



The Holy See

EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION FOR THE INAUGURATION OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR 1999-2000

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 15 October 1999

1. *"Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"* (Rom 4: 3). The Apostle Paul's words which have just now resounded in this basilica, bring us to the heart of today's liturgy for the inauguration of the Academic Year 1999-2000.

With great affection I greet Cardinal Pio Laghi, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education.

I greet you, dear rectors, professors and students, who have wished to take part in this solemn Eucharistic celebration. I wish every one a fruitful academic year. This year will be a special one, because it coincides with the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. May this season of joy be a favourable opportunity for you not only to deepen your theological knowledge, but above all to grow in faith in Jesus Christ.

2. The Apostle speaks of this faith, presenting the example of Abraham, father of believers. He illustrates a fundamental point of his apostolic preaching: faith as the basis for justification. Man is justified before God through faith. The justice that saves man does not derive from the effects of law, but from faith, that is, from the attitude of total openness and full acceptance of God's grace, which transforms the human being and makes him a new creature.

The act of faith is not simply an intellectual adherence to the truths revealed by God, but neither is it merely an attitude of confident entrustment to God's action. Rather it is the synthesis of both these elements, because it involves both the intellectual and the affective realm, as an integral act of the human person.

These reflections on the nature of faith have immediate consequences on the way of working out, teaching and learning theology. If, in fact, the act of faith that leads to man's justification involves the whole of the person, theological reflection on divine Revelation and on the human response cannot but take due account of the multiple aspects - intellectual,

emotional, moral and spiritual - which intervene in the relationship of communion between God and the believer.

3. *"I said: 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'" (Ps 32 [31]: 5)*. The responsorial psalm we repeated together accentuates our awareness that we cannot reach God with our efforts alone, and of our condition as sinners. It is when he becomes aware of his remoteness from God that the human person sets out to seek to encounter him and opens himself to the action of grace.

Through faith, man welcomes the salvation which the Father offers him in Jesus Christ. The man to whom the Lord gives salvation is truly blessed (*response, responsorial psalm*); the hearts of those who are at peace with God overflow with joy: *"Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!" (Ps 32 [31]: 11)*.

The first part of today's Gospel passage refers to this sincere confession of one's sins, and of the need to open oneself to God's action. The harshness of refusing to recognize one's own faults and the inability to accept God's gift are defined by Jesus as *"the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Lk 12: 1)*. With these words, Jesus censures not only false attitudes and the search for appearances, but the presumption of being just in themselves, precluding every possibility of genuine conversion and faith in God.

The act of faith considered in its integrality must necessarily be expressed in concrete attitudes and decisions. In this way it becomes possible to overcome the apparent antithesis between faith and action. Faith understood in the full sense does not remain an abstract element, uprooted from everyday life, but involves all a person's dimensions, including the existential contexts and experiential aspects of his life.

An eloquent example of this synthesis between faith and action, contemplation and action, is the Carmelite saint, Teresa of Avila, a doctor of the Church, whose feast we are celebrating today. She reached the peak of intimacy with God and, at the same time, was always very active from the apostolic viewpoint and sound in everything she did. Her mystical experience, moreover, like that of all the saints, clearly shows how in those who seek God everything converges towards one central point: their integral response to God which is communicated. Theology too, faithful to its own character of sapiential reflection on the faith, by its nature flows into the fields of morals and spirituality.

4. In the passage from Luke which has just been proclaimed, we read: *"Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed" (Lk 12: 2)*. These words do not simply indicate the fact that God scrutinizes every person's heart. What is hidden and must be revealed has a far greater significance and universal importance: it is the Gospel proclamation sown in the depths of consciences, which asks to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Jesus' words add an important element to the reflection on the act of faith: that is, the passage from the personal context and, as it were, from man's inmost depths to the context of community and mission. Faith, if it is to be full and mature, brings the impulse to be communicated, extending in a certain sense that movement which originates in Trinitarian love, and strives to embrace humanity and all creation.

5. Gospel proclamation is not free from risks. The Church's history is marked with examples of heroic fidelity to the Gospel. In our century also, even in our day, many of our brothers and sisters in the faith have sealed their full adherence to Christ and their service to the kingdom of God with the supreme sacrifice of their life.

With regard to renunciation and sacrifice, which in some cases lead to martyrdom, we encounter Jesus' comforting words: "*Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do*" (Lk 12: 4). The forces of evil try to oppose the way of the Gospel, they try to destroy the work of salvation and to kill Christ's witnesses, but the very sacrifice of these courageous workers in the Lord's vineyard is eloquent proof of God's power. How many trials has the Church overcome with the power of the Holy Spirit! How many martyrs of our century have given up their lives for Christ's cause! Their sacrifices have yielded abundant fruit for the Church and for the kingdom of God.

Jesus' words comfort and encourage us at the beginning of this new academic year: "Fear not" (Lk 12: 7). Dear friends, let us not be afraid to open the doors of our hearts to faith, to make it a lively experience in our lives and to proclaim it ceaselessly to our brethren.

May the Blessed Virgin, model of faith and seat of divine wisdom, make us faithful disciples of her Son Jesus and generous proclaimers of his Word. Amen!

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