



NOVEMBER 28, 2012. THE YEAR OF FAITH. HOW TO SPEAK ABOUT GOD?

The Catechesis of the Holy Father Benedict XVI during the Year of Faith



BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 28 November 2012

[Video]

Year of Faith. How to speak about God?

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The important question we ask ourselves today is: how can we talk about God in our time? How can we communicate the Gospel so as to open roads to his saving truth in our contemporaries' hearts — that are all too often closed — and minds — that are at times distracted by the many dazzling lights of society? Jesus, the Evangelists tell us, asked himself about this as he proclaimed the kingdom of God: "With what can we compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?" (Mk 4:30).

How can we talk about God today? The first answer is that we can talk about God because he has talked to us; so the first condition for speaking of God is listening to all that

God himself has said. God has spoken to us! God is therefore not a distant hypothesis concerning the world's origin; he is not a mathematical intelligence far from us. God takes an interest in us, he loves us, he has entered personally into the reality of our history, he has communicated himself, even to the point of taking flesh. Thus God is a reality of our life, he is so great that he has time for us too, he takes an interest in us. In Jesus of Nazareth we encounter the face of God, who came down from his heaven to immerse himself in the human world, in our world, and to teach "the art of living", the road to happiness; to set us free from sin and make us children of God (cf. Eph 1:5; Rom 8:14). Jesus came to save us and to show us the good life of the Gospel.

Talking about God means first of all expressing clearly what God we must bring to the men and women of our time: not an abstract God, a hypothesis, but a real God, a God who exists, who has entered history and is present in history; the God of Jesus Christ as an answer to the fundamental question of the meaning of life and of how we should live. Consequently speaking of God demands familiarity with Jesus and his Gospel, it implies that we have a real, personal knowledge of God and a strong passion for his plan of salvation without succumbing to the temptation of success, but following God's own method. God's method is that of humility — God makes himself one of us — his method is brought about through the Incarnation in the simple house of Nazareth; through the Grotto of Bethlehem; through the Parable of the Mustard Seed.

We must not fear the humility of taking little steps, but trust in the leaven that penetrates the dough and slowly causes it to rise (cf. Mt 13:33). In talking about God, in the work of evangelization, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must recover simplicity, we must return to the essence of the proclamation: the Good News of a God who is real and effective, a God who is concerned about us, a God-Love who makes himself close to us in Jesus Christ, until the Cross, and who in the Resurrection gives us hope and opens us to a life that has no end, eternal life, true life. St Paul, that exceptional communicator, gives us a lesson that goes straight to the heart of the problem of faith: "how to speak of God" with great simplicity.

In his First Letter to the Corinthians he writes: "When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:1-2).

The first real fact, therefore, is that Paul does not speak of a philosophy that he developed, he does not speak of ideas that he found elsewhere or invented, but of a reality of his life, he speaks of the God who entered his life, he speaks of a real God who is alive, who spoke with him and will speak with us, he speaks of the Crucified and Risen Christ.

The second real fact is that Paul does not seek himself, he does not want to make a fan club for himself, he does not wish to go down in history as the head of a school of great knowledge, he is not self-seeking; rather, St Paul proclaims Christ and wants to gain people for the true and real God. Paul's wish is to speak of and preach the One who entered his life and who is true life, who won him over on the road to Damascus. Therefore, talking about God means making room for the One who enables us to know him, who reveals his face of love to us; it means emptying ourselves of our own ego, offering it to Christ, in the awareness that it is not we who can win over others for God, but that we must expect God to send them, we must entreat God for them. Talking about God therefore stems from listening, from our knowledge of God which is brought about through familiarity with him, through the life of prayer and in accordance with the Commandments.

Communicating faith, for St Paul, did not mean putting himself forward, but rather saying openly and publicly what he had seen and heard in his encounter with Christ, what he had experienced in his life that was transformed by that encounter: it meant putting forward Jesus whom he felt present within him and who became the true orientation of his existence, to make it clear to all that Jesus is necessary to the world and crucial to every person's freedom. The Apostle is not satisfied with proclaiming words but expends

his whole life in the great work of faith. To speak of God, we must leave him room, trusting that he will act in our weakness: we must make room for him without fear but with simplicity and joy, in the deep conviction that the more we put him at the centre rather than ourselves, the more fruitful our communication will be. And this is also true for Christian communities: they are called to show the transforming action of God's grace, by overcoming individualism, closure, selfishness, indifference, by living out God's love in their daily relations. Let us ask ourselves whether our communities really are like this. To be so, we must, always and truly proclaim Christ and not ourselves.

