



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 26 November 1997

With Jesus eternity has entered time

1. The celebration of the Jubilee has us contemplate Jesus Christ as the endpoint of the time preceding him and the starting point of all that follows him. Indeed, he inaugurated a new history not only for those who believe in him, but for the entire human community, because the salvation he accomplished is offered to every human being. Henceforth the fruits of his saving work are mysteriously diffused throughout history. With Christ, eternity has entered time! *"In the beginning was the Word"* (Jn 1:1). With these words John begins his Gospel, taking us beyond the beginning of our time, to the divine eternity. Unlike Matthew and Luke, who primarily consider the circumstances of the Son of God's human birth, John directs his gaze to the mystery of the divine preexistence.

In this sentence, "in the beginning" means the absolute beginning, the beginning without a beginning, eternity precisely. The expression echoes that used in the creation account: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn 1:1). But in creation it was a question of the beginning of time, whereas here, where the Word is mentioned, it is a question of eternity.

There is an infinite distance between the two principles. It is the distance between time and eternity, between creatures and God.

2. Existing eternally as the Word, Christ has an origin that goes back far beyond his birth in time.

John's assertion is based on Jesus' exact words. To the Jews who rebuked him for claiming to have seen Abraham when he was not yet 50 years old, Jesus replies: "Truly, truly, I say to you,

before Abraham was, I am" (Jn 8:58). The assertion stresses the contrast between the *becoming* of Abraham and the *being* of Jesus. The word "genésthai" used in the Greek text for Abraham actually means "to become", or "to come into being": it is the appropriate verb to designate the mode of being proper to creatures. On the contrary, Jesus alone can say: "I am", indicating by this expression the *fullness of being* which lies beyond all becoming. Thus he expresses his awareness of possessing an eternal personal existence.

3. By applying the expression "I am" to himself, *Jesus* makes *God's name* his own, the name revealed to Moses in Exodus. After entrusting him with the mission of liberating his people from slavery in Egypt, Yahweh, the Lord, guarantees him assistance and closeness, and in a way as a pledge of his fidelity, he reveals to him the mystery of his name: "I am who I am" (Ex 3:14). Thus Moses can say to the Israelites: "I am has sent me to you" (ibid.). This name expresses God's saving presence for the sake of his people, but also his inaccessible mystery.

Jesus makes this divine name his own. In John's Gospel this expression appears several times on his lips (cf. 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19). With it, Jesus effectively shows us that in his person eternity not only precedes time, but *enters time*.

Although sharing the human condition, Jesus is conscious of his eternal being, which confers a higher value on all his activities. He himself emphasized this eternal value: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Mk 13:31; par.). His words, like his actions, have a unique, definitive value, and will continue to call for a response from humanity until the end of time.

4. Jesus' work involves two closely related aspects: it is a *saving action* which frees humanity from the power of evil, and it is a *new creation* which obtains for humanity participation in the divine life.

Liberation from evil was prefigured in the Old Covenant, but only Christ can fully achieve it. He alone, as Son, has eternal power over human history: "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn 8:36). The Letter to the Hebrews forcefully underscores this truth, showing how the one sacrifice of the Son obtained for us "eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12), far exceeding the value of the Old Covenant sacrifices.

The new creation can only be achieved by the One who is all-powerful, because it implies the communication of divine life to human existence.

5. The perspective of the eternal origin of the Word, particularly emphasized in John's Gospel, spurs us to enter more deeply into the mystery.

Let us therefore approach the Jubilee, professing our faith in Christ ever more forcefully: "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God". These phrases of the Creed give us access to the mystery; they are an invitation to approach it. Jesus continues to testify to our generation, as

he did 2,000 years ago to his disciples and listeners, his awareness *of his divine identity*: the mystery of the *I am*.

Because of this mystery, human history is no longer left to decay, but has a meaning and a direction: it has in a way been *impregnated with eternity*. The consoling promise Christ made to his disciples resounds for everyone: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially the young people of the American All-Star Dance and Drill Team, the students from Australia and Sweden, the group representing the Catholic Schools of Denmark, and the pilgrims from Malaysia and the Philippines. Upon all of you I cordially invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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