



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL CELEBRATION OF FIRST VESPERS

ON THE OCCASION OF THE CLOSING OF THE PAULINE YEAR HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS *BENEDICT XVI* Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls

Sunday, 28 June 2009 Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Distinguished Members of the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,

Dear Brothers and Sisters, I address my cordial greeting to each one of you. In particular, I greet the Cardinal Archpriest of this Basilica and his collaborators, I greet the Abbot and the Benedictine monastic community; I also greet the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The commemorative year for the birth of St Paul ends this evening. We have gathered at the tomb of the Apostle whose sarcophagus, preserved beneath the papal altar, was recently the object of a careful scientific analysis. A tiny hole was drilled in the sarcophagus, which in so many centuries had never been opened, in order to insert a special probe which revealed traces of a precious purple-coloured linen fabric, with a design in gold leaf, and a blue fabric with linen threads. Grains of red incense and protein and chalk substances were also found. In addition, minute fragments of bone were sent for carbon-14 testing by experts unaware of their provenance. The fragments proved to belong to someone who had lived between the first and second centuries. This would seem to confirm the unanimous and undisputed tradition which claims that these are the mortal remains of the Apostle Paul. All this fills our hearts with profound emotion. In recent months, many people have followed the paths of the Apostle the exterior and especially the interior paths on which he travelled in his lifetime: the road to Damascus towards his encounter with the Risen One; the routes of the Mediterranean world which he crossed with the torch of the Gospel, encountering contradiction and adherence until his martyrdom, through which he belongs for ever to the Church of Rome. It was to her that he also addressed his most important Letter. The Pauline Year is drawing to a close but what will remain a part of Christian existence is the journey with Paul with him and thanks to him getting to know Jesus, and, like the Apostle, being enlightened and transformed by the Gospel. And always, going beyond the circle of believers, he remains the "teacher of the Gentiles", who seeks to bring the message of the Risen One to them all, because Christ has known and loved each one; he has died and risen for them all. Therefore let us too listen to him at this time when we are solemnly beginning the Feast of the two Apostles who were bound to one another by a close bond. It is part of the structure of Paul's Letters always in

reference to the particular place and situation that they first of all explain the mystery of Christ, they teach faith. The second part treats their application to our lives: what ensues from this faith? How does it shape our existence, day by day? In the *Letter to the Romans*, this second part begins in chapter 12, in which the Apostle briefly sums up the essential nucleus of Christian existence in the first two verses. What does St Paul say to us in that passage? First of all he affirms, as a fundamental thing, that a new way of venerating God began with Christ a new form of worship. It consists in the fact that the living person himself becomes adoration, "sacrifice", even in his own body. It is no longer things that are offered to God. It is our very existence that must become praise of God. But how does this happen? In the second verse we are given the answer: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God..." (12: 2). The two decisive words of this verse are "transformed" and "renewal". We must become new people, transformed into a new mode of existence. The world is always in search of novelty because, rightly, it is always dissatisfied with concrete reality. Paul tells us: the world cannot be renewed without new people. Only if there are new people will there also be a new world, a renewed and better world. In the beginning is the renewal of the human being. This subsequently applies to every individual. Only if we ourselves become new does the world become new. This also means that it is not enough to adapt to the current situation. The Apostle exhorts us to non-conformism. In our Letter he says: we should not submit to the logic of our time. We shall return to this point, reflecting on the second text on which I wish to meditate with you this evening. The Apostle's "no" is clear and also convincing for anyone who observes the "logic" of our world. But to become new how can this be done? Are we really capable of it? With his words on becoming new, Paul alludes to his own conversion: to his encounter with the Risen Christ, an encounter of which, in the *Second Letter to the Corinthians* he says: "if anyone is in Christ, he is in a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (5: 17). This encounter with Christ was so overwhelming for him that he said of it: "I... died..." (Gal 2: 19; cf. Rm 6). He became new, another, because he no longer lived for himself and by virtue of himself, but for Christ and in him. In the course of the years, however, he also saw that this process of renewal and transformation continues throughout life. We become new if we let ourselves be grasped and shaped by the new Man, Jesus Christ. He is the new Man par excellence. In him the new human existence became reality and we can truly become new if we deliver ourselves into his hands and let ourselves be moulded by him. Paul makes this process of "recasting" even clearer by saying that we become new if we transform our way of thinking. What has been introduced here with "way of thinking" is the Greek term "*nous*". It is a complex word. It may be translated as "spirit", "sentiments", "reason", and precisely, also by "way of thinking". Thus our reason must become new. This surprises us. We might have expected instead that this would have concerned some attitude: what we should change in our behaviour. But no: renewal must go to the very core. Our way of looking at the world, of understanding reality all our thought must change from its foundations. The reasoning of the former person, the common way of thinking is usually directed to possession, well-being, influence, success, fame and so forth. Yet in this way its scope is too limited. Thus, in the final analysis, one's "self" remains the centre of the world. We must learn to think more profoundly. St Paul tells us what this means in the second part of the sentence: it is