At this point we should ask ourselves: how did Jesus communicate? Jesus, in his oneness, speaks of his Father — *Abba* — and of the Kingdom of God, his gaze full of compassion for the hardships and difficulties of human life. He speaks with great realism and, I would say, that the essential feature of Jesus' proclamation is that it makes clear that our life and the world are worthy of God. Jesus shows that in the world and in Creation God's face shines out and he shows us that God is present in the daily events of our life. Both in the parables on nature, the mustard seed and the field with various seeds, and in our own life — let us think of the parable of the Prodigal Son, of Lazarus and of other parables of Jesus. From the Gospels we see that Jesus takes an interest in every human situation that he encounters, he immerses himself in the reality of the men and women of his time, with complete trust in the Father's help. And that in this history, although hidden, God is really present and if we are attentive we can encounter him. And the disciples, who live with Jesus, the crowds who meet him, see his reaction to the most disparate problems, they see how he speaks, how he behaves; in him they see the action of the Holy Spirit, the action of God. In him proclamation and life are interwoven: Jesus acts and teaches, always starting from a close relationship with God the Father. This style becomes an essential indication for us as Christians: our way of living in faith and charity becomes a way of speaking of God today, because it shows, through a life lived in Christ, the credibility and realism of what we say with words, which are not solely words but reveal the reality, the true reality. And in this we must take care to perceive the signs of the times in our epoch, namely, to identify the potentials, aspirations and obstacles we encounter in today's culture and in particular the wish for authenticity, the yearning for transcendence, and concern to safeguard Creation and to communicate fearlessly the response that faith in God offers.

The Year of Faith is an opportunity for us to discover, our imaginations fired by the Holy Spirit, new paths to take on a personal and community level so that the power of the Gospel may become wisdom of life and an orientation for existence everywhere.

In our time too, the family, the first school for communicating the faith to the new generations, is a privileged place in which to talk about God. The Second Vatican Council speaks of parents as the first messengers of God (cf. Dogmatic Constitution, Decree *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 11). Parents are called to rediscover their mission, assuming responsibility in educating, in opening the consciences of their little ones to love of God as a fundamental service to their life and in being the first catechists and teachers of the faith for their children. And in this task *watchfulness* is of the utmost importance. It means being able to take favourable opportunities to introduce the topic of faith in the family and to develop a critical reflection with regard to the many forms of conditioning to which children are subjected.

The parents' attention includes their sensitivity in perceiving the possible religious questions latent in their children's minds, at times obvious but at other times hidden. Then, *joy*: the communication of faith must always have joyful tones. It is the Easter joy that does not stay silent or conceal the realities of pain, of suffering, of effort, of difficulty, of incomprehension and of death itself, but that can offer criteria for interpreting all things in the perspective of Christian hope. The good life of the Gospel is precisely this new perception, this capacity to see God with one's own eyes in every situation. It is important to help all the members of the family understand that faith is not a burden but a source of profound joy, that it is perceiving God's action, recognizing the presence of goodness that does not make a sound; and it offers precious guidance for living life well. Lastly, the *capacity for listening and for dialogue*: the family must be a milieu in which we learn

to be together, to settle disagreements in conversation with each other, which consists in listening and speaking, in mutual understanding and love, so as to be a sign for each other of God's merciful love.

So it is that talking about God means making people realize through our speech and example, that God is no rival in our existence but rather is its true guarantor, who guarantees the greatness of the human person. Thus we return to the beginning: speaking of God is communicating what is essential, forcefully and simply, through our words and through our life: the God of Jesus Christ, that God who showed us a love so great that he took flesh, died and rose again for us: that God who asks us to follow him and to let ourselves be transformed by his immense love in order to renew our life and our relationships; that God who has given us the Church, so that we may walk together and, through the word and the sacraments, renew the entire city of men and women, so that it may become a City of God.

To special groups:

I offer a cordial welcome to the members and associates of the Catholic Medical Missionary Board, with gratitude for their charitable concern for the health care needs of our brothers and sisters in developing countries. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience, including the groups from Nigeria, Korea and the United States of America, I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.

APPEAL

World AIDS Day will be celebrated on 1 December to draw attention to a disease that has taken a toll of millions of lives and caused tragic human suffering, particularly acute in the world's poorest regions that only with great difficulty have access to effective medicines. My thoughts turn in particular to the large number of children who contract the virus from their mothers every year, despite the preventive treatment that exists. I encourage the many projects in the context of the ecclesial mission that are being promoted to eliminate this scourge.

* * *

Lastly, I address an affectionate thought to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. May the Season of Advent that is about to begin be an incentive to you, dear *young people*, to rediscover the importance of faith in Christ; may it help you, dear *sick people*, to face your suffering with you gaze turned to the Infant Jesus; may it increase in you, dear *newlyweds*, the meaning of God's presence in your new family.

© Copyright 2012 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana