



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
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EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Islinger Feld, Regensburg
Tuesday, 12 September 2006

Dear Brothers in the episcopal and priestly ministry!

Dear Brother and Sisters!

"Those who believe are never alone". Let me return once again to the theme of these days and express my joy that here we can see how true it is: faith brings us together and gives us a reason to celebrate. It gives us joy in God, joy in his creation, joy in being together. I realize that this celebration required much time and effort to prepare. By reading newspaper accounts, I had some idea of how many people gave their time and energy to do such a fine job of readying this esplanade. Thanks to them, we have the Cross here on the hill as a sign of God's peace in the world; the access roads have been cleared; security and good order have been ensured; housing has been provided, and so much more. I could not have imagined - and even now I am only beginning to imagine - how much work, down to the smallest details, was needed for us to meet here today. For all this I can only say, in a word: "Heartfelt thanks!" May the Lord repay you for everything you have done, and may the joy which we can now experience as a result of your preparations return a hundredfold to each of you! I was very moved when I heard how many people, especially from the vocational schools of Weiden and Hamburg, and how many firms and individuals, men and women, also helped to make my little house and garden a bit more beautiful. I am a bit taken aback by all this goodness, and once again I can only offer an inadequate "thank you!" for all your efforts. You did not do this for just one person; in the end, you did it in a spirit of solidarity in faith, inspired by love of the Christ and the Church. All this is a sign of true humanity, born of our experience of the love of Jesus Christ.

We are gathered for a celebration of faith. But the question immediately arises: What do we actually believe? What does it mean to have faith? Is it still something possible in the modern world? When we look at the great *Summae* of theology compiled in the Middle Ages, or we think of the number of books written each day for or against faith, we might lose heart and think that it is all too complicated. In the end, we can no longer see the forest for the trees. True enough: faith's vision embraces heaven and earth; past, present and future; eternity - and so it can never be fully exhausted. And yet, deep down, it is quite simple. The Lord himself tells us so when he says to the Father: "you have revealed these things to the simple - to those able to see with their hearts" (cf. *Mt* 11:25). The Church, for her part, has given us a tiny *Summa* in which everything essential is expressed. It is the so-called "Apostles' Creed", which is usually divided into twelve articles, corresponding to the number of the twelve Apostles. It speaks of God, the creator and source of all that is, of Christ and his work of salvation, and it culminates in the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting. In its basic structure, the Creed is composed of only three main sections, and as we see from its history, it is merely an expansion of the formula for Baptism which the same Lord entrusted to his disciples for all time when he told them: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Mt* 28:19).

Once we realize this, two things become clear. First, faith is simple. We believe in God - in God, who is the Beginning and End of human life. We believe in a God who enters into a relationship with us human beings, who is our origin and our future. Consequently, faith is, always and inseparably, hope: the certainty that we have a future and will not end up as nothing. And faith is love, since God's love is "contagious". This is the first thing: we simply believe in God, and this brings with it hope and love.

A second thing also becomes clear: the Creed is not a collection of propositions; it is not a theory. It is anchored in the event of Baptism - a genuine encounter between God and man. In the mystery of Baptism, God stoops to meet us; he comes close to us and in turn brings us closer to one another. Baptism means that Jesus Christ adopts us as his brothers and sisters, welcoming us as sons and daughters into God's family. He thus makes us one great family in the universal communion of the Church. Truly, those who believe are never alone. God comes to meet us. Let us go out to meet God and thus meet one another! To the extent we can, let us make sure that none of God's children ever feels alone!

We believe in God. This is a fundamental decision on our part. But again the question has to be asked: is this still possible today? Is it reasonable? From the Enlightenment on, science, at least in part, has applied itself to seeking an explanation of the world in which God would be unnecessary. And if this were so, he would also become unnecessary in our lives. But whenever the attempt seemed to be nearing success - inevitably it would become clear: something is missing from the equation! When God is subtracted, something doesn't add up for man, the world, the whole universe. So we end up with two alternatives. What came first? Creative Reason, the Creator Spirit who makes all things and gives them growth, or Unreason, which, lacking any meaning, yet

somehow brings forth a mathematically ordered cosmos, as well as man and his reason. The latter, however, would then be nothing more than a chance result of evolution and thus, in the end, equally meaningless. As Christians, we say: "I believe in God the Father, the Creator of heaven and earth" - I believe in the Creator Spirit. We believe that at the beginning of everything is the eternal Word, with Reason and not Unreason. With this faith we have no reason to hide, no fear of ending up in a dead end. We rejoice that we can know God! And we try to help others see the reasonableness of faith, as Saint Peter in his *First Letter* explicitly urged the Christians of his time to do, and with them, ourselves as well (cf. 3:15)!

