



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION at THE parish
of St Julian Martyr IN ROME

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 2 March 1997

1. “*Lord, you have the words of eternal life*” (cf. Jn 6:68).

The responsorial psalm proclaimed a few moments ago leads us to the heart of the message of today’s liturgy. The power of the divine word was manifested for the first time in the creation of the world, when God said: “Let there be” (cf. Gn 1:3), calling all creatures into existence. But the biblical readings for this Third Sunday of Lent shed light on another dimension of the power of the word of God: that which concerns the *moral order*.

Yahweh gave the Ten Commandments to the chosen people on Mount Sinai, a mountain which has unique symbolic value in salvation history. This is precisely why a meeting on that mountain has been proposed for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 53). Today’s first reading from the Book of Exodus particularly develops the first three commandments given to Israel, those of the so-called “first tablet”: “I am the Lord, your God.... You shall have no other gods before me.... You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God in vain.... Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex 20:2-3, 7-8).

The first commandment, in which *the oneness of God* is solemnly affirmed, is fundamental: there are no other divinities besides him. The invisible God, to whom no image made by human hands can do justice, manifests himself in the law given to Moses. With the incarnation of the Word, God became man, and thus the invisible God became visible and, from that moment, humanity can contemplate his glory. The question of the artistic portrayal of God was extensively examined at the Second Council of Nicaea and it was then made clear that, since the invisible God became man in the incarnation, it was legitimate for Christians to portray him in art.

Connected with the first commandment is the second, which does not only condemn the *abuse of God's name*, but is also meant to warn people against the idolatry that was widespread in pagan religions.

With regard to the third commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex 20:8), the law is detailed and refers back to the original model of rest God gave us when he had completed creation.

On the other hand, the commandments of the so-called "second tablet" are described concisely.

3. "*Lord, you have the words of eternal life*". The words spoken by God in the Old Testament are fulfilled in Christ, the incarnate Word of God. In the Old Covenant, God's creative power in the moral sphere was expressed in the *Ten Commandments*; however, in the New Covenant *it is Christ who is the fulfilment of this power*. thus it is not a written law but the very Person of the Saviour.

This is a truth expressed to great effect by St Paul when he writes to the Galatians and the Romans: he contrasts justification by observance of the law with justification by faith in Christ. Today, however, in the second reading taken from the First Letter to the Corinthians, we read: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:22-24).

The power and wisdom which God showed in creating the world and man made "in his image and likeness" (cf. Gn 1:26) are fully expressed in the moral order. The latter is therefore in service to man's good and that of human society. This is confirmed in the New Testament, which clearly establishes the role of morality in serving man's eternal salvation.

This is why in the Gospel acclamation the words Jesus used in his nocturnal conversation with Nicodemus: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him ... might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16), were proclaimed. Not only the commandments, but above all the eternal Word who became man is the source of eternal life.

4. Dear brothers and sisters of St Julian Martyr Parish! I am pleased to be here with you today, to celebrate the Eucharist on the Third Sunday of Lent. I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Auxiliary of the area, your zealous parish priest, Fr Luciano D'Erme, the parochial vicar, the religious who live in this area and all of you who belong to this parish community, dedicated in a special way to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Merciful Heart of Jesus.

Today we naturally remember our venerable and beloved Brother, Cardinal Ugo Poletti, who died a few days ago. This parish, established in 1980, was *one of more than 70 built by him* during his long service to the Diocese of Rome. As I thank the Lord once again for having given me this

capable Vicar General, I invite you all to pray for him, commending this chosen soul to God's mercy.

I am following the progressive phases of the mission with affection and attention, especially the distribution of St Mark's Gospel *to families and the practice of the Spiritual Exercises*, which are taking place during this season of Lent. The programme of Spiritual Exercises is truly fitting, for they are an important help to Christians, who are called to "be renewed in spirit ... and [to] put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:23-24). Fruit of the Church's rich spiritual tradition, the Spiritual Exercises are a genuine answer to man's profound questions. I therefore recommend them to young people as part of their journey of vocational discernment, to Christian married couples, to families and to all who are sincerely searching for God.

5. *"He spoke of the temple of his body"* (Jn 2:21).

In the Gospel we again read the story about the driving of the merchants from the temple. St John's description is vivid and eloquent: on one side there is Jesus, who, "making a whip of cords, drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple" (Jn 2:14-15), and on the other are the Jews, particularly the Pharisees. The contrast is so strong that some of those present ask Jesus: "What sign have you to show us for doing this?" (Jn 2:18).

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19), Christ answers. To which the people reply: "It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" (Jn 2:20). They had not understood —St John notes — that the Lord was talking about the living temple of his body, which, during the paschal events, would be destroyed by his death on the cross but would be raised up on the third day. "When therefore he was raised from the dead", the Evangelist writes, "his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken" (Jn 2:22).

It is the paschal event that gives authentic meaning to all the various elements of today's readings. At Easter the power of the incarnate Word is fully revealed, the power of the eternal Son of God, who became man for us and for our salvation.

"Lord you have the words of eternal life".

We believe that you are truly the Son of God.

And we thank you for having made us sharers in your own divine life.

Amen.

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