ST. PAUL AND THE EARTHLY FIGURE OF CHRIST

VATICAN CITY, 8 OCT 2008 (VIS) - In this Wednesday's general audience Benedict XVI continued his catechesis on St. Paul. His teaching touched on the Apostle to the Gentiles' relationship with the historical figure of Jesus. The audience was given in St. Peter's Square with over 25,000 people in attendance.

Benedict XVI affirmed that "it seems certain that Paul did not meet Jesus during His earthly life. Through the Apostles and the nascent Church he learned the details of Jesus' life and in his letters we find references to the pre-Easter Jesus". For example, "in an explicit and direct manner", the Apostle speaks of "Jesus' Davidic lineage", of the "existence of his 'brothers'", and knows what occurred at the Last Supper.

The Pauline letters also make reference to the tradition recounted in the synoptic Gospels as "Jesus' teaching regarding the meek and poor. ... When Paul speaks of Jesus' obedience unto death(. he knows of the Passion . of the Cross and the tradition about this Cross is already at the centre of the Pauline 'kerygma'. Paul also knows another pillar of Jesus' teaching, the Sermon on the Mount", as is evident from the Letter to the Romans.

We also note the traces of Jesus' words in the form in which Paul transposes "the pre-Easter tradition to the situation after Easter", as in the "theme of the Kingdom of God ... that announced the mystery of Jesus and was transformed in Christology. Jesus' own instructions for entering the Kingdom of God are valid for Paul in regard to the justification by faith. Both require an attitude of humility and an openness ... in order to receive God's grace".

"Another form of transformation that is faithful to Jesus' core teaching is found in His titles. Before Easter, Jesus calls himself the 'Son of Man' ... and after Easter ... the 'Son of God'. This is why the title preferred by Paul for Jesus is 'Lord', which indicates His divinity". Paul also touches upon Christ's "salvific dimension" when he speaks of "the death of Jesus as ransom, as redemption, liberation, and reconciliation".

"In conclusion, St. Paul does not think of Jesus as a historian would; he does not see Jesus as a figure of the past. He certainly knows the tradition ... regarding His life but does not treat Him as something in the past but as the reality of the living Jesus. ... Jesus lives and speaks with us today. This is the true form of knowing Jesus and the tradition about Him".