



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*St. Peter's Square*

*Wednesday, 20 April 2011*

[\[Video\]](#)

### ***Easter Triduum***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

We have now arrived at the heart of [Holy Week](#), the culmination of the [Lenten journey](#). Tomorrow we shall enter the Easter Triduum, the three holy days in which the Church commemorates the mystery of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus.

The Son of God, who, after becoming man in obedience to the Father, similar to us in all things save sin (cf. Heb 4:15), accepted to do the Father's will to the very end. He accepted the Passion and the Cross out of love for us, to enable us to share in his Resurrection so that, in him and for him, we might live for ever in consolation and in peace.

I therefore urge you to accept this mystery of salvation and to participate intensely in the Easter Triduum, the fulcrum of the entire [Liturgical Year](#) and a time of special grace for every Christian. I invite you in these days to seek recollection and prayer, so as to draw more deeply from this source of grace. In this regard, with a view to the forthcoming celebrations every Christian is asked to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation, a moment of special adherence to the death and Resurrection of Christ, to be able to participate more fruitfully in Holy Easter.

Holy Thursday is the day on which the Institution of the Eucharist and of the Ministerial Priesthood

is commemorated. In the morning each diocesan community, gathered round its bishop in the cathedral church, celebrates the Chrism Mass in which the sacred Chrism, the Oil of the Catechumens and the Oil of the Sick are blessed. Starting with the Easter Triduum and throughout the liturgical year these oils will be used for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, priestly and episcopal Ordination and the Anointing of the Sick.

This emphasizes that salvation, transmitted by the sacramental signs, flows from the very heart of the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Indeed, we are redeemed by his death and Resurrection and, through the sacraments, we draw on that same salvific source.

The priestly promises will also be renewed at the Chrism Mass tomorrow. Throughout the world, every priest renews the commitment he made on the day of his Ordination to be totally consecrated to Christ in exercising his sacred ministry at the service of his brethren. Let us accompany our priests with our prayers.

In the afternoon of Holy Thursday, the Triduum effectively begins with the commemoration of the Last Supper, at which Jesus instituted the Memorial of his Passover, complying with the Jewish Easter rite. In accordance with the tradition, every Jewish family, gathered at table on the feast of the Passover, eats roast lamb, commemorating the liberation of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt; thus in the Upper Room, knowing of his imminent death, Jesus, the true Paschal Lamb, offered himself for our salvation (cf. 1 Cor 5:7).

In pronouncing the blessing over the bread and the wine, he anticipated the sacrifice of the Cross and expressed the intention of perpetuating his presence among the disciples. Under the species of the bread and the wine, he made himself present in a real way with his Body given and his Blood poured out.

At the Last Supper, the Apostles were constituted ministers of this Sacrament of salvation; Jesus washed their feet (cf. Jn 13:1-25), inviting them to love one another as he had loved them, giving his life for them. In repeating this gesture in the Liturgy, we too are called to witness effectively to the love of our Redeemer.

Lastly, Holy Thursday ends with Eucharistic Adoration, in memory of the Lord's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Having left the Upper Room he withdrew to pray, alone before the Father. At that moment of deep communion the Gospels recount that Jesus experienced great anguish, such acute suffering that it made him sweat blood (cf. Mt 26:38).

In the knowledge of his imminent death on the Cross, he felt immense anguish at the closeness of death. In this situation an element appeared that was of great importance to the whole Church. Jesus said to his followers: stay here and keep watch; and this appeal for vigilance concerns precisely this moment of anguish, of threats, in which the traitor was to arrive, but it concerns the

whole history of the Church. It is a permanent message for every era because the disciples' drowsiness was not just a problem at that moment but is a problem for the whole of history.

The question is: in what does this apathy consist? What would the watchfulness to which the Lord invites us consist of? I would say that the disciples' somnolence in the course of history is a certain insensitiveness of the soul with regard to the power of evil, an insensibility to all the evil in the world. We do not wish to be unduly disturbed by these things, we prefer to forget them. We think that perhaps, after all, it will not be so serious and we forget.

Moreover, it is not only insensibility to evil, when we should be watchful in order to do good, to fight for the force of goodness. Rather it is an insensibility to God: this is our true sleepiness, this insensibility to God's presence that also makes us insensible to evil. We are not aware of God — he would disturb us — hence we are naturally not aware of the force of evil and continue on the path of our own convenience.

Nocturnal adoration of Holy Thursday, watching with the Lord, must be the very moment to make us reflect on the somnolence of the disciples, of the defenders of Jesus, of the Apostles, of us who do not see, who do not wish to see the whole force of evil nor do we wish to enter his passion for goodness, for the presence of God in the world, for the love of our neighbour and of God.

Then the Lord began to pray. The three Apostles — Peter, James and John — were asleep but they awoke intermittently and heard the refrain of this prayer of the Lord: "not *my* will, but *your* will be done". What is this will of *mine*, what is this will of *yours* of which the Lord speaks?

*My* will is "that he should not die", that he be spared this cup of suffering: it is the human will, human nature, and Christ felt, with the whole awareness of his being, life, the abyss of death, the terror of nothingness, the threat of suffering. Moreover, he was even more acutely aware of the abyss of evil than are we who have a natural aversion to death, a natural fear of death.

Together with death, he felt the whole of humanity's suffering. He felt that this was the cup he was obliged to drink, that he himself had to drink in order to accept the evil of the world, all that is terrible, the aversion to God, the whole weight of sin. And we can understand that before this reality, the cruelty of which he fully perceived, Jesus, with his human soul, was terrified: *my* will would be not to drink the cup, but *my* will is subordinate to *your* will, to the will of God, to the will of the Father, which is also the true will of the Son. And thus in this prayer Jesus transformed his natural repugnance, his aversion to the cup and to his mission to die for us; he transformed his own natural will into God's will, into a "yes" to God's will.

Man of himself is tempted to oppose God's will, to seek to do his own will, to feel free only if he is autonomous; he sets his own autonomy against the heteronomy of obeying God's will. This is the whole drama of humanity. But in truth, this autonomy is mistaken and entry into God's will is not

opposition to the self, it is not a form of slavery that violates my will but rather means entering into truth and love, into goodness.

And Jesus draws our will — which opposes God's will, which seeks autonomy — upwards, towards God's will. This is the drama of our redemption, that Jesus should uplift our will, our total aversion to God's will and our aversion to death and sin and unite it with the Father's will: "Not *my* will but *yours*". In this transformation of "no" into "yes", in this insertion of the creatural will into the will of the Father, he transforms humanity and redeems us. And he invites us to be part of his movement: to emerge from our "no" and to enter into the "yes" of the Son. My will exists, but the will of the Father is crucial because it is truth and love.

Another element of this prayer seems to me to be important. The three witnesses preserved — as appears in Sacred Scripture — the Hebrew or Aramaic word with which the Lord spoke to the Father, he called him: "Abba", Father. But this term "Abba" is a familiar form of the term "father", a form used only in the family that was never applied to God. Here we have a glimpse of Jesus' intimate life, of the way he spoke in the family, the way he truly spoke as the Son with the Father. We see the Trinitarian mystery: the Son speaks to the Father and redeems humanity.

A further observation: the Letter to the Hebrews gave us a profound interpretation of this prayer of the Lord, of this drama of Gethsemane. It says: Jesus' tears, his prayer, his cry, his anguish, all this is not merely a concession to the weakness of the flesh as might be said. It is in this very way that Jesus fulfilled his office as High Priest, because the High Priest must uplift the human being, with all his problems and suffering, to God's heights. And the Letter to the Hebrews says: with all these cries, tears, prayers and supplications, the Lord has brought our reality to God (cf. Heb 5:7ff). And it uses this Greek word "*prosferein*", which is the technical term for what the High Priest must do to offer, with raised hands.

It was in this drama of Gethsemane, where God's power no longer seemed to be present, that Jesus fulfilled his role as High Priest. And it also says that in this act of obedience, that is, of the conformation of the natural human will to God's will, he was perfected as a priest. Furthermore, it once again uses the technical word for ordaining a priest. In this way he truly became the High Priest of humanity and thus opened Heaven and the door to the resurrection.

