

Eucharistic Concelebration on the Vigil of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Emmanuel Community - Emmanuel School of Mission
Domus Aurelia, Via Aurelia 218
Rome, 11 June 2015, 6.30 p.m.

Introduction

Dear Brothers in Priestly Service,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Tomorrow is the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. This is why, this evening, we will celebrate the Vigil Mass for this liturgical feast so dear to your community, because of your summer meetings in the Sanctuary of Paray-le-Monial.

More than thirty years ago, on March 1st 1984, I began working as private secretary to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. As a 'gift of welcome' he gave me a copy of his newly published book, *Schauen auf den Durchbohrten. Versuche einer spirituellen Christologie* - "Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology".¹ In this collection of essays there is one on the veneration of the Heart of Jesus, placed inside a larger biblical and theological context: *The Paschal Mystery. Content and deep foundation of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*.²

Faced with the sharp fall-off in practicing this devotion in Germany, Cardinal Ratzinger tried to rehabilitate and resituate this devotion within a broader context of biblical theology, anthropology and liturgy. This evening's brief meditation wishes to support this task, but from another the point of view, relevant to a Solemnity of Jesus Christ, He who is Emmanuel and Redeemer of the whole of humanity, and therefore of each one of us.

¹ Cfr. Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger, *Schauen auf den Durchbohrten. Versuche einer spirituellen Christologie*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1984. La dedica autografa dice: "Für Don Clemens zum Einstand in unsere Kongregation herzliche Glückwünsche. + Joseph Card. Ratzinger, 6. 3. 1984." Cito la traduzione italiana: Joseph Ratzinger, *Guardare al Crocifisso*. Fondazione teologica di una cristologia spirituale., Jaca Book, Milano 1992; Benedetto XVI, *Lettera al Preposito Generale della Compagnia di Gesù in occasione del 50° anniversario dell'Enciclica Haurietis Aquas*, 15 maggio 2006, in: *Insegnamenti* II/1, 604-608; Benedetto XVI, *Volgeranno lo sguardo a colui che hanno trafitto* (Gv 19,37). Messaggio per la Quaresima 2007, 21 nov. 2006, in: *Insegnamenti* II/2 (2006), 655-658.

² Ratzinger, *Guardare* 43-61.

Homily

(Jn. 19: 31-37)

«*Look to him whom they have pierced*»

Dear Brothers in Priestly Service,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As I said earlier, this homily wishes to follow the efforts made by the Theologian and cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to make the veneration of the Heart of Jesus more accessible and more fervent. For this reason, I propose that we meditate on two verses from today's Gospel: "*When they came to Jesus, seeing that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one of the soldiers struck his side with a lance, and immediately came out blood and water*" (Jn. 19: 33 et post).³

What do these phrases say to us on the vigil of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus? How do they prepare us to celebrate more worthily this Feast-day of the Lord?

Modern medical science considers possible that blood and water could have come out the side of Jesus after his death.⁴ This description also corresponds to the widespread conception in Antiquity that Man was composed (in equal parts) of two elements: blood and water.⁵ Obviously, the Gospel transcends this vision and carries a much more penetrating content, because these two substances – blood and water – contain a deep symbolism.⁶

1. From Jesus side "*blood came out...*" – "*ἔξῆλθεν εὐθὺς αἷμα ...*"

To correctly understand the meaning of the blood that comes from Jesus' side we must bring together two corner stones of John's theology: 1) the role of the devil in the "world" and in the theology of the death of Jesus; and 2) the dynamism of the Passion chronology which culminates in Passover Day, that is to say Good Friday, the last day of the liturgical feast of Pessah.⁷

The κόσμος, in the vision of John the Evangelist, is under the dominion of the "prince of this world"⁸, called "devil" or "satan" in other passages⁹. The evil one is, for John, "from the beginning a murderