



The Holy See

REMARKS BY OF JOHN PAUL II

AFTER COMPLETING THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS, 1999

Good Friday 2 April 1999

1. "*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum*"; "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit". These are the words, this is the last cry of Christ on the Cross. It is these words that close the mystery of the Passion and open up the mystery of liberation through death which will be fulfilled in the Resurrection. They are important words. The Church, aware of their importance, has incorporated them into the Liturgy of the Hours and every day ends it with these words: "Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit".

Today we would like to put these words on humanity's lips at the end of the second millennium, and the end of the 20th century. Millenniums do not speak, centuries do not speak, but man speaks, thousands, millions of people speak, who have filled this space which is called the 20th century, this space which is called the second millennium. Today we want to put Christ's words on the lips of all these people who have been citizens of our 20th century, our second millennium, because these words, this cry of the suffering Christ, his last words, do not only close: they open. They signify openness to the future.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit". These words are an opening. We hope that at the end of this Good Friday, and Easter Vigil of 1999, the words - "*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum*", "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" - will be the last words for each of us, those which will open eternity to us.

2. "*Christus factus est pro nobis oboediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis*"; "Christ became for us obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (*Antiphon from the Breviary*; cf. Phil 2:8). With these words, the liturgy of Good Friday summarizes what was accomplished on

Golgotha 2,000 years ago. The Evangelist John, who was an eyewitness, recounts the sorrowful events of Christ's Passion. He tells of his cruel agony, his last words: "*All is accomplished!*" (Jn 19:30), and the piercing of his side with a spear by a Roman soldier. From the wounded side of the Redeemer there came forth blood and water, certain proof that he was dead (cf. Jn 19:34), and the supreme gift of his merciful love.

3. Keeping John's testimony in mind, what the prophet Isaiah says in the Song of the Suffering Servant becomes even more remarkable. He writes some centuries before Christ and his words seem in perfect harmony with those of the fourth Evangelist. They constitute a true "Gospel of the Cross": "Despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows.... / Pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins.... / We had all gone astray like sheep, each taking his own way; and the Lord burdened him with the sins of us all... / Yes, he was torn away from the land of the living, for our faults struck down in death. / They gave him a grave with the wicked.... / His soul's anguish over, he shall see the light and be content; / by his sufferings shall my servant justify many, taking their faults on himself" (53:3, 5, 6, 8-9, 11).

These considerations, so rich in detail, are all the more surprising because they are the words of one who could not see with his own eyes the drama of Calvary, having lived long before. They are words which foreshadow the theology of the sacrifice of Christ's Cross. In a wonderful synthesis, they contain the entire *mysterium passionis et resurrectionis*, which go to make the great *mysterium paschale*.

4. The prophetic words of the Book of Isaiah resound in our hearts this evening, at the end of the Way of the Cross, here at the Colosseum, eloquent reminder of the suffering and martyrdom of many believers who paid with their blood for their faithfulness to the Gospel. They are words which echo the Passion of Jesus "in agony until the end of the world" (Paschal, *Pensées, Le mystère de Jésus*, 553).

Christ is "despised and rejected" in those reviled and killed in the war in Kosovo and wherever the culture of death triumphs; the Messiah is "crushed for our sins" in the victims of hatred and evil in every time and place. Peoples divided and struck by incomprehension and indifference seem at times to have "gone astray like sheep".

Yet on the horizon of this scene of suffering and death, hope shines for humanity: "his soul's anguish over, he shall see the light and be content; / ... my servant shall justify many". In the night of sorrow and depression, the Cross is a torch which keeps alive the expectation of the new day of the resurrection. We look to the Cross of Christ with faith this evening, and through the Cross we want to proclaim to the world the Father's merciful love for every human being.

5. Yes, this is the day of mercy and love; the day on which the redemption of the world is accomplished, because sin and death have been defeated by the saving death of the Redeemer.

O crucified heavenly King, may the mystery of your glorious death triumph in the world.

Grant that we never lose the courage and boldness of hope in the face of the tragedies afflicting humanity and in the face of every situation of injustice that humiliates the human being, the creature redeemed by your precious blood.

Grant indeed that we may proclaim this evening with even greater force: Your Cross is victory and salvation, "*quia per sanctum crucem tuam redemisti mundum*", because by your blood and your Passion you have redeemed the world!