If we reflect on this drama of Gethsemane we can also see the strong contrast between Jesus with his anguish, with his suffering, in comparison with the great philosopher Socrates, who stayed calm, without anxiety, in the face of death. And this seems the ideal. We can admire this philosopher but Jesus' mission was different. His mission was not this total indifference and freedom; his mission was to bear in himself the whole burden of our suffering, the whole of the human drama. This humiliation of Gethsemane, therefore, is essential to the mission of the God-Man. He carries in himself our suffering, our poverty, and transforms it in accordance with God's will. And thus he opens the doors of Heaven. He opens Heaven: this curtain of the Most Holy One,

which until now Man has kept closed against God, is opened through his suffering and obedience. These are a few observations for Holy Thursday, for our celebration on Holy Thursday evening.

On Good Friday we will commemorate the Passion and death of the Lord; we will worship the Crucified Christ, we will share in his suffering with penance and fasting. Looking “on him whom they have pierced” (cf. Jn 19:37), we shall be able to draw from his pierced heart, from which blood and water flowed as from a source; from that heart from which the love of God for every human being flows, we receive his Spirit. Therefore, on Good Friday, let us too accompany Jesus on his ascent to Calvary, allowing him to guide us right to the Cross and to receive the offering of his immolated Body.

Lastly, on the night of Holy Saturday we shall celebrate the solemn Easter Vigil during which Christ’s Resurrection is proclaimed, his definitive victory over death which calls us to be new men and women in him. In participating in this holy Vigil, the central Night of the entire Liturgical Year, we shall commemorate our Baptism, in which we too were buried with Christ, to be able to rise with him and take part in the banquet of Heaven (cf. Rev 19:7-9).

Dear friends, we have endeavoured to understand Jesus’ state of mind at the moment when he experienced the extreme trial in order to grasp what directed his action. The criterion that throughout his life guided every decision Jesus made was his firm determination to love the Father, to be one with the Father and to be faithful to him; this decision to respond to his love impelled him to embrace the Father’s plan in every single circumstance, to make his own the plan of love entrusted to him in order to recapitulate all things in God, to lead all things to him.

In reliving the Sacred Triduum, let us also prepare ourselves to welcome God’s will in our life, knowing that our own true good, the way to life, is found in God’s will even if it appears harsh, in contrast with our intentions. May the Virgin Mother guide us on this itinerary and obtain from her divine Son the grace to be able to spend our life for love of Jesus, in the service of our brethren. Thank you.

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**To special groups:**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I offer a cordial welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today’s Audience, especially the groups from England, The Netherlands, the Philippines, Canada and the United States. To you and your families I offer prayerful good wishes for a spiritually fruitful celebration of Holy Week and a Happy Easter!

I address a warm welcome to the Italian-speaking pilgrims. I greet in particular those participating

in the international UNIV meeting, sponsored by the Prelature of Opus Dei. Dear friends, I hope that these days in Rome will be an opportunity for all of you to rediscover the Person of Christ as well as a strong ecclesial experience so that you will go home motivated by the desire to witness to the heavenly Father's mercy.

Thus, all that St Josemaría Escrivá hoped for will be brought about in your life: "How I wish your bearing and conversation were such that, on seeing or hearing you, people will say: This man reads the life of Jesus Christ" (*The Way*, n. 2).

I then cordially greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Tomorrow we shall be entering the Sacred Triduum that will make us relive the central mysteries of our salvation. I ask you, dear *young people*, and especially, you young members of the "Lega Nazionale Dilettanti", to look to the Cross and to draw from it light in order to walk faithfully in the Redeemer's footsteps. Dear *sick people*, may the Lord's Passion, which culminates in the glorious triumph of Easter always be a source of hope and comfort to you. And, dear *newlyweds*, may you prepare your hearts for celebrating the Paschal Mystery with intense participation, so that your whole life may become every day a reciprocal gift open to love and rich in fruits of goodness.

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