthians, St Paul makes clear the decisive importance he attributes to the Resurrection of Jesus. In this event, in fact, lies the solution to the problem posed by the drama of the Cross. The Cross alone could not explain the Christian faith, indeed it would remain a tragedy, an indication of the absurdity of being. The Paschal Mystery consists in the fact that the Crucified man "was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15: 4), as proto-Christian tradition attests. This is the keystone of Pauline Christology: everything rotates around this gravitational centre. The whole teaching of Paul the Apostle starts *from*, and arrives *at*, the mystery of him whom the Father raised from the dead. The Resurrection is a fundamental fact, almost a prior axiom (cf. 1 Cor 15: 12), on the basis of which Paul can formulate his synthetic proclamation (*kerygma*). He who was crucified and who thus manifested God's immense love for man, is risen again, and is alive among us.

It is important to understand the relationship between the proclamation of the Resurrection, as Paul formulates it, and that was in use since the first pre-Pauline Christian communities. Here indeed we can see the importance of the tradition that preceded the Apostle and that he, with

great respect and care, desires to pass on in his turn. The text on the Resurrection, contained in chapter 15: 1-11 of the First Letter to the Corinthians, emphasizes the connection between "receiving" and "transmitting". St Paul attributes great importance to the literal formulation of the tradition, and at the end of the passage under consideration underlines, "What matters is that I preach what they preach" (1 Cor 15: 11), so drawing attention to the oneness of the *kerygma*, of the proclamation for all believers and for those who will proclaim the Resurrection of Christ. The *tradition* to which he refers is the fount from which to draw. His Christology is never original at the expense of faithfulness to tradition. The *kerygma* of the Apostles always presides over the personal re-elaboration of Paul; each of his arguments moves from common tradition, and in them he expresses the faith shared by all the Churches, which are one single Church. In this way St Paul offers a model for all time of how to approach theology and how to preach. The theologian, the preacher, does not create new visions of the world and of life, but he is at the service of truth handed down, at the service of the real fact of Christ, of the Cross, and of the Resurrection. His task is to help us understand today the reality of "God with us" that lies behind the ancient words, and thus the reality of true life.

We should here be explicit: St Paul, in proclaiming the Resurrection, does not worry about presenting an organic doctrinal exposition he does not wish to write what would effectively be a theological handbook but he approaches the theme by replying to doubts and concrete questions asked of him by the faithful; an unprepared discourse, then, but one full of faith and theological experience. We find here a concentration of the essential: we have been "justified", that is made just, saved, by Christ who *died* and *rose* again for us. Above all else the *fact* of the Resurrection emerges, without which Christian life would be simply in vain. On that Easter morning something extraordinary happened, something new, and at the same time very concrete, distinguished by very precise signs and recorded by numerous witnesses. For Paul, as for the other authors of the New Testament, the Resurrection is closely bound to the *testimony* of those who had direct experience of the Risen One. This means seeing and hearing, not only with the eyes or with the senses, but also with an interior light that assists the recognition of what the external senses attest as objective fact.

Paul gives, therefore, as do the four Gospels, primary importance to the theme of the *appearances*, which constitute a fundamental condition for belief in the Risen One who left the tomb empty. These two facts are important: *the tomb is empty* and *Jesus has in fact appeared*. In this way the links of that tradition were forged, which, through the testimony of the Apostles and the first disciples, was to reach successive generations until it came down to our own. The first consequence, or the first way of expressing this testimony, is to preach the Resurrection of Christ as a synthesis of the Gospel proclamation and as the culminating point in the salvific itinerary. Paul does all this on many occasions: looking at the Letters and the Acts of the Apostles, we can see that for him the essential point is to bear witness to the Resurrection. I should like to cite just one text: Paul, arrested in Jerusalem, stands accused before the Sanhedrin. In this situation, where his life is at stake, he indicates what is the sense and content of all his preaching: "with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial" (Acts 23: 6). This same phrase

Paul continually repeats in his Letters (cf. 1 Thes 1: 9ff; 4: 13-18; 5: 10), in which he refers to his own personal experience, to his own meeting with the Risen Christ (cf. Gal 1: 15-16, 1 Cor 9: 1).

