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Benedict XVI's Homily for Palm Sunday

"His Will Is the Truth and Is Love"

VATICAN CITY, APRIL 5, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of the homily Benedict XVI gave at today's Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Dear Young People!

Jesus went up to Jerusalem for Passover along with a growing crowd of pilgrims. On the last stage of the journey, he had cured the blind Bartimaeus, who had addressed him as Son of David, asking for mercy. Now -- being able to see -- with gratitude he joined the pilgrims. When, at the gates of Jerusalem, Jesus mounts a donkey, the animal symbol of Davidic royalty, joyous certainty erupts among the pilgrims: It is he, the Son of David! Thus they greet Jesus with the messianic acclamation: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," and add: "Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:9). We do not know exactly what the enthusiastic pilgrims imagined the coming kingdom of David to be. But we, have we truly understood the message of the Jesus, Son of David? Have we understood what the kingdom is that he spoke of when he was interrogated by Pilate? Do we understand what it means that this kingdom is not of this world? Or would we like it to be of this world?

St. John, in his Gospel, after the account of the entrance into Jerusalem, reports a series of words of Jesus, in which he explains the essentials of this new type of kingdom. In a first reading of these texts we can distinguish three different images of the kingdom in which the same mystery is always reflected in a different way. John first of all reports that among the pilgrims who "wanted to worship God" during the feast, there were also some Greeks (cf. 12:20). Let us note the fact that the true objective of these pilgrims was to worship God. This corresponds perfectly to what Jesus said on the occasion of the purification of the Temple: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17). The true scope of the pilgrimage must be that of encountering God, to worship him, and, in this way, put the fundamental relationship of our life in right order. The Greeks are persons in search of God, they are on a journey toward God with their lives. Now, with the help of two Greek-speaking apostles, Philip and Andrew, they send this request to the Lord: "We want to see Jesus" (John 12:21). This is essential. Dear friends, that is why we are gathered here together: We want to see Jesus. Thousands of young people went to Sydney last year for this purpose. Certainly they had many expectations about this pilgrimage. But the main objective was this: We want to see Jesus.

What did Jesus say in regard to this request at that time? From the Gospel it is not clear whether there was a meeting between Jesus and those Greeks. Jesus' gaze reaches far higher: "If the grain of wheat falls to the ground and does not die, it will remain alone; but if it dies, it will bear much fruit" (John 12:24). This means that right now a more or less brief discussion with a few persons, who will then return home, is not important. As a grain of wheat dead and risen in a totally new way, that goes beyond the limits of the moment, he will go

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out to meet the world and the Greeks. Through the resurrection Jesus passes beyond the limits of space and time. As the Risen One, he is on a journey toward the vastness of the world and history. Indeed, as the Risen One he goes to the Greeks and speaks with them, he manifests himself to them in such a way that they, the ones who are faraway, draw near and, precisely in their language, in their culture, his word will be carried forward in a new way and understood in a new way -- his kingdom comes. We can thus recognize two essential characteristics of this kingdom. The first is that this kingdom passes through the cross. Because Jesus gives himself totally, he can as the Risen One belong to everyone and make himself present to all. In the Holy Eucharist we receive the fruit of the dead grain of wheat, the multiplication of the loaves that continues to the end of the world and in all times.

The second characteristic is that his kingdom is universal. It fulfills the ancient hope of Israel: this reign of David knows no more borders. It extends "from sea to sea" -- as the prophet Zachariah says (9:10) -- that is, it embraces the whole world. This, however, is only possible because it is not a political kingdom, but is based solely on the free adhesion of love -- a love that, for its part, answers to the love of Jesus Christ that has given itself for all. I think that we must always be learning both things -- first the universality, the catholicity. It means that no one can posit himself as absolute, his culture, his time and his world. This means that we all welcome each other, renouncing something of ourselves. Universality includes the mystery of the cross -- the overcoming of ourselves, obedience toward the universal word of Jesus Christ in the universal Church. Universality is always an overcoming of ourselves, a renunciation of something that is ours. Universality and the cross go together. Only in this way can peace be created.

