



The Holy See

**INTERVIEW WITH HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
ON THE TV PROGRAMME ENTITLED
"IN HIS IMAGE. QUESTIONS ON JESUS"
BROADCAST BY RAI UNO**

Good Friday, 22 April 2011

Holy Father, I want to thank you for your presence here, which fills us with joy and helps us remember that today is the day in which Jesus showed his love in the most radical way, that is, by dying on the Cross as an innocent. It is precisely on this theme of innocent sorrow which is the first question that comes from a seven-year-old Japanese child who says: "My name is Elena. I am Japanese and I am seven years old. I am very frightened because the house where I felt safe really shook a lot and many children my age have died. I cannot go to play in the park. I want to know: why do I have to be so afraid? Why do children have to be so sad? I'm asking the Pope, who speaks with God, to explain it to me".

Dear Elena, I send you my heartfelt greetings. I also have the same questions: why is it this way? Why do you have to suffer so much while others live in ease? And we do not have the answers but we know that Jesus suffered as you do, an innocent, and that the true God who is revealed in Jesus is by your side. This seems very important to me, even if we do not have answers, even if we are still sad; God is by your side and you can be certain that this will help you. One day we will even understand why it was so. At this moment it seems important to me that you know "God loves me" even if it seems like he doesn't know me. No, he loves me, he is by my side, and you can be sure that in the world, in the universe, there are many who are with you, thinking of you, doing what they can for you, to help you. And be aware that, one day, I will understand that this suffering was not empty, it wasn't in vain, but behind it was a good plan, a plan of love. It is not chance. Be assured, we are with you, with all the Japanese children who are suffering. We want to help you with our prayers, with our actions, and you can be sure that God will help you. In this

sense we pray together so that light may come to you as soon as possible.

The second question presents us with a Calvary because we have a mother under her son's cross. This mother is an Italian named Maria Teresa and she asks you: "Your Holiness, has the soul of my son Francesco, who has been in a vegetative coma since Easter Sunday 2009, left his body, seeing that he is no longer conscious, or is it still near him?"

Certainly his soul is still present in his body. The situation, perhaps, is like that of a guitar whose strings have been broken and therefore can no longer play. The instrument of the body is fragile like that, it is vulnerable, and the soul cannot play, so to speak, but remains present. I am also sure that this hidden soul feels your love deep down, even if he is unable to understand the details, your words, etc. He feels the presence of love. Your presence, therefore, dear parents, dear mother, next to him for hours and hours every day, is the true act of a love of great value because this presence enters into the depth of that hidden soul. Your act is thus also a witness of faith in God, of faith in man, of faith, let us say, of commitment to life, of respect for human life, even in the saddest of situations. I encourage you, therefore, to carry on, to know that you are giving a great service to humanity with this sign of faith, with this sign of respect for life, with this love for a wounded body and a suffering soul.

The third question takes us to Iraq, to the youth of Baghdad, persecuted Christians, who send you this question; "Greetings from Iraq, Holy Father" they say. "We Christians in Baghdad are persecuted like Jesus. Holy Father, in your opinion, in what way can we help our Christian community to reconsider their desire to emigrate to other countries, convincing them that leaving is not the only solution?"

First of all I want to cordially greet all the Christians of Iraq, our brothers and sisters, and I have to say that I pray every day for the Christians in Iraq. They are our suffering brothers and sisters, as those who are suffering in other lands are too, and therefore they are particularly dear to our hearts and we must do whatever we can so that they might be able to stay, so that they might be able to resist the temptation to emigrate, which is very understandable in the conditions they are living in. I would say that it is important that we are close to you, dear brothers and sisters in Iraq, and we also want to help you when you come, to welcome sincerely you as brothers and sisters. Naturally, all the institutions that truly have the possibility to do something in Iraq for you should do it. The Holy See is in permanent contact with the diverse communities, not only the Catholic community and the other Christian communities, but also with our Muslim brothers and sister, Shi'ites and Sunni. We want to create reconciliation and understanding, with the government as well, to help in this difficult journey of rebuilding a torn society. Because this is the problem, that the society is profoundly divided, torn, there is no longer the awareness that "In our diversity we are one people with a common history, where each has his place". This awareness needs to be rebuilt: that in diversity, they have a common history, a common determination. In dialogue, precisely with the various groups, we want to assist the process of reconstruction and encourage

you, dear brothers and sisters in Iraq, to have faith, to be patient and have faith in God, to collaborate in this difficult process. Be assured of our prayers.

The next question comes to you from a Muslim woman from the Ivory Coast, a country that has been at war for years. This lady's name is Bintu and she greets you in Arabic, saying "May God be in all the words that we say to one another and may God be with you". It is an expression that they use when beginning an address. She then continues in French: "Dear Holy Father, here in the Ivory Coast we have always lived in harmony between Christians and Muslims. Families are often formed by members of both religions. There also exists a diversity of ethnicities but we have never had problems. Now everything has changed: the crisis we are living under, caused by politics, has sown division. How many innocents have lost their lives! How many persons have been displaced, how many mothers and how many children traumatized! The messengers have exhorted peace, the prophets have exhorted peace. As an ambassador of Jesus, what do you advise for our country?"

I would like to respond to your greeting: May God also be with you and help you forever. I have to say that I have received heartbreaking letters from the Ivory Coast in which I see the sorrow, the depth of suffering, and I am saddened that I can do so little. We can do one thing always: remain in prayer with you and, as much as possible, we can offer works of charity. Above all we want to help, as much as is in our power, the political and human contacts. I have entrusted Cardinal Turkson, who is the president of our Council for Justice and Peace, to go to the Ivory Coast to try to mediate, to speak with the various groups and various persons to encourage a new beginning. Above all we want to make the voice of Jesus, whom you also believe in as a prophet, heard. He was always a man of peace. It could be expected that, when God came to earth, he would be a man of great power, destroying the opposing forces. That he would be a man of powerful violence as an instrument of peace. Not at all. He came in weakness. He came with only the strength of love, totally without violence, even to the point of going to the Cross. This is what shows us the true face of God, that violence never comes from God, never helps bring anything good, but is a destructive means and not the path to escape difficulties. He is thus a strong voice against every type of violence. He strongly invites all sides to renounce violence, even if they feel they are right. The only path is to renounce violence, to begin anew with dialogue, with the attempt to find peace together, with a new concern for one another, a new willingness to be open to one another. This, dear lady, is Jesus' true message: seek peace with the means of peace and leave violence aside. We pray for you, that all sections of your society may hear Jesus' voice and thus that peace and communion will return.

Holy Father, the next question is on the theme of Jesus' death and Resurrection and comes from Italy. I will read it to you: "Your Holiness, what is Jesus doing in the time between His death and resurrection? Seeing that in reciting the Creed it says that Jesus, after his death, descended into Hell, should we think that that will also happen to us, after death, before going to Heaven?"

First of all, this descent of Jesus' soul should not be imagined as a geographical or a spatial trip, from one continent to another. It is the soul's journey. We have to remember that Jesus' soul always touches the Father, it is always in contact with the Father but, at the same time, this human soul extends to the very borders of the human being. In this sense it goes into the depths, into the lost places, to where all who do not arrive at their life's goal go, thus transcending the continents of the past. This word about the Lord's descent into Hell mainly means that Jesus reaches even the past, that the effectiveness of the Redemption does not begin in the year 0 or 30, but also goes to the past, embraces the past, all men and women of all time. The Church Fathers say, with a very beautiful image, that Jesus takes Adam and Eve, that is, humanity, by the hand and guides them forward, guides them on high. He thus creates access to God because humanity, on its own cannot arrive at God's level. He himself, being man, can take humanity by the hand and open the access. To what? To the reality we call Heaven. So this descent into Hell, that is, into the depth of the human being, into humanity's past, is an essential part of Jesus' mission, of his mission as Redeemer, and does not apply to us. Our lives are different. We are already redeemed by the Lord and we arrive before the Judge, after our death, under Jesus' gaze. On one hand, this gaze will be purifying: I think that all of us, in greater or lesser measure, are in need of purification. Jesus' gaze purifies us, thus making us capable of living with God, of living with the saints, and above all of living in communion with those dear to us who have preceded us.

The next question is also on the theme of Resurrection and comes from Italy. "Your Holiness, when the women reach the tomb on the Sunday after Jesus' death, they do not recognize their Master but confuse him with another. It also happens to the Apostles: Jesus shows them his wounds, breaks bread, in order to be recognized, precisely by his actions. He has a true body, made of flesh, but it is also glorified. What does it mean that his risen body didn't have the same characteristics as before? What, exactly, does a glorified body mean? Will the Resurrection also be like that for us?"

Naturally, we cannot define the glorified body because it is beyond our experience. We can only note the signs that Jesus has given us to understand, at least a little, in which direction we should seek this reality. The first sign: the tomb is empty. That is, Jesus dead did not leave his body behind to corruption. This shows us that even matter is destined for eternity, that it is truly resurrected, that it does not remain something lost. But he then assumed this matter in a new condition of life. This is the second point: Jesus no longer dies, that is, He is beyond the laws of biology and physics because He endured this one death. Therefore there is a new condition, a different one, that we do not know but which is shown in the fact of Jesus and which is a great promise for all of us: that there is a new world, a new life, toward which we are on a journey. Being in this condition, Jesus had the possibility of letting himself be felt, of offering his hand to his followers, of eating with them, but still of being beyond the conditions of biological life as we live it. We know that, on the one hand, he is a real man, not a ghost, that he lives a real life, but a new life that is no longer submitted to the death that is our great promise. It is important to understand this, at least as much as we can, for the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, the Lord gives us his glorified

body, not flesh to eat in a biological sense. He gives us himself, this newness that he is in our humanity, in our being as person, and it touches us within with his being so that we might let ourselves be penetrated by his presence, transformed in his presence. It is an important point because we are thus already in contact with this new life, this new type of life, since he has entered into me and I have gone out of myself and am extended toward a new dimension of life. I think that this aspect of the promise, of the reality that he gives himself to me and pulls me out of myself, toward on high, is the most important point. It is not about noting things that we cannot understand but of being on a journey to the newness that always begins again anew in the Eucharist.

Holy Father, the last question is about Mary. At the Cross we witness a poignant dialogue between Jesus and his Mother in which Jesus says to Mary: "Behold your son", and to John, "Behold your Mother". In your latest book, "Jesus of Nazareth", you define it as "Jesus' final provision". How are we to understand these words? What meaning did they have at that moment and what do they mean today? And, on the subject of entrusting, do you intend to renew a consecration to the Virgin at the beginning of this new millennium?

These words of Jesus are, above all, a very human act. We see Jesus as a true man who makes a human act, an act of love for his Mother, entrusting the Mother to the young John so that she might be safe. A woman living alone in the East at that time was an impossible situation. He entrusts his Mother to this young man and to this young man he gives his Mother, therefore Jesus actually acts as a human with a deeply human sentiment. This seems very beautiful to me, very important, that before any theology we see in this act the true humanity of Jesus, his true humanism. Naturally, however, this has several dimensions, not just about this moment but regarding all of history. In John, Jesus entrusts all of us, the whole Church, all future disciples, to his Mother and his Mother to us. In this the course of history is fulfilled. More and more, humanity and Christians have understood that the Mother of Jesus is their Mother and more and more they have entrusted themselves to the Mother. Think of the great sanctuaries, think of this devotion for Mary in which more and more people feel "This is your mother". And even some who have difficulty reaching Jesus in his greatness, the Son of God, entrust themselves without difficulty to the Mother. Someone said, "But this doesn't have any Biblical foundation!" To this I reply, with St Gregory the Great: "In reading", he says, "grow the words of Scripture." That is, they develop in lived reality. They grow and more and more in history this Word develops. We see how we can all be grateful because there is truly a Mother; we have all been given a Mother. We can also go to this Mother with great confidence because she is also the Mother of every Christian. However, it is also true that this Mother expresses the Church. We cannot be Christians alone, following a Christianity based on our own ideas. The Mother is the image of the Church, the Mother Church, and entrusting ourselves to Mary means we must also entrust ourselves to the Church, live the Church, be the Church with Mary. And so we arrive at the meaning of entrusting ourselves: the Popes — whether it was Pius XII or Paul VI or John Paul II — have made a great act of entrusting the world to the Our Lady and it seems to me, as a gesture before humankind, before Mary

herself, that it was a very important gesture. I believe that now it is important to internalize this act, to let ourselves be penetrated, and to bear it out in ourselves. In this sense I have gone to some of the great Marian sanctuaries of the world: Lourdes, Fatima, Czestochowa, Altötting..., always with this sense of making real, of interiorizing this act of entrustment, so that it might truly become our act. I think that the great, public act has been made. Perhaps one day it will be necessary to repeat it again, but at the moment it seems more important to me to live it, to make it real, to enter into this entrusting so that it might truly be our own. For example, at Fatima I saw how the thousands of persons present truly entered into this entrustment. In themselves, for themselves they entrusted themselves to her; they made this made this trust real within them. It thus becomes a reality in the living Church and thus also the Church grows. The common entrustment to Mary, letting ourselves be penetrated by this presence, creating and entering into communion with Mary makes the Church, make us together with Mary, truly the Bride of Christ. Thus, at the moment, I do not intend to make a new act of public entrustment, but I would rather invite you to enter into this entrustment that has already been made, so that we may truly live it every day, and thus that a truly Marian Church might grow, a Church that is Mother, Bride, and Daughter of Jesus.

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