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On the Triduum

"I Invite You to Seek in These Days Recollection and Prayer"

VATICAN CITY, APRIL 20, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of the Italian-language catechesis Benedict XVI gave today during the general audience held in St. Peter's Square. The Pope focused his address on the meaning of the Easter Triduum, the culmination of the Lenten journey.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have already arrived at the heart of Holy Week, the fulfillment of the Lenten journey. Tomorrow we will enter the Easter Triduum, the three holy days in which the Church commemorates the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. After being made man in obedience to the Father, the Son of God, being in everything like us except for sin (cf. Hebrews 4:15), accepted fulfilling his will to the end, to face for love of us his Passion and Cross, to make us sharers in his Resurrection, so that in him and through him we can live forever, in consolation and peace. Hence, I exhort you to receive this mystery of salvation, to take part intensely in the Easter Triduum, the culmination of the whole liturgical year and a moment of particular grace for every Christian. I invite you to seek in these days recollection and prayer, to be able to accede more profoundly to this source of grace. In connection with this, given the imminent festivities, every Christian is invited to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, a moment of special adherence to the death and resurrection of Christ, to be able to participate with greater fruitfulness in Holy Easter.

Maundy Thursday is the day in which we recall the institution of the Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood. In the morning, each diocesan community, gathered in the cathedral church around the bishop, will celebrate the Chrism Mass in which the sacred chrism, the oil of the catechumens, and the oil of the sick are blessed. Beginning with the Easter Triduum and during the whole liturgical year, these oils will be used for the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and priestly and episcopal ordination and the anointing of the sick; in this is manifested how salvation, transmitted by the sacramental signs, springs precisely from the paschal mystery of Christ. In fact, we are redeemed by his death and resurrection and, through the sacraments, we go to that same salvific source. During the Chrism Mass tomorrow, the renewal of priestly promises takes place. Throughout the world, every priest renews the commitments he assumed on the day of ordination, to be totally consecrated to Christ in the exercise of the sacred ministry at the service of his brothers. Let us support our priests with our prayer.

On the afternoon of Maundy Thursday the Easter Triduum effectively begins, with the remembrance of the Last Supper, in which Jesus instituted the Memorial of his Pasch, fulfilling the Jewish paschal rite. According to tradition, every Jewish family, gathered at table on the feast of Passover eats the roasted lamb, recalling the Israelites' deliverance from the slavery of Egypt; thus in the Cenacle, conscious of his imminent death, Jesus, the true paschal Lamb, offered himself for our salvation (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7). Pronouncing the blessing over the bread and wine, he anticipated the sacrifice of the cross and manifested the intention of perpetuating his presence amid the disciples: Under the species of bread and wine he makes himself present in a real way with

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his body given and his blood shed. During the Last Supper, the apostles were constituted ministers of this sacrament of salvation. Jesus washed their feet (cf. John 13:1-25), inviting them to love one another as he loved them, giving his life for them. Repeating this gesture in the liturgy, we are also called to give witness with the deeds of our Redeemer.

Maundy Thursday, finally, is closed with Eucharistic Adoration, in memory of the Lord's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Leaving the Cenacle, he withdrew to pray, alone, in the presence of his Father. At that moment of profound communion, the Gospels recount that Jesus experienced great anguish, such suffering that he sweat blood (cf. Matthew 26:38). Conscious of his imminent death on the cross, he felt great anguish and the closeness of death. In this situation an element is seen that is of great importance also for the whole Church. Jesus said to his own: Stay here and watch; and this call to vigilance refers in a precise way to this moment of anguish, of menace, in which the betrayer arrives, but it concerns the whole history of the Church. It is a permanent message for all times, because the somnolence of the disciples was not only the problem of that moment, but is the problem of the whole of history.

The question is what this somnolence consists of, and what is the vigilance to which the Lord invites us. I would say that the disciples' somnolence in the course of history is a certain insensitivity of soul to the power of evil, an insensitivity to all the evil of the world. We do not want to let ourselves be too disturbed by these things, we want to forget them: We think that perhaps it is not so grave, and we forget. And it is not only insensitivity to evil; instead, we should be watching to do good, to struggle for the force of good. It is insensitivity to God -- this is our real somnolence: this insensitivity to the presence of God that makes us insensitive also to evil. We do not listen to God -- it would bother us -- and so we do not listen, of course, to the force of evil either, and we stay on the path of our comfort.