The saying about the dead grain of wheat is part of Jesus' answer to the Greeks, it is his answer. Then, however, he formulates once again the fundamental law of human existence: "He who loves his life will lose it and he who hates his life in this world will save it for eternal life" (John 12:25). He who wants to have his life for himself, live only for himself, squeeze out everything for himself and exploit all the possibilities -- he is the one who lose his life. It becomes boring and empty. Only in abandoning ourselves, only in the disinterested gift of the "I" in favor of the "Thou," only in the "Yes" to the greater life, precisely the life of God, our life too becomes full and more spacious. Thus, this fundamental principle that the Lord establishes is, in the final analysis, simply identical with the principle of love. Love, in fact, means leaving yourself behind, giving yourself, not wanting to hold on to yourself, but becoming free from yourself: not getting preoccupied with yourself -- what will become of me -- but looking ahead, toward the other - toward God and the people whom he sends to me. It is this principle of love that defines man's journey, it is once again identical with the mystery of the cross, with the mystery of death and resurrection that we encounter in Christ.

Dear friends, perhaps it is relatively easy to accept this grand fundamental vision of life. In concrete reality, however, it is not just a simple matter of recognizing a principle, but of living its truth, the truth of the cross and the resurrection. And for this, once again, just one big decision is not enough. It is surely important at some point to dare to make a fundamental decision, to dare the great "Yes" that the Lord asks of us at a certain moment in our life. But the great "Yes" of the decisive moment in our life -- the "Yes" to the truth that the Lord places before us -- must then be daily re-conquered in the everyday situations in which, again and again, we must abandon our "I," make ourselves available, when, at bottom, we just want to hang on to that "I." Sacrifice, renunciation, also belongs to an upright life. He who permits himself a life without this ever renewed gift of self, deceives people. There is no successful life without sacrifice. If I cast a retrospective glance on my own life, I must say that precisely those moments in which I said "Yes" to renunciation were the great and important moments of my life.

Finally, St. John also put Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Olives in a modified form in his composition for "Palm Sunday." There is first of all the statement, "My soul is troubled" (12:27). Here Jesus' fear appears, which is amply illustrated by the other evangelists -- his fear in the face of the power of death, in the face of the entire abyss of evil that he sees and into which he must descend. The Lord suffers our anxieties together with us, he accompanies us in the last anxiety until we come to the light. Then there follow, in John, Jesus'

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two questions. The first is only expressed conditionally: "What will I say, 'Father, save me from this hour?'" (12:27). As a human being, Jesus also felt driven to ask that he be spared the terror of the passion. We too can pray in this way. We too can lament before the Lord like Job, present all our questions that arise in us in the face of the injustice in the world and the problems affect us personally. Before God we must not take refuge in pious phrases, in a world of make-believe. Praying also means struggling with God, and like Jacob we can say to him: "I will not let you go until you have given me a blessing!" (Genesis 32:37). But then there is Jesus' second request: "Glorify your name!" (John 12:28). The Synoptic Gospels put this request in this way: "Not my will but your will be done!" (Luke 22:42). In the end, God's glory, his lordship, his will is always more important and more true than my thoughts and my will. And this is what is essential in our prayer and in our life: understanding this right order of reality, accepting it interiorly; trusting in God and believing that he is doing the right thing; understanding that his will is the truth and is love; understanding that my life will be a good life if I can learn how to conform to this order. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are the guarantee that we can truly entrust ourselves to God. It is in this way that his kingdom is realized.

Dear friends, at the end of this liturgy, the young people from Australia will give the World Youth Day Cross to the young people of Spain. The Cross is on its way from one side of the world to the other, from sea to sea. And we accompany it. Let us go forth with it along this road and, in this way, find our road. When we touch the cross, indeed, when we carry it, we touch the mystery of God, the mystery of Jesus Christ. The mystery that God so loved the world -- us -- that he gave his only-begotten Son for us (cf. John 3:16). We touch the marvelous mystery of God's love, the only truth that is really redemptive. But we also touch the fundamental law, the constitutive norm of our life, that is, that without the "Yes" of the cross, without walking in communion with Christ day after day, life can never be a success.

The more that, for the love of the great truth and the great love -- for love of the truth and love of God -- we can make some sacrifice, the greater and richer our life will become. He who wants to keep his life for himself will lose it. He who gives his life away -- daily in small gestures, that are part of the great decision -- will find it. This is the exigent truth, a truth that is also deeply beautiful and liberating, in which we want to enter, step by step, on the cross' journey over the continents. May the Lord bless this journey. Amen.

[Translation by Joseph G. Trabbic]

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