PAUL: THE RISEN CHRIST AND THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION

VATICAN CITY, 22 OCT 2008 (VIS) - In his general audience this morning, Benedict XVI proceeded with his series of catecheses on St. Paul, focusing on the Apostle of the Gentile's teaching on "the central role of the Risen Christ in the mystery of salvation". The audience, held in St. Peter's Square, was attended by 17,000 people.

For Paul, the Pope explained, Christ "is the principle for understanding the world and discovering the path of history". The Apostle of the Gentiles, said the Holy Father "was not concerned with narrating the individual episodes of Jesus' life" because "his pastoral and theological intention, which sought to sustain the nascent communities, concentrated above all on announcing Jesus Christ as the 'Lord', living and present, now among His people".

The essential characteristic of Pauline Christology, said Benedict XVI, apart from announcing the living Christ, is "announcing the central fact of ... the death and resurrection of Jesus as the culmination of His earthly journey and as the root of the subsequent development of all Christian faith, of all the reality of the Church. For the Apostle, the Resurrection is not some isolated event, separate from His death: the Risen Christ is always same Christ Who before was crucified".

"The Apostle contemplates in fascination the secret hidden in the Crucifixion-Resurrection and, through the suffering Christ experienced in His humanity, is led back to the eternal existence in which Christ is one with the Father". However, to understand Paul's thought on "pre-existence and ... the incarnation of Christ" we need to know "certain Old Testament texts which highlight the role of Wisdom before the creation of the world, ... such as those that speak of creative Wisdom".

"These texts ... also speak of the descent of Wisdom which pitched its tent among us" as a premonition of "the tent of flesh" mentioned by St John the Evangelist. "But this descent of Wisdom ... implies the possibility of its being rejected", and St. Paul makes it clear that "Christ,

like Wisdom, can be rejected, above all by those who dominate this world, so that in God's plan a paradoxical situation may be created in which ... the Cross ... is transformed into the way of salvation for all humankind".

In his Letter to the Philippians Paul "further develops this idea of Wisdom which descends to be exalted despite its rejection. ... The gesture of the Son of God is the opposite of pride, it is a gesture of humility which is the realisation of love, and love is divine. Hence Christ's descent, the radical humility with which He contrasts human pride, truly is an expression of divine love, and it is followed by that elevation to heaven to which God draws us".

In the Letters to the Colossians and Ephesians, Christ is described as "firstborn". This, the Pope explained, means that "the first among many children ... came down to make us His brothers and sisters".

Finally, in the Letter to the Ephesians the Apostle considers "the divine plan of salvation", saying that "in Christ God wished to recapitulate all things. ... Christ reassumes all things and guides us to God. Thus He involves us in a movement of descent and ascension, inviting us to share in His humility, in other words His love for others and, hence, His glorification".