THE MEETING WITH THE RISEN CHRIST CHANGED PAUL'S LIFE

VATICAN CITY, 3 SEP 2008 (VIS) - This morning Benedict XVI travelled from Castelgandolfo to the Vatican for his weekly general audience, which was held in the Paul VI Hall. Continuing the series of catechesis on St. Paul, he today focused on the conversion of the Apostle of the Gentiles.

The Holy Father recalled how "the decisive moment of Paul's life came on the road to Damascus in the early 30s of the first century, following a period in which he persecuted the Church".

In order to understand what happened to the Apostle as he travelled to Damascus "we have two sources" the Pope explained. "The first and most popular are the accounts written by Luke, who narrates the event three times in the Acts of the Apostles". The details the Evangelist chooses to highlight - the light from the sky, Paul's fall to the earth, his blindness - "relate to the core of what happened", said the Holy Father, "the Risen Christ appears as a splendid light that speaks to Saul, transforming his mind and his life. ... This meeting with Christ, which is the focus of St. Luke's account, profoundly changed Paul's life, and in this sense we can and must speak of a true conversion".

Benedict XVI then went on to explain that "the second source are the Letters of St. Paul himself". The Apostle "never spoke of the particulars of the event, perhaps because he believed that everyone knew its essential details: everyone knew that from being a persecutor he had been transformed into a fervent apostle of Christ, the result not of his own reflections but of a tremendous event, a meeting with the Risen One".

In certain of his writings the Apostle of the Gentiles "highlights how the apparition of the Risen Christ - of which he himself was a true witness - is the foundation of his apostolate, ... the foundation of his new life", said the Pope.

Yet, Pope Benedict went on, "St. Paul did not consider the event as a conversion. And the reason", he explained, "is very clear: this transformation of his life was not the result of a psychological process, of an intellectual or moral evolution, ... but the fruit of his meeting with Christ Jesus. ... St. Paul's renewal cannot be explained in any other way. Psychological analyses cannot clarify and resolve the problem; only an event, the forceful encounter with Christ, is the key to understanding what happened".

For us, the Holy Father concluded, Christianity "is not a new philosophy or a new form of morality. We are only Christians if we encounter Christ, even if He does not reveal Himself to us as clearly and irresistibly as he did to Paul in making him the Apostle of the Gentiles. We can also encounter Christ in reading Holy Scripture, in prayer, and in the liturgical life of the Church - touch Christ's heart and feel that Christ touches ours. And it is only in this personal relationship with Christ, in this meeting with the Risen One, that we are truly Christian".