necessary to learn to understand God's will, so that it may shape our own will. This is in order that we ourselves may desire what God desires, because we recognize that what God wants is the beautiful and the good. It is therefore a question of a turning point in our fundamental spiritual orientation. God must enter into the horizon of our thought: what he wants and the way in which he conceived of the world and of me. We must learn to share in the thinking and the will of Jesus Christ. It is then that we will be new people in whom a new world emerges. Paul illustrates the same idea of a necessary renewal of our way of being human in two passages of his *Letter to the Ephesians*; let us therefore reflect on them briefly. In the Letter's fourth chapter, the Apostle tells us that with Christ we must attain adulthood, a mature faith. We can no longer be "children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine..." (4: 14). Paul wants Christians to have a "responsible" and "adult faith". The words "adult faith" in recent decades have formed a widespread slogan. It is often meant in the sense of the attitude of those who no longer listen to the Church and her Pastors but autonomously choose what they want to believe and not to believe hence a do-it-yourself faith. And it is presented as a "courageous" form of self-expression against the Magisterium of the Church. In fact, however, no courage is needed for this because one may always be certain of public applause. Rather, courage is needed to adhere to the Church's faith, even if this contradicts the "logic" of the contemporary world. This is the non-conformism of faith which Paul calls an "adult faith". It is the faith that he desires. On the other hand, he describes chasing the winds and trends of the time as infantile. Thus, being committed to the inviolability of human life from its first instant, thereby radically opposing the principle of violence also precisely in the defence of the most defenceless human creatures is part of an adult faith. It is part of an adult faith to recognize marriage between a man and a woman for the whole of life as the Creator's ordering, newly re-established by Christ. Adult faith does not let itself be carried about here and there by any trend. It opposes the winds of fashion. It knows that these winds are not the breath of the Holy Spirit; it knows that the Spirit of God is expressed and manifested in communion with Jesus Christ. However, here too Paul does not stop at saying "no", but rather leads us to the great "yes". He describes the mature, truly adult faith positively with the words: "speaking the truth in love" (cf. Eph 4: 15). The new way of thinking, given to us by faith, is first and foremost a turning towards the truth. The power of evil is falsehood. The power of faith, the power of God, is the truth. The truth about the world and about ourselves becomes visible when we look to God. And God makes himself visible to us in the Face of Jesus Christ. In looking at Christ, we recognize something else: truth and love are inseparable. In God both are inseparably one; it is precisely this that is the essence of God. For Christians, therefore, truth and love go together. Love is the test of truth. We should always measure ourselves anew against this criterion, so that truth may become love and love may make us truthful. Another important thought appears in this verse of St Paul. The Apostle tells us that by acting in accordance with truth in love, we help to ensure that all things (*ta pánta*) the universe may grow, striving for Christ. On the basis of his faith, Paul is not only concerned in our personal rectitude nor with the growth of the Church alone. He is interested in the universe: *ta pánta*. The ultimate purpose of Christ's work is the universe the transformation of the universe, of the whole human world, of all creation. Those who serve the truth in love together with Christ contribute to the true progress of the world. Yes, here it is quite clear that Paul is

acquainted with the idea of progress. Christ his life, his suffering and his rising was the great leap ahead in the progress of humanity, of the world. Now, however, the universe must grow in accordance with him. Where the presence of Christ increases, therein lies the true progress of the world. There, mankind becomes new and thus the world is made new. Paul makes the same thing clear from yet another different perspective. In chapter three of the *Letter to the Ephesians* he speaks to us of the need to be "strengthened... in the inner man" (3: 16). With this he takes up a subject that earlier, in a troubled situation, he had addressed in the *Second Letter to the Corinthians*. "Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day" (4: 16). The inner person must be strengthened this is a very appropriate imperative for our time, in which people all too often remain inwardly empty and must therefore cling to promises and drugs, which then result in a further growth of the sense of emptiness in their hearts. This interior void the weakness of the inner person is one of the great problems of our time. Interiority must be reinforced the perceptiveness of the heart; the capacity to see and to understand the world and the person from within, with one's heart. We are in need of reason illuminated by the heart in order to learn to act in accordance with truth in love. However, this is not realized without an intimate relationship with God, without the life of prayer. We need the encounter with God that is given to us in the sacraments. And we cannot speak to God in prayer unless we let him speak first, unless we listen to him in the words that he has given us. In this regard Paul says to us: "Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3: 17ff.). With these words Paul tells us that love sees beyond simple reason. And he also tells us that only in communion with all the saints, that is, in the great community of all believers and not against or without it can we know the immensity of Christ's mystery. He circumscribes this immensity with words meant to express the dimensions of the cosmos: breadth, length and height and depth. The mystery of Christ has a cosmic vastness; he did not belong only to a specific group. The Crucified Christ embraces the entire universe in all its dimensions. He takes the world in his hands and lifts it up towards God. Starting with St Irenaeus of Lyons thus from the second century the Fathers have seen in these words on the breadth, length and height and depth of Christ's love an allusion to the Cross. In the Cross, Christ's love embraced the lowest depths the night of death as well as the supreme heights, the loftiness of God himself. And he took into his arms the breadth and the vastness of humanity and of the world in all their distances. He always embraces the universe all of us. Let us pray the Lord to help us to recognize something of the immensity of his love. Let us pray him that his love and his truth may touch our hearts. Let us ask that Christ dwell in our hearts and make us new men and women who act according to truth in love. Amen! © Copyright 2009 - Libreria Editrice

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