ST. PAUL: THE CROSS TRANSFORMS THE REALITY OF WORSHIP

VATICAN CITY, 7 JAN 2009 (VIS) - In his first general audience of 2009, celebrated in the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father turned his attention to the worship Christians must pay to God, according to the teaching of St. Paul.

"In the past", he said, "people used to talk of an 'anti-worship' tendency in the Apostle, of his 'spiritualisation' of the idea of worship. Today we are better able to understand how Paul saw in the Cross a historical watershed that radically transformed and renewed the reality of worship".

Commenting on three texts from the Letter to the Romans, in which St. Paul refers to this "new vision of worship", Benedict XVI explained how in chapter three the Apostle affirms that God put Christ forward "as a sacrifice of atonement by His blood, effective through faith". This, said the Holy Father, indicates that "ancient worship with the sacrifice of animals in the Temple of Jerusalem is finished, ... it has been replaced by real worship: the love of God incarnated in Christ and brought to fulfilment in His death on the Cross. This is not the spiritualisation of real worship, but real worship substituting symbolic and provisional worship".

In chapter twelve, the Pope went on, the Apostle exhorts Christians "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship".

The Holy Father highlighted a "danger of misunderstanding. This new worship could easily be interpreted in a moralistic sense: by offering our lives we ourselves make the new worship. In this way, worship with animals is substituted by moralism in which man does everything himself with his own moral force. And this was certainly not St. Paul's intention".

Only through union with Christ "can we become 'living sacrifice' in Him and with Him, and offer 'true worship'. ... Jesus Christ, in His donation to the Father and to us, does not replace us with

Himself, but carries our being in Himself, our sins and our desire. He represents us and assumes us to Himself. In communion with Christ, achieved in faith and in the Sacraments, we become a living sacrifice, despite all our shortcomings, and 'true worship' is achieved".

The Church, said the Pope, "prays that communities gathered in celebration truly are united with Christ, ... that we might become ... an offer that is pleasing to God and that is glory of God".

Finally, in chapter five of the Letter to the Romans, "St. Paul describes his missionary work among the peoples of the world to construct the universal Church as a priestly activity"; and "the goal of missionary activity is, we could say, cosmic liturgy: that all people united in Christ - the world - may become glory of God".

"The self-giving of Christ", Pope Benedict concluded, "implies the tendency to attract everyone to the communion of His Body, to unite the world. Only in communion with Christ - the model Man, one with God - can the world become as all of us would desire it: a mirror of divine love. This dynamism is ever present in the Eucharist, this dynamism must inspire and shape our lives".