The nocturnal adoration on Maundy Thursday, our being vigilant with the Lord, should be precisely the moment to make us reflect on the somnolence of the disciples, of Jesus' defenders, of the apostles, of ourselves, who do not see, we do not want to see all the force of evil, and we do not want to enter into his passion for the good, for the presence of God in the world, for the love of neighbor and of God.

Then the Lord began to pray. The three apostles -- Peter, James and John -- slept, but then they woke up and heard the phrase of this prayer of the Lord: "Not my will but thine be done." What is this will of mine, what is this will of yours, of which the Lord speaks? My will is that I "should not die," that he be spared this chalice of suffering: It is the human will, of human nature, and Christ feels, with all the consciousness of his being, life, the abyss of death, the terror of nothingness, this menace of suffering.

And he more than us, who have this natural aversion to death, this natural fear of death, even more than us, he felt the abyss of evil. He also felt, with death, all the suffering of humanity. He felt that all this was the chalice he must drink, that he must make himself drink, accept the evil of the world, everything that is terrible, the aversion to God, the whole of sin. And we can understand that Jesus, with his human soul, was terrified before this reality, which he perceived in all its cruelty: My will would be not to drink the chalice, but my will is subordinated to your will, to the will of God, to the will of the Father, which is also the real will of the Son. And thus Jesus transformed, in this prayer, the natural aversion, the aversion to the chalice, to his mission to die for us. He transformed this natural will of his into the will of God, in a "yes" to the will of God.

On his own man is tempted to oppose the will of God, to have the intention to follow his own will, to feel free only if he is autonomous; he opposes his own autonomy against the heteronomy of following the will of God. This is the whole drama of humanity. But in truth this autonomy is erroneous and this entering into God's will is not an opposition to oneself, it is not a slavery that violates my will, but it is to enter into truth and love, into the good. And Jesus attracts our will, which is opposed to the will of God, which seeks its autonomy. He attracts this will of ours on high, to the will of God. This is the drama of our redemption, that Jesus attracts our will on high, all our aversion to the will of God and our aversion to death and sin, and unites it to the will

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of the Father: "Not my will but thine be done." In this transformation of the "no" into "yes," in this insertion of the will of the creature in the will of the Father, he transforms humanity and redeems us. And he invites us to enter into this movement of his: To come out of our "no" and enter into the "yes" of the Son. My will exists, but the decisive will is the will of the Father, because the will of the Father is truth and love.

A further element of this prayer seems important to me. The three witnesses have kept -- as it appears in sacred Scripture -- the Hebrew or Aramaic word with which the Lord spoke to the Father, he called him: "Abba," father. But this formula, "Abba," is a familiar form of the term father, a form that is used only in the family, which has never been used toward God. Here we see in the intimacy of Jesus how he speaks in the family, he speaks truly as Son with his Father. We see the Trinitarian mystery: The Son who speaks with the Father and redeems humanity.

One more observation. The Letter to the Hebrews gives us a profound interpretation of this prayer of the Lord, of this drama of Gethsemane. It says: these tears of Jesus, this prayer, these cries of Jesus, this anguish -- is not all this simply a concession to the weakness of the flesh, as could be said. But precisely in this way he realizes the task of High Priest, because the High Priest must lead the human being, with all his problems and sufferings, to the height of God. And the Letter to the Hebrews says: with all these cries, tears, sufferings, prayers, the Lord took our reality to God (cf. Hebrews 5:7ff). And it uses this Greek word "prosferein," which is the technical term for what the High Priest must do to offer, to raise his hand on high. Precisely in this drama of Gethsemane, where it seems that God's strength is no longer present, Jesus realizes the function of High Priest. And it says, moreover, that in this act of obedience, namely, of conformity of the natural human will to the will of God, he is perfected as priest. And it uses again the technical word to ordain a priest. Precisely in this way he becomes the High Priest of humanity and thus opens heaven and the door to resurrection.

If we reflect on this drama of Gethsemane, we can also see the great contrast between Jesus, with his anguish, with his suffering, in comparison with the great philosopher Socrates, who remains peaceful, imperturbable in the face of death. And this seems to be the ideal. We can admire this philosopher, but Jesus' mission is another. His mission was not this total indifference and liberty; his mission was to bear in himself all the suffering, all the human drama. And because of this, precisely this humiliation of Gethsemane is essential for the mission of the Man-God. He bears in himself our suffering, our poverty and transforms them according to the will of God. And thus opens the doors of heaven, he opens heaven: This curtain of the Most Holy, which up to now man closed against God, is opened by his suffering and obedience. These are some observations for Maundy Thursday, for our celebration of the night of Maundy Thursday.

