



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 25 January 2012

[[Video](#)]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Catechesis let us focus our attention on the prayer that Jesus raises to the Father in the "Hour" of his exaltation and glorification (cf. Jn 17:1-26). As the [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) says: "Christian Tradition rightly calls this prayer the 'priestly' prayer of Jesus. It is the prayer of our High Priest, inseparable from his sacrifice, from his "passing over" (Passover) to the Father to whom he is wholly 'consecrated'" (n. [2747](#)).

The extreme richness of Jesus' prayer can be understood especially if we set it against the backdrop of the Jewish feast of expiation, *Yom Kippur*. On that day the High Priest makes expiation first for himself and then for the category of priests, and, lastly, for the whole community of the people. The purpose is to restore to the People of Israel, after a year's transgressions, the awareness of their reconciliation with God, the awareness that they are the Chosen People, a "holy people", among the other peoples. The prayer of Jesus, presented in Chapter 17 of the Gospel according to John, returns to the structure of this feast. On that night Jesus addresses the Father at the moment when he is offering himself. He, priest and victim, prays for himself, for the Apostles and for all those who will believe in him and for the Church of all the time (cf. Jn 17:20).

The prayer that Jesus prays for himself is the request for his glorification, for his "exaltation" in his "Hour". In fact, it is more than a prayer of petition, more than the declaration of his full willingness to enter, freely and generously, into the plan of God the Father, which is fulfilled in his being

consigned and in his death and resurrection. This “Hour” began with Judas’ betrayal (cf. 13:31) and was to end in the ascension of the Risen Jesus to the Father (Jn 20:17).

Jesus comments on Judas’ departure from the Upper Room with these words: “Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified” (Jn 13:31). It is not by chance that he begins his priestly prayer saying: “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you” (Jn 17:1).

The glorification that Jesus asks for himself as High Priest, is the entry into full obedience to the Father, an obedience that leads to his fullest filial condition: “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made” (Jn 17:5). This readiness and this request are the first act of the new priesthood of Jesus, which is a total gift of himself on the Cross and on the Cross itself — the supreme act of love — he is glorified because love is the true glory, the divine glory.

The second moment of this prayer is the intercession that Jesus makes for the disciples who have been with him. They are those of whom Jesus can say to the Father: “I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word” (Jn 17:6). This “manifesting God’s name to men” is the fulfilment of a new presence of the Father among the people, for humanity. This “manifesting” is not only a *word*, but is *reality* in Jesus; God is with us, and so his name — his presence with us, his being one of us — is “fulfilled”. This manifestation is thus realized in the Incarnation of the Word. In Jesus God enters human flesh, he becomes close in a new and unique way. And this presence culminates in the sacrifice that Jesus makes in his Pasch of death and Resurrection.

At the centre of this prayer of intercession and of expiation in favour of the disciples is the request for *consecration*; Jesus says to the Father: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you did send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth” (Jn 17:16-19).

I ask: what does “consecrate” mean in this case? First of all it must be said that really only God is “consecrated” or “holy”. “To consecrate” therefore means “to transfer” a reality – a person or a thing – to become the property of God. And two complementary aspects are present in this: on the one hand, removing them from ordinary things, segregating, “setting them apart” from the context of personal human life so that they may be totally given to God; and on the other, this segregation, this transfer into God’s sphere, has the very meaning of “sending”, of mission: precisely because he or she is given to God, the reality, the consecrated person, exists “for” others, is given to others. Giving to God means no longer existing for oneself, but for everyone. Whoever, like Jesus, is segregated from the world and set apart for God with a view to a task is for this very reason, fully available to all. For the disciples the task will be to continue Jesus’ mission, to be given to

God and thereby to be on mission for all. The Risen One, appearing to his disciples on Easter evening, was to say to them: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21).

The third part of this priestly prayer extends to the end of time. In it Jesus turns to the Father in order to intercede for all those who will be brought to the faith through the mission inaugurated by the Apostles and continued in history: “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their world”. Jesus prays for the Church of all time, he also prays for us (Jn 17:20).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* comments: “Jesus fulfilled the work of the Father completely; his prayer, like his sacrifice, extends until the end of time. The prayer of this hour fills the end-times and carries them toward their consummation” (n. 2749).

The central request of the priestly prayer of Jesus dedicated to his disciples of all epochs is that of the future unity of those who will believe in him. This unity is not a worldly product. It comes exclusively from the divine unity and reaches us from the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Jesus invokes a gift that comes from Heaven and has its effect — real and perceptible — on earth. He prays “that they may all be one; even as you, Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:21).

Christian unity, on the one hand, is a secret reality that is in the heart of believers. But, at the same time, it must appear with full clarity in history, it must appear so that the world may believe, it has a very practical and concrete purpose, it must appear so that all may really be one. The unity of future disciples, in being united with Jesus— whom the Father sent into the world — is also the original source of the efficacy of the Christian mission in the world.

“We can say that the founding of the Church takes place” in the priestly prayer of Jesus... In this very place, in the act of the Last Supper, Jesus creates the Church. “For what else is the Church, if not the community of disciples who through faith in Jesus Christ as the one sent by the Father”, receives his unity and is involved in Jesus’ mission to save the world, leading it to knowledge of God? Here we really find a true definition of the Church. “The Church is born from Jesus’ prayer. But this prayer is more than words; it is the act by which he ‘sanctifies’ himself, that is to say, he ‘sacrifices’ himself for the life of the world” (cf. *Jesus of Nazareth*, II, p. 101).

Jesus prays that his disciples may be one. By virtue of this unity, received and preserved, the Church can walk “in the world” without being “of the world” (cf. Jn 17:16) and can live the mission entrusted to her so that the world may believe in the Son and in the Father who sent him.

Therefore the Church becomes the place in which the mission of Christ itself continues: to lead the “world” out of man’s alienation from God and out of himself, out of sin, so that it may return to being the world of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have grasped a few elements of the great richness of the priestly prayer of Jesus, which I invite you to read and to meditate on so that it may guide us in dialogue with the Lord and teach us to pray. Let us too, therefore, in our prayers, ask God to help us to enter, more fully, into the design he has for each one of us. Let us ask him to be “consecrated” to him, to belong to him more and more, to be able to love others more and more, those who are near and far; let us ask him to be able always to open our prayer to the dimensions of the world, not closing it to the request for help with our problems but remembering our neighbour before the Lord, learning the beauty of interceding for others; let us ask him for the gift of visible unity among all believers in Christ — we have invoked it forcefully in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity — let us pray to be ever ready to answer anyone who asks us to account for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pt 3:15). Many thanks.

To special groups:

I offer a warm welcome to the students of the Bossey Graduate School of Ecumenical Studies in Switzerland, and I offer prayerful good wishes for their work. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today’s Audience I cordially invoke God’s blessings of joy and peace!

Lastly, an affectionate thought goes to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which ends today, offers us the opportunity to reflect on our belonging to Christ and to the Church. Dear *young people*, trust in the teachings of the Church, which aim for your integral development. Dear *sick people*, offer your sufferings for the cause of the unity of the Church of Christ. And you, dear *newlyweds*, raise your children in accordance with the logic of love freely given, on the model of God’s love for humanity.

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