THE CROSS HAD A CENTRAL PLACE IN THE LIFE OF ST. PAUL

VATICAN CITY, 29 OCT 2008 (VIS) - In today's general audience, held in St. Peter's Square in the presence of 20,000 faithful, the Pope spoke of St. Paul's theology of the Cross.

The Holy Father recalled how the Apostle of the Gentiles, following his experience on the road to Damascus, changed his life completely. Paul remained deeply marked by "the central significance of the Cross: he understood that Jesus died and rose for everyone. The Cross, then, demonstrated the gratuitous and merciful love of God", he said.

"For St. Paul the Cross had a fundamental primacy in the history of humanity. It is the focal point of his theology because 'Cross' means salvation as grace for all creatures. The theme of the Cross became an essential and principal element of the Apostle's preaching".

Benedict XVI then went on to highlight how "the 'stumbling block' and 'foolishness' of the Cross", of which St. Paul, speaks are to be found "in the fact that where there seemed to be only failure, suffering and defeat, there, in reality, is all the power of God's limitless Love".

"If for the Jews the reason for rejecting the Cross was in the Revelation, in other words in the God of the Fathers, for the Greeks - that is, the pagans - the criterion for opposing the Cross lay in reason. For them, in fact, the Cross was death, foolishness. ... It was clearly inconceivable to imagine that a God could end up on a Cross! And we see how this Greek logic has also become the common logic of our own time".

"Why", the Pope asked, "did St. Paul make the word Cross such a fundamental part of his preaching? The answer", he said, "is not difficult: the Cross reveals 'the power of God' which is different from human power; it reveals, in fact, His love".

For the Apostle "the crucified Christ is wisdom because He truly shows Who God is: the power of love which goes even unto the Cross to save man. God uses means and instruments that to human beings seem to be mere weakness. The crucified Christ reveals, on the one hand, the weakness of man and, on the other, the true power of God, in other words the gratuitousness of love; and precisely this complete gratuitousness of love is true wisdom".

The Holy Father explained how St. Paul, in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, makes "two fundamental affirmations: the one, that Christ, Whom God made to be sin for our sake, died for everyone; and the other, that God reconciled us to Him not counting our trespasses against us. It is from this 'ministry of reconciliation' that all slaves are ransomed".

"St. Paul renounced his own life and committed himself totally to the ministry of reconciliation, of the Cross which is salvation for us all. This is something we must also do. We can find our strength in the humility of love and our wisdom in the weakness to renounce, thus to enter into the strength of God. ... We have to mould our lives on this true wisdom, not living for ourselves, but living in faith in the God of Whom we can all say: 'He loved me and gave Himself for me'".