

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 8 November 2006*

St Paul's new outlook

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In our previous Catechesis two weeks ago, I endeavoured to sketch the essential lines of the biography of the Apostle Paul. We saw how his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus literally revolutionized his life. Christ became his *raison d'être* and the profound motivation of all his apostolic work.

In his Letters, after the Name of God which appears more than 500 times, the name most frequently mentioned is Christ's (380 times). Thus, it is important to realize what a deep effect Jesus Christ can have on a person's life, hence, also on our own lives. Actually, the history of salvation culminates in Jesus Christ, and thus he is also the true discriminating point in the dialogue with other religions.

Looking at Paul, this is how we could formulate the basic question: how does a human being's encounter with Christ occur? And of what does the relationship that stems from it consist? The answer given by Paul can be understood in two stages.

In the first place, Paul helps us to understand the absolutely basic and irreplaceable value of faith. This is what he wrote in his *Letter to the Romans*: "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (3: 28).

This is what he also wrote in his *Letter to the Galatians*: "[M]an is not justified by works of the law but only through faith in Jesus Christ; even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified" (2: 16).

"Being justified" means being made righteous, that is, being accepted by God's merciful justice to enter into communion with him and, consequently, to be able to establish a far more genuine relationship with all our brethren: and this takes place on the basis of the complete forgiveness of our sins.

Well, Paul states with absolute clarity that this condition of life does not depend on our possible good works but on the pure grace of God: "[We] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3: 24). With these words St Paul expressed the fundamental content of his conversion, the new direction his life took as a result of his encounter with the Risen Christ.

Before his conversion, Paul had not been a man distant from God and from his Law. On the contrary, he had been observant, with an observance faithful to the point of

fanaticism. In the light of the encounter with Christ, however, he understood that with this he had sought to build up himself and his own justice, and that with all this justice he had lived for himself.

He realized that a new approach in his life was absolutely essential. And we find this new approach expressed in his words: "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2: 20).

Paul, therefore, no longer lives for himself, for his own justice. He lives for Christ and with Christ: in giving of himself, he is no longer seeking and building himself up. This is the new justice, the new orientation given to us by the Lord, given to us by faith.

Before the Cross of Christ, the extreme expression of his self-giving, there is no one who can boast of himself, of his own self-made justice, made for himself! Elsewhere, re-echoing Jeremiah, Paul explains this thought, writing, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord" (I Cor 1: 31 = Jer 9: 23-24ff.); or: "Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6: 14).

In reflecting on what justification means, not for actions but for faith, we thus come to the second component that defines the Christian identity described by St Paul in his own life.

This Christian identity is composed of precisely two elements: this restraint from seeking oneself by oneself but instead receiving oneself from Christ and giving oneself with Christ, thereby participating personally in the life of Christ himself to the point of identifying with him and sharing both his death and his life. This is what Paul wrote in his *Letter to the Romans*: "[A]ll of us... were baptized into his death... we were buried therefore with him... we have been united with him.... So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6: 3, 4, 5, 11).

These last words themselves are symptomatic: for Paul, in fact, it was not enough to say that Christians are baptized or believers; for him, it was just as important to say they are "in Christ Jesus" (cf. also Rom 8: 1, 2, 39; 12: 5; 16: 3, 7, 10; I Cor 1: 2, 3 etc.).

At other times he inverted the words and wrote: "Christ is in us/you" (Rom 8: 10; II Cor 13: 5) or "in me" (Gal 2: 20).

This mutual compenetration between Christ and the Christian, characteristic of Paul's teaching, completes his discourse on faith.

In fact, although faith unites us closely to Christ, it emphasizes the distinction between us and him; but according to Paul, Christian life also has an element that we might describe as "mystical", since it entails an identification of ourselves with Christ and of Christ with us. In this sense, the Apostle even went so far as to describe our suffering as "the suffering of Christ" in us (II Cor 1: 5), so that we might "always [carry] in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (II Cor 4: 10).

We must fit all this into our daily lives by following the example of Paul, who always lived with this great spiritual range. Besides, faith must constantly express humility before God, indeed, adoration and praise.

Indeed, it is to him and his grace alone that we owe what we are as Christians. Since nothing and no one can replace him, it is necessary that we pay homage to nothing and no one else but him. No idol should pollute our spiritual universe or otherwise, instead of enjoying the freedom acquired, we will relapse into a humiliating form of slavery.

Moreover, our radical belonging to Christ and the fact that "we are in him" must imbue in us an attitude of total trust and immense joy. In short, we must indeed exclaim with St Paul: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom 8: 31). And the reply is that nothing and no one "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8: 39). Our Christian life, therefore, stands on the soundest and safest rock one can imagine. And from it we draw all our energy, precisely as the Apostle wrote: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4: 13).

Therefore, let us face our life with its joys and sorrows supported by these great sentiments that Paul offers to us. By having an experience of them we will realize how true are the words the Apostle himself wrote: "I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me"; in other words, until the Day (II Tm 1: 12) of our definitive meeting with Christ the Judge, Saviour of the world and our Saviour.