



DECEMBER 12, 2012. THE YEAR OF FAITH. THE STAGES OF THE REVELATION

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



BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

PAUL VI AUDIENCE HALL
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[VIDEO]

Year of Faith. The stages of the Revelation

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In our Catechesis last week I spoke of the Revelation of God as a communication he makes of himself and of his benevolent and loving purpose. This Revelation of God fits into human time and history: a history that becomes “the arena where we see what God does for humanity. God comes to us in the things we know best and can verify most easily, the things of our everyday routine, apart from which we cannot understand ourselves” (cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, n. 12).

St Mark the Evangelist — as we have heard — records the very start of Jesus’ preaching in clear and concise words: “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk 1:15). What illuminates and gives full meaning to the history of the world and of man begins

to shine out in the Bethlehem Grotto; it is the Mystery which, in a little while, we shall be contemplating at Christmas: salvation, brought about in Jesus Christ. In Jesus of Nazareth God shows his face and asks man to choose to recognize and follow him. God's revelation of himself in history in order to enter into a relationship of loving dialogue with man, gives new meaning to the whole human journey. History is not a mere succession of centuries, years or days, but the time span of a presence that gives full meaning and opens it to sound hope.

Where can we read the stages of this Revelation of God? Sacred Scripture is the best place for discovering the steps of this process, and, I would like — once again — to invite everyone, in this Year of Faith, to open the Bible more often, to hold, read and meditate on it and to pay greater attention to the Readings of Sunday Mass; all this is precious nourishment for our faith. In reading the Old Testament we can see how God intervenes in the history of the chosen people, the people with whom he made a covenant: these are not fleeting events that fade into oblivion. Rather, they become a "memory", taken together they constitute the "history of salvation", kept alive in the consciousness of the People of Israel through the celebration of the salvific events. Thus, in the Book of Exodus, the Lord instructs Moses to celebrate the Jewish Passover, the great event of the liberation from slavery in Egypt, with these words: "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever" (12:14).

Commemorating what God has brought about becomes a sort of constant imperative for the whole People of Israel, so that the passing of time may be marked by the living memory of past events which, in this way, day after day, form history and live on.

In the Book of Deuteronomy Moses addresses the people saying: "Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children" (4:9).

Consequently he also tells us: "be careful not to forget the things that God has done for us". Faith is nourished by the discovery and memory of the ever faithful God who guides history and constitutes the sound and permanent foundation on which to build our life. The Cantic of the *Magnificat*, which the Virgin Mary addresses to God, is a lofty example of this history of salvation, of this memory that makes and keeps God's action present. Mary exalts God's merciful action in the actual journey of his people, his fidelity to the promises of the covenant that he made to Abraham and his descendants; and all this is a living memory of the divine presence that is never absent (cf. Lk 1:46-55).

For Israel, the Exodus is the central historical event in which God reveals his powerful action. God sets the Israelites free from slavery in Egypt so that they may return to the Promised Land and worship him as the one true Lord. Israel does not set out to be a people like others — so that it might have national independence — but also to serve God in worship and in life, to create a place for God where men and women are obedient to him, where God is present and worshipped in the world — and of course, not only among the Israelites — but to witness to him also among the other peoples.

The celebration of this event is to make him present here and now, so that God's action may not be lacking. He fulfilled his plan of liberation and continues to pursue it so that men and women may recognize and serve their Lord and respond to his action with faith and love.

So it was that God revealed himself not only in the primordial act of the Creation, but also by entering our history, the history of a small people which was neither the largest nor the strongest. And this self-revelation of God, which develops through history, culminates in Jesus Christ: God, the *Logos*, the creative Word who is the origin of the world, took on flesh in Jesus and in him showed the true face of God.

In Jesus every promise is fulfilled, the history of God with humanity culminates in him. When we read the account of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus which St Luke has written down for us, we become clearly aware of the fact that the Person of Christ illuminates the Old Testament, the whole history of salvation, and shows the great unitive design of the two Testaments, it shows the path to his oneness. Jesus, in fact, explains to the two bewildered and disappointed wayfarers that he is the fulfilment of every promise: “and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (24:27). The Evangelist records the exclamation of the two disciples after they had recognized that their travelling companion was the Lord: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” (v. 32).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes the development of Divine Revelation (cf. nn. 54-64): From the very first the Lord invited men and women to intimate communion with himself and, even when through disobedience they lost his friendship, God did not abandon them to the power of death but time and again offered them covenants (cf. *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer IV).

The *Catechism* retraces God’s journey with man from the Covenant with Noah after the flood, to the call to Abraham to leave his land to be made the father of a multitude of peoples. God forms his People Israel in the event of the Exodus, in the Covenant of Sinai and in the gift, through Moses, of the Law, in order to be recognized and served as the one living and true God. With the prophets, God forms his People in the hope of salvation.

We know — through Isaiah — of the “second Exodus”, the return of the People from the Babylonian Captivity to their own land, its refoundation; at the same time, however, many were dispersed and in this way began the universality of this faith. In the end, not only a King, David, a son of David, was awaited, but a “Son of man”, the salvation of all peoples. Encounters between cultures took place, first with Babylon and Syria, then also with the Greek multitude. Thus we see how God’s path broadens, how it unfolds increasingly towards the Mystery of Christ, King of the Universe. In Christ the Revelation in its fullness, God’s benevolent purpose, is brought about at last: he makes himself one of us.

I have reflected on remembering God’s action in human history to show the stages of this great plan of love, witnessed in the Old and New Testaments. It is a single plan of salvation, addressed to the whole of humanity, gradually revealed and realized through the power of God, in which God always reacts to man’s responses and finds the new beginnings of a covenant when man strays.

This is fundamental in the journey of faith. We are in the liturgical season of Advent which prepares us for Holy Christmas. As we all know, “advent” means “coming”, “presence”, and in ancient times it meant, precisely, the arrival of the king or emperor in a specific province. For Christians the word means a marvellous and overwhelming reality: God himself has crossed the threshold of his heaven and has lowered himself to man; he has made a covenant with him, entering the history of a people; he is a king who came down to this poor province which is the earth, and made a gift to us of his visit, taking our flesh and becoming a man like us. Advent invites us to retrace the journey of this presence and reminds us over and over again that God did not take himself away from the world, he is not absent, he has not left us to ourselves, but comes to meet our needs in various ways that we must learn to discern. And we too, with our faith, our hope and our charity, are called every day to perceive this presence and to witness to it in the world that is often superficial and distracted, and to make the light that illuminated the Grotto of Bethlehem shine out. Thank you.

To special groups:

I offer a cordial welcome to the newly professed Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity. My greeting also goes to the group of visitors from Oklahoma Wesleyan University. Upon all the English- speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.

Lastly, a thought for the *young people*, the *sick*, and the *newlyweds*. Today we are celebrating the Memorial of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas and also Patroness of the New Evangelization. Dear *young people*, may you learn at Mary's school to love and to hope; dear *sick people*, may the Blessed Virgin be a companion and comfort to you in your suffering; and you, dear *newlyweds*, entrust your journey through married life to the Mother of Jesus.

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