On Good Friday we will recall the passion and death of the Lord; we will adore Christ Crucified, we will share in his sufferings with penance and fasting. Looking "on him whom they have pierced" (cf. John 19:37), we will be able to drink from his broken heart that gushes blood and water as a fountain; of that heart from which springs the love of God for every man, we receive his Spirit. Hence, on Good Friday we will also accompany Jesus as he goes up to Calvary; let us be guided by him to the cross, let us receive the offering of his immaculate body.

Finally, on the night of Holy Saturday, we will celebrate the Easter Vigil, in which the resurrection of Christ will be proclaimed to us, his definitive victory over death which calls us to be, in him, new men. Participating in this holy vigil, the central night of the whole liturgical year, we will recall our baptism, in which we were buried with Christ, to be able to resurrect with him and take part in the banquet of heaven (cf. Revelation 19:7-9).

Dear friends, we have tried to understand the state of spirit with which Jesus lived the moment of extreme trial, to understand what guided his action. The criterion that guided all of Jesus' choices during his whole life was the firm will to love the Father, to be one with the Father, and to be faithful to him. This decision to

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correspond to his love impelled him to embrace the Father's plan in every circumstance, to make his own the design of love that was entrusted to him to recapitulate everything in him, to lead everything back to him.

On reliving the Holy Triduum, let us dispose ourselves to receive also in our lives the will of God, conscious that in the will of God, though it seems hard, in contrast to our intentions, is found our true good, the path of life.

May the Virgin Mother guide us on this journey and obtain for us from her divine Son the grace to be able to use our life for love of Jesus at the service of brothers. Thank you.

[Translation by ZENIT]

[The Holy Father then greeted pilgrims in several languages. In English, he said:]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Tomorrow marks the beginning of the Easter Triduum, the three days in which the Church commemorates the mystery of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. The liturgies of these days invite us to ponder the loving obedience of Christ who, having become like us in all things but sin, resisted temptation and freely surrendered himself to the Father's will. Tomorrow, at the Chrism Mass, priests renew their ordination promises, the sacred oils are blessed, and we celebrate the grace of the crucified and risen Lord which comes to us through the Church's sacramental life. On the evening of Holy Thursday, the Mass of the Lord's Supper begins the actual Triduum and recalls the institution of the sacraments of the Eucharist and Holy Orders. The Liturgy of Good Friday invites us to share in Christ's sufferings through penance and fasting, and to receive the gift of God's love flowing from the Lord's pierced Heart. The Easter Vigil joyfully proclaims Christ's resurrection from the dead and the new life received in Baptism. By our prayers and our sharing in these liturgies, let us resolve to imitate Christ's loving obedience to the Father's saving plan, which is the source of authentic freedom and the path of eternal life.

I offer a cordial welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, especially the groups from England, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Canada and the United States. To you and your families I offer prayerful good wishes for a spiritually fruitful celebration of Holy Week and a happy Easter!

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[He concluded in Italian:]

I address a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims. In particular I greet you, participants in the international meeting of UNIV, promoted by the Prelature of Opus Dei. Dear friends, I hope that these Roman days will be for all of you an occasion to rediscover the person of Christ and of strong ecclesial experience so that you can return home animated by the desire to witness the mercy of the heavenly Father. Thus through your life will be realized what St. Josemaría Escrivá hoped for: "May your behavior and your conversation be such that in seeing you and hearing you everyone will be able to say: here is one who reads the life of Jesus Christ" (Camino, No. 2).

Now I cordially greet young people, the sick and newlyweds. Tomorrow we will enter into the Sacred Triduum which will bring us to relive the central mysteries of our salvation. I invite you, dear young people, especially you youngsters of the "Lega Nazionale Dilettanti" to look at the cross and to draw from it light to walk faithfully in the footsteps of the Redeemer. For you, dear sick, may the passion of the Lord, culminating in the glorious triumph of Easter, constitute always a source of hope and comfort. And you, dear newlyweds,

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dispose your hearts to celebrate with intense participation the paschal mystery, so that your existence becomes every day a reciprocal gift, open to the fruitful love of goodness.

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