



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 20 September 2000

1. We have started our meeting under the sign of the Trinity, described incisively and clearly by the words of the Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Galatians (cf. 4: 4-7). The Father, in pouring out the Holy Spirit into Christians' hearts, brings about and reveals the adoption as sons obtained for us by Christ. Indeed, it is the Spirit who is "bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (*Rom* 8: 16). Looking at this truth as at the Pole star of the Christian faith, let us meditate on some existential aspects of our communion with the Father through the Son and in the Spirit.
2. The typically Christian way of contemplating God always passes through Christ. He is the Way, and no one comes to the Father except through him (cf. *Jn* 14: 6). To the Apostle Philip who implores him: "show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied", Jesus says: "he who has seen me has seen the Father" (*Jn* 14: 8-9). Christ, the beloved Son (cf. *Mt* 3: 17; 17: 5), is the revealer of the Father *par excellence*. The true face of God is revealed to us only by the One "who is in the bosom of the Father". The original Greek expression in John's Gospel (cf. 1: 18) indicates an essentially intimate and dynamic relationship of love, of life, between the Son and the Father. This relationship of the eternal Word involves the human nature he took on in the Incarnation. Therefore in the Christian perspective the experience of God can never be reduced to a general "sense of the divine", nor can the mediation of Christ's humanity be surpassed, as has been shown by the great mystics, such as St Bernard, St Francis of Assisi, St Catherine of Siena, St Teresa of Avila and many lovers of Christ in our time, from Charles de Foucauld to St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein).
3. Various aspects of Jesus' witness with regard to the Father are reflected in every authentic Christian experience. He witnessed first of all that his teaching originates in the Father: "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me" (*Jn* 7: 16). What he made known is exactly what he

"heard" from the Father (cf. *Jn* 8: 26; 15: 15; 17: 8, 14). Therefore the Christian experience of God cannot develop except in total coherence with the Gospel.

Christ also witnessed effectively to the Father's love. In the wonderful Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus presents the Father who is constantly waiting for man the sinner to return to his embrace. In John's Gospel, he insists on the Father who loves mankind: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (*Jn* 3: 16). And again, "if a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (*Jn* 14: 23). Those who truly experience God's love can only repeat with ever new emotion the exclamation in John's First Letter: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 *Jn* 3: 1). In this light, we can address God with that tender, natural, intimate name: *Abba*, Father. It is constantly on the lips of the faithful who feel they are children, as St Paul recalls in the text with which our meeting began (cf. *Gal* 4: 4-7).

4. Christ gives us the very life of God, a life that goes beyond time and leads us into the mystery of the Father, into his joy and infinite light. The Evangelist John testifies to this, passing on Jesus' sublime words: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself (*Jn* 5: 26). "This is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.... As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me" (*Jn* 6: 40; 57).

This participation in the life of Christ, which makes us "sons in the Son" is made possible by the gift of the Spirit. The Apostle, in fact, presents to us our being children in God in close connection with the Holy Spirit: "all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (*Rom* 8: 14). The Spirit puts us in relation to Christ and to the Father. "In this Spirit, who is the eternal gift, the Triune God opens himself to man, to the human spirit. The hidden breath of the divine Spirit enables the human spirit to open in its turn before the saving and sanctifying self-opening of God.... In the communion of grace with the Trinity, man's 'living area' is broadened and raised up to the supernatural level of divine life. Man lives in God and by God: he lives 'according to the Spirit', and 'sets his mind on the things of the Spirit'" (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 58).

5. The fatherly face of God truly appears to Christians illumined by the grace of the Spirit. The Christian can turn to him with trust as St Thérèse of Lisieux witnesses in this intense autobiographical passage: "The little bird would like to fly towards the shining sun which fascinates its eyes. It would like to imitate the eagles, its sisters, whom it sees flying high to the divine fire of the Trinity.... However, alas! all that it can do is to flap its tiny wings; but taking off in flight is not one of its few possibilities.... So with bold abandon it stays gazing at its divine sun; nothing will be able to instil fear in it, neither wind, nor rain" (*Autobiographical manuscripts*, Paris 1957, p. 231).

I am happy to extend a special greeting to the Jubilee pilgrimage from Melaka-Johor, Malaysia, led by Bishop James Chan. I also greet the Union of past pupils of the Pontifical Irish College, led by Archbishop Seán Brady. I warmly welcome the ecumenical groups, especially the Lutheran visitors from Sweden and the group sponsored by the Anglican Centre in Rome. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Sweden, Japan, Malaysia, Australia and the United States of America I invoke the joy and peace of Christ the Saviour.

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