



The Holy See

MASS OF THE DAY

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

*Saint Peter's Square
Easter Sunday, 12 April 2009*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Christ, our Paschal lamb, has been sacrificed!” (1 Cor 5:7). On this day, Saint Paul’s triumphant words ring forth, words that we have just heard in the second reading, taken from his First Letter to the Corinthians. It is a text which originated barely twenty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and yet – like many Pauline passages – it already contains, in an impressive synthesis, a full awareness of the newness of life in Christ. The central symbol of salvation history – the Paschal lamb – is here identified with Jesus, who is called “our Paschal lamb”. The Hebrew Passover, commemorating the liberation from slavery in Egypt, provided for the ritual sacrifice of a lamb every year, one for each family, as prescribed by the Mosaic Law. In his passion and death, Jesus reveals himself as the Lamb of God, “sacrificed” on the Cross, to take away the sins of the world. He was killed at the very hour when it was customary to sacrifice the lambs in the Temple of Jerusalem. The meaning of his sacrifice he himself had anticipated during the Last Supper, substituting himself – under the signs of bread and wine – for the ritual food of the Hebrew Passover meal. Thus we can truly say that Jesus brought to fulfilment the tradition of the ancient Passover, and transformed it into *his* Passover.

On the basis of this new meaning of the Paschal feast, we can also understand Saint Paul’s interpretation of the “leaven”. The Apostle is referring to an ancient Hebrew usage: according to which, on the occasion of the Passover, it was necessary to remove from the household every tiny scrap of leavened bread. On the one hand, this served to recall what had happened to their forefathers at the time of the flight from Egypt: leaving the country in haste, they had brought with them only unleavened bread. At the same time, though, the “unleavened bread” was a symbol of

purification: removing the old to make space for the new. Now, Saint Paul explains, this ancient tradition likewise acquires a new meaning, once more derived from the new “Exodus”, which is Jesus’ passage from death to eternal life. And since Christ, as the true Lamb, sacrificed himself for us, we too, his disciples – thanks to him and through him – can and must be the “new dough”, the “unleavened bread”, liberated from every residual element of the old yeast of sin: no more evil and wickedness in our heart.

“Let us celebrate the feast ... with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”. This exhortation from Saint Paul, which concludes the short reading that was proclaimed a few moments ago, resounds even more powerfully in the context of the Pauline Year. Dear brothers and sisters, let us accept the Apostle’s invitation; let us open our spirit to Christ, who has died and is risen in order to renew us, in order to remove from our hearts the poison of sin and death, and to pour in the life-blood of the Holy Spirit: divine and eternal life. In the Easter Sequence, in what seems almost like a response to the Apostle’s words, we sang: “*Scimus Christum surrexisse a mortuis vere*” – we know that Christ has truly risen from the dead. Yes, indeed! This is the fundamental core of our profession of faith; this is the cry of victory that unites us all today. And if Jesus is risen, and is therefore alive, who will ever be able to separate us from him? Who will ever be able to deprive us of the love of him who has conquered hatred and overcome death?

The Easter proclamation spreads throughout the world with the joyful song of the *Alleluia*. Let us sing it with our lips, and let us sing it above all with our hearts and our lives, with a manner of life that is “unleavened”, that is to say, simple, humble, and fruitful in good works. “*Surrexit Christus spes mea: praecedet vos in Galileam*” – Christ my hope is risen, and he goes before you into Galilee. The Risen One goes before us and he accompanies us along the paths of the world. He is our hope, He is the true peace of the world. Amen!

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