ST. PAUL AND THE SACRAMENTS

VATICAN CITY, 10 DEC 2008 (VIS) - In his general audience this morning, held in the Paul VI Hall in the presence of 5,000 people, Benedict XVI spoke on St. Paul's teaching concerning the Sacraments.

The Holy Father indicated how "from St. Paul we have learned that there is a new beginning of history in Jesus Christ, ... Who is man and God. With Him, Who comes from God, a new history begins, formed by the 'yes' He pronounced to the Father, ... out of love and truth".

"How can we enter", the Pope asked, "into this new beginning, this new history? ... How can Jesus reach my own life, my own being? The fundamental response of St. Paul, of all the New Testament, is: by the Holy Spirit" which "at the Pentecost created the beginning of a new humanity, a new community: the Church, the body of Christ".

The spirit of Christ "touches me within ... using two visible elements: the Word of announcement and the Sacraments, in particular Baptism and the Eucharist. ... Faith comes not from reading but from listening. It is not only an interior experience but a relationship".

"The Word became flesh in Jesus to create a new humanity. For this reason, the Word of announcement becomes Sacrament. ... No-one can baptise himself; ... no-one can become Christian by himself. ... We can only become Christian through the meditation of others, and this gives us the gift of faith. ... Autonomous Christianity is a self-contradiction. ... These 'others' are, in the first place, the community of believers, the Church. ... Only Christ can constitute the Church, Christ is the true giver of the Sacraments".

"Being Christian is more than a cosmetic operation that embellishes life, ... it is a new beginning and rebirth, death and resurrection. ... It is not purely spiritual but involves the body, the

cosmos, and extends to the new earth and to the new heavens".

On the subject of the Eucharist, the Holy Father pointed out that St. Paul speaks of the institution of this Sacrament in his First Letter to the Corinthians, and he explained that "with the gift of the chalice of the new covenant Christ gives us the true sacrifice, the only true sacrifice is the love of the Son".

After highlighting how the Apostle of the Gentiles says that the chalice we bless is communion with the Blood of Christ and the bread we share is communion with the Body of Christ, the Pope pointed out that "Christ unites Himself with each one of us, and with the men and women around us".

Referring then to chapter ten of the First Letter to the Corinthians in which St. Paul speaks of us becoming "one body, for we all partake of the one bread", Benedict XVI affirmed that "the realism of the Church is much more profound and authentic than that of the nation State, because Christ truly gives us His Body, converts us into His Body ... and unites us to one another. ... The Church is not just a corporation like a State, it is a body; it is not an organisation but an organism".

The Pope then recalled how St. Paul defines the Sacrament of Matrimony as "a great mystery. ... Married love has as its model the love of Christ for His Church", he said. "People will enjoy a rewarding experience of true marriage if a constant human and emotive development remains united to the effectiveness of the Word and the significance of Baptism. ... Participating in the Body and the Blood of the Lord consolidates the union and makes it visible, a union that grace then makes indissoluble".