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On the Easter Triduum

"We Will Relive the Passion, Death and Resurrection"

VATICAN CITY, APRIL 12, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of Benedict XVI's address at today's general audience, which he dedicated to explain the meaning of the Easter triduum.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Tomorrow the Easter triduum begins, which is the fulcrum of the whole liturgical year. Aided by the sacred rites of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the solemn Easter Vigil, we will relive the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord.

They are propitious days to reawaken in us a more intense desire to be united to Christ and follow him generously, conscious that he has loved us to the point of giving his life for us. The events that the sacred triduum again proposes to us are the sublime manifestation of this love of God for man.

Let us dispose ourselves, therefore, to celebrate the Easter triduum taking up St. Augustine's exhortation: "Consider now attentively the three holy days of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of the Lord. From these three mysteries we realize in the present life that of which the cross is symbol, while we realize through faith and hope, that of which the burial and resurrection is symbol" (Letter 55,14,24).

The Easter triduum begins tomorrow, Holy Thursday, with the evening Mass "in Cena Domini," though in the morning another significant liturgical celebration is usually held, the Chrism Mass, during which, gathered around the bishop, the whole presbyterate of every diocese renews priestly promises, and takes part in the blessing of the oils of the catechumens, of the sick and of the chrism. This is what we will also do tomorrow here, in St. Peter's.

In addition to the institution of the priesthood, on this holy day will be commemorated Christ's total giving of himself to humanity in the sacrament of the Eucharist. On the very night he was betrayed, he left us, as sacred Scripture recalls, the "new commandment" -- "mandatum novum" -- of fraternal love by carrying out the striking gesture of the washing of the feet, which reminds us of the humble service of slaves. This singular day, evocative of the great mysteries, ends with Eucharistic adoration, in memory of the Lord's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Feeling great anguish, recounts the Gospel, Jesus asked his own to watch with him, remaining in prayer: "Remain here, and watch with me." And we see how also today, we, the disciples of today, often remain asleep. This was, for Jesus, the hour of abandonment and solitude, which was followed, in the middle of the night, by the arrest and beginning of the painful way to Calvary.

Good Friday, centered on the Passion, is a day of fast and abstinence, oriented to the contemplation of the cross. Proclaimed in the churches is the account of the Passion, and the words of the prophet Zechariah resound: "They shall look on him whom they have pierced" (John 19:37).

And on Good Friday we also wish to direct our gaze to the pierced heart of the Redeemer in whom, as St. Paul writes, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3), more than that, "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9), for this reason, the Apostle can affirm his decision "to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). It is true: The cross reveals "the breadth and length and height and depth" -- the cosmic dimensions, this is the meaning of a love that surpasses all knowledge -- love goes beyond what is known and fills us with "all the fullness of God" (cf. Ephesians 3:18-19).

In the mystery of the Crucified is brought about that "turning of God against himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form" ("Deus Caritas Est," No. 12). The cross of Christ, wrote Pope St. Leo the Great in the fifth century, "is source of all blessings, and the cause of all blessings" (Discourse 8 on the Passion of the Lord, 6-8; PL 54, 340-342).

On Holy Saturday the Church, united spiritually to Mary, remains in prayer before the sepulcher, where the body of the Son of God lies inert in a state of repose after the creative work of redemption, realized with his death (cf. Hebrews 4:1-13). At night the solemn Easter Vigil will begin, during which the joyous Easter "Gloria" and "Alleluia" will rise from the hearts of the newly baptized and the whole Christian community, joyful because Christ has risen and conquered death.

Dear brothers and sisters, to be able to live a profitable celebration of Easter, the Church asks the faithful to draw near these days to the sacrament of penance, which is a kind of death and resurrection for each one of us. In the early Christian community, on Holy Thursday the rite of the Reconciliation of Penitents was celebrated, over which the bishop presided.

Of course the historical conditions have changed, but to prepare for Easter with a good confession continues to be a duty which must be fully appreciated, as it offers us the possibility to begin our life again and this new beginning is realized in the joy of the Risen One and in the communion of forgiveness that it gives us. Conscious that we are sinners, but trusting in divine mercy, let us allow ourselves to be reconciled by Christ to experience more intensely the joy that he communicates to us in his resurrection.

The forgiveness that Christ gives us in the sacrament of penance is source of interior and exterior peace and makes us apostles of peace in a world in which continue, unfortunately, divisions, sufferings and the tragedies of hatred and violence, of inability to be reconciled to begin again with a sincere pardon.

We know, however, that evil does not have the last word, as he who triumphs is Christ crucified and risen, and his victory is manifested with the force of merciful love. His resurrection gives us this certainty: Despite all the darkness in the world, evil does not have the last word. Supported by this truth, we will be able to commit ourselves with greater courage and enthusiasm to make a more just world come into being.

This is what I wish all of you from my heart, dear brothers and sisters, hoping that you will prepare with faith and devotion for the imminent Easter celebrations. May you be accompanied by Mary Most Holy, who, after having followed her divine Son in the hour of the passion and cross, shared the joy of his resurrection.

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