We believe in God. This is what the main sections of the Creed affirm, especially the first section. But another question now follows: in what God? Certainly we believe in the God who is Creator Spirit, creative Reason, the source of everything that exists, including ourselves. The second section of the Creed tells us more. This creative Reason is Goodness, it is Love. It has a face. God does not leave us groping in the dark. He has shown himself to us as a man. In his greatness he has let himself become small. "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father", Jesus says (*Jn* 14:9). God has taken on a human face. He has loved us even to the point of letting himself be nailed to the Cross for our sake, in order to bring the sufferings of mankind to the very heart of God. Today, when we have learned to recognize the pathologies and the life-threatening diseases associated with religion and reason, and the ways that God's image can be destroyed by hatred and fanaticism, it is important to state clearly the God in whom we believe, and to proclaim confidently that this God has a human face. Only this can free us from being afraid of God - which is ultimately at the root of modern atheism. Only this God saves us from being afraid of the world and from anxiety before the emptiness of life. Only by looking to Jesus Christ does our joy in God come to fulfilment and become redeemed joy. During this solemn Eucharistic celebration, let us look to the Lord lifted up before us on the Cross and ask him to give us the immense joy which, at the hour of his farewell, he promised to the disciples (cf. *Jn* 16:24)!

The second section of the Creed ends by speaking of the last judgement and the third section by speaking of the resurrection of the dead. Judgement - doesn't this word also make us afraid? On the other hand, doesn't everyone want to see justice eventually rendered to all those who were unjustly condemned, to all those who suffered in life, who died after lives full of pain? Don't we, all of us, want the outrageous injustice and suffering which we see in human history to be finally undone, so that in the end everyone will find happiness, and everything will be shown to have meaning? This triumph of justice, this joining together of the many fragments of history which seem meaningless and giving them their place in a bigger picture in which truth and love prevail: this is what is meant by the concept of universal judgement. Faith is not meant to instil fear; rather it is meant to call us to accountability. We are not meant to waste our lives, misuse them, or spend them simply for ourselves. In the face of injustice we must not remain indifferent and thus end up as silent collaborators or outright accomplices. We need to recognize our mission in history and to strive to carry it out. What is needed is not fear, but responsibility - responsibility and concern for our own salvation, and for the salvation of the whole world. Everyone needs to make his or her

own contribution to this end. But when responsibility and concern tend to bring on fear, then we should remember the words of Saint John: "My little ones, I am writing this to keep you from sin. But if anyone should sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one" (1 *Jn* 2:1). "No matter what our hearts may charge us with - God is greater than our hearts and all is known to him" (*ibid.*, 3:20).

Today we celebrate the feast of the "Most Holy Name of Mary". To all those women who bear that name - my own mother and my sister were among them, as the Bishop mentioned - I offer my heartfelt good wishes for their feast day. Mary, the Mother of the Lord, has received from the faithful the title of *Advocate*: she is our advocate before God. And this is how we see her, from the wedding-feast of Cana onwards: as a woman who is kindly, filled with maternal concern and love, a woman who is attentive to the needs of others and, out of desire to help them, brings those needs before the Lord. In today's Gospel we have heard how the Lord gave Mary as a Mother to the beloved disciple and, in him, to all of us. In every age, Christians have received with gratitude this legacy of Jesus, and, in their recourse to his Mother, they have always found the security and confident hope which gives them joy in God and makes us joyful in our faith in him. May we too receive Mary as the lodestar guiding our lives, introducing us into the great family of God! Truly, those who believe are never alone. Amen!

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