



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 7 April 2004

Comment on the reading from the Letter to the Philippians (2: 8-9)

Holy Week

1. "*Christ Jesus... humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him...*" (Phil 2: 8-9).

We have just heard these words of the hymn contained in the Letter to the Philippians. They essentially and effectively present to us the mystery of the passion and death of Jesus; at the same time, they allow us to glimpse the glory of the Resurrection. Thus, they constitute a meditation that introduces us into the celebrations of the Easter Triduum that begins tomorrow.

2. Dear brothers and sisters, we are preparing ourselves to relive the great mystery of our salvation. Tomorrow morning, *Holy Thursday*, the Bishop in every diocesan community will celebrate with his priests the *Chrism Mass* during which the oils are blessed: the oil of the catechumens, the oil for the anointing of the sick and the holy Chrism. In the evening we will commemorate the *Last Supper* with the Institution of the Eucharist and of the Priesthood. The "*washing of the feet*" reminds us that with this gesture Jesus in the Upper Room anticipated his supreme Sacrifice on Calvary and bequeathed his love to us as a new law, *mandatum novum*. According to a pious tradition, after the rites of the Mass of the *Lord's Supper*, the faithful stay in adoration before the Eucharist late into the night. It is a unique prayer vigil which goes back to the agony of Christ in Gethsemane.

3. On *Good Friday*, the Church commemorates the passion and death of Our Lord. The Christian assembly is invited to meditate upon the evil and sin that oppress humanity and upon the salvation

brought about by the redemptive Sacrifice of Christ. The Word of God and certain evocative liturgical rites, such as the Adoration of the Cross, help us to contemplate the various stages of the Passion. In addition, Christian Tradition has brought to life on this day various expressions of popular devotion. Outstanding among these are the penitential processions of Good Friday and the pious stations on the Way of the Cross, which help us to interiorize the mystery of the Cross.

Deep silence is a feature of *Holy Saturday*. In fact, no special liturgies are proposed for this day of expectation and prayer. Everything in the Church is still while the faithful, in imitation of Mary, prepare for the great event of the Resurrection.

4. The solemn *Easter Vigil*, "mother of all vigils", begins at nightfall on *Holy Saturday*. After blessing the new fire, the celebrant lights the paschal candle which symbolizes Christ who brings light to every person, and the great proclamation of the *Exsultet* rings out joyfully. The ecclesial community, listening to the Word of God, meditates upon the important promise of definitive liberation from the slavery of sin and death. This is followed by the rites of Baptism and Confirmation for the catechumens who have undergone a long process of preparation.

The proclamation of the Resurrection scatters the darkness of the night and the whole of created reality awakens from the slumber of death to recognize Christ's lordship, as the Pauline hymn that has inspired our reflections brings to the fore: "*At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*" (Phil 2: 10-11).

5. Dear brothers and sisters, these days are particularly suitable for intensifying the conversion of our hearts to the One who out of love died for our sake.

Let us allow Mary, the faithful Virgin, to accompany us; let us reflect with her in the Upper Room and stay beside Jesus on Calvary, to meet him risen at last on Easter Day.

With these sentiments and hopes, I express my most cordial wishes for a happy and holy Easter to you who are present here, to your communities and to all your loved ones.

To special groups

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking pilgrims present at this Audience, especially those from England, the Faroe Islands, Canada and the United States of America. Upon you and your loved ones, I invoke the Lord's blessings of health and joy and wish you a happy and holy Easter. I address a special greeting to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*.

I hope that you, dear *young people*, will not be afraid to follow Christ, even when he asks you to embrace the Cross. May meditating on the passion of Jesus, a mystery of suffering transfigured by love, be a comfort to you, dear *sick people*. And may the death and Resurrection of the Lord renew in you, dear *newly-weds*, the joy and commitment of the marriage bond.