But we may wonder, what, for St Paul, is the deep meaning of the Resurrection of Jesus? What has he to say to us across these 2,000 years? Is the affirmation "Christ is risen" relevant to us today? Why is the Resurrection so important, both for him and for us? Paul gives a solemn answer to this question at the beginning of his Letter to the Romans, where he begins by referring to "the Gospel of God... concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, and designated Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rm 1: 3-4). Paul knows well, and often says, that Jesus was always the Son of God, from the moment of his Incarnation. The novelty of the Resurrection, consists in the fact that Jesus, raised from the lowliness of his earthly existence, is constituted Son of God "in power". Jesus, humiliated up to the moment of his death on the Cross, can now say to the Eleven, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28: 18). The affirmation of Psalm 2: 8 has come to pass. "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession". So, with the Resurrection begins the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ to all peoples the Kingdom of Christ begins, this new Kingdom that knows no power other than that of truth and love. The Resurrection thus reveals definitively the real identity and the extraordinary stature of the Crucified One. An incomparable and towering dignity: *Jesus is God!* For St Paul, the secret identity of Jesus is revealed even more in the mystery of the Resurrection than in the Incarnation. *While the title of Christ*, that is "Messiah"; "the Anointed", in St Paul tends to become the proper name of Jesus, and that of "the Lord" indicates his personal relationship with believers, now the title "*Son of God*" comes to illustrate the intimate relationship of Jesus with God, a relationship which is fully revealed in the Paschal event. We can say, therefore, that Jesus rose again to be the Lord of the living and the dead, (cf. Rm 14: 9; and 2 Cor 5: 15) or in other words, our Saviour (cf. Rm 4: 25).

All this bears important consequences for our lives as believers: we are called upon to take part, in our inmost selves, in the whole story of the death and Resurrection of Christ. The Apostle says: we "have died with Christ" and we believe we shall "live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" (Rm 6: 8-9). This means sharing in the suffering of Christ, which is a prelude to that full unity with him through the resurrection that we hope for. This is also what happened to St Paul, whose personal experience is described in the Letters in tones as sorrowful as they are realistic: "that I may know him and the power of his Resurrection, and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3: 10-11; cf. 2 Tm 2: 8-12). The theology of the Cross is not a theory it is the reality of Christian life. To live in the belief in Jesus Christ, to live in truth and love implies daily sacrifice, implies suffering. Christianity is not the easy road, it is, rather, a difficult climb, but one illuminated by the light of Christ and by the great hope that is born of him. St Augustine says: Christians are not spared suffering, indeed they must suffer a little more, because to live the faith expresses the courage to face in greater depth the

problems that life and history present. But only in this way, through the experience of suffering, can we know life in its profundity, in its beauty, in the great hope born from Christ crucified and risen again. The believer, however, finds himself between two poles: on the one hand, the Resurrection, which in a certain sense is already present and operating within us (cf. Col 3: 1-4; Eph 2: 6); on the other, the urgency to enter into the process which leads everyone and everything towards that fullness described in the Letter to the Romans with a bold image: as the whole of Creation groans and suffers almost as with the pangs of childbirth, so we groan in the expectation of the redemption of our bodies, of our redemption and resurrection (cf. Rm 8: 18-23).

In synthesis, we can say with Paul that the true believer obtains salvation by professing with his mouth that Jesus is the *Lord* and believing in his heart that *God has raised Him from the dead* (cf. Rm 10: 9). Important above all else is the heart that believes in Christ, and which in its faith "touches" the Risen One; but it is not enough to carry our faith in our heart, we must confess it and bear witness to it with our mouths, with our lives, thus making the truth of the Cross and the Resurrection present in our history. In this way the Christian becomes part of that process by which the first Adam, a creature of the earth, and subject to corruption and death, is transformed into the last Adam, heavenly and incorruptible (cf. 1 Cor 15: 20-22 and 42-49). This process was set in motion by the Resurrection of Christ, and it is, therefore, on this that we found our hope that we too may one day enter with Christ into our true homeland, which is in Heaven. Borne up by this hope, let us continue with courage and with joy.

* * *

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience. In a particular way I greet the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums from Florida. I also extend a warm welcome to the group from the Bunri Sato Educational Institute in Saitama, Japan. I greet especially the groups from England, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Cyprus, the Philippines and the United States. Upon all of you and your families I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings of joy and peace.

© Copyright 2008 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana