



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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The decisive meeting with Christ, the Word made flesh

1. In our previous reflections we have followed humanity in its encounter with God who created it and walks on its paths to seek it out. Today we will meditate on the supreme encounter between God and man which took place in Jesus Christ, the divine Word who became flesh and dwelt among us (cf. *Jn* 1: 14). The definitive revelation of God - as St Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, observed in the second century - was accomplished "when the Word became man, making himself like man and man like him, so that man might become precious to God through his likeness to the Son" (*Adversus Haereses* V, 16, 2). This intimate embrace of divinity and humanity, which St Bernard compares to the "kiss" mentioned in the Song of Songs (cf. *Sermones super Cantica canticorum* II), expands from the person of Christ to those he touches. This encounter of love has various dimensions which we will now try to illustrate.

2. It is an encounter that takes place in everyday life, in time and in space. The passage of John's Gospel which was just read (cf. *Jn* 1: 35-42) is descriptive in this regard. There we find a precise chronological indication of the day and time, locality and house where Jesus was staying. There are people who lead a simple life and are transformed, even in name, through that meeting. In fact, to have Christ enter one's life means to see one's history and projects disrupted. When those fishermen of Galilee found Jesus at the lakeside and heard his call, "they left everything and followed him" (*Lk* 5: 11). This is a radical turning-point which allows no hesitation and sets one on a path fraught with difficulties but very liberating: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (*Mt* 16: 24).

3. When he crosses a person's life, Christ disquiets his conscience and reads his heart, as

happened with the Samaritan woman when he told her "all that she ever did" (cf. *Jn* 4: 29). Above all, he moves her to repentance and love, as occurred with Zacchaeus, who gives half of his goods to the poor and restores fourfold to anyone he may have defrauded (cf. *Lk* 19: 8). This is also what happened with the repentant woman sinner whose sins were forgiven "because she loved much" (*Lk* 7: 47), and with the adulteress who is not judged but urged to lead a new and sinless life (cf. *Jn* 8: 11). The encounter with Jesus is like a rebirth: it brings forth the new creature who is capable of true adoration, which consists in worshiping the Father "in spirit and truth" (*Jn* 4: 23-24).

4. Encountering Christ on one's path through life often means finding physical healing. Jesus would entrust to his disciples themselves the mission of proclaiming God's kingdom, conversion and the forgiveness of sins (cf. *Lk* 24: 47), and also of healing the sick, delivering people from every evil, giving comfort and support. For the disciples "preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them" (*Mk* 6: 12-13). Christ came to seek, meet and save the whole person. As a condition of salvation, Jesus demands faith, by which a person abandons himself totally to God who acts in him. Indeed, Jesus said to the woman with a hemorrhage who had touched his garment as her last hope: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (*Mk* 5: 34).

5. The purpose of Christ's coming among us is to lead us to the Father. For "no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (*Jn* 1: 18). This historical revelation accomplished by Jesus in his words and deeds touches us deeply, through the Father's interior action (cf. *Mt* 16: 17; *Jn* 6: 44-45) and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jn* 14: 26; 16: 13). For this reason, the risen Jesus pours himself forth as the principle of the forgiveness of sins (cf. *Jn* 20: 22-23) and the source of divine love within us (cf. *Rom* 5: 5). Thus we have a Trinitarian communion which already begins in earthly life and whose final goal is the fullness of vision, when "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 *Jn* 3: 2).

6. Now Christ continues to walk beside us on the paths of history, as he promised: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt* 28: 20). He is present through his Word, "a Word who calls, who invites, who personally summons, as happened to the Apostles. When a person is touched by the Word obedience is born, that is, the listening which changes life. Every day (the believer) is nourished by the bread of the Word. Deprived of it, he is as though dead and has nothing left to communicate to his brothers and sisters, because the Word is Christ (*Oriente lumen*, n. 10).

Christ is also present in the Eucharist, the source of love, unity and salvation. The words he spoke one day at the synagogue in the little town of Capernaum on Lake Tiberias echo constantly in our churches. They are words of hope and life: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him ... he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (*Jn* 6: 54, 56).

The Holy Father again asked the faithful to pray for an end to the violence in the Moluccas and deplored the recent attacks in Moscow and Spain:

Once again I feel it necessary to ask you to pray for an end to the violence that is convulsing the Molucca Islands in Indonesia.

As we entrust to God's mercy the numerous victims of that tragedy, we wish to express our deep spiritual closeness to all who are suffering from the death of their loved ones, the loss of the necessities of life and the destruction of their places of worship. Many of them have been forced to leave the land where they lived and have a right to live in dignity and security.

With faith let us implore the Lord that order be restored, the harmony of the past be re-established and Christians and Muslims be able to live together in peace.

May the Blessed Virgin, Mother of the suffering, support our prayers with her powerful intercession.

The Holy Father went on to deplore the bomb explosion in Moscow and the continuing violence in Spain.

Yesterday in Moscow, in an underpass near the Kremlin, a bomb exploded during rush hour, causing many deaths and injuries. I cannot help express how deeply I deplore this grave attack, as I offer the assurance of my solidarity accompanied by my prayer.

I would like to extend the same sentiments to the victims of the attacks which, unfortunately, are still occurring in Spain.

I ardently hope that every form of violence, which sows grief and pain, will come to an end and that minds will turn to thoughts of understanding and peaceful coexistence.

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I extend a special greeting to the young Benedictine monks gathered for the *Congressus Iuniorum* of their Order. Dear Brothers, I encourage you to be convincing witnesses to other young people of the great Christian ideals contained in the Rule of Saint Benedict. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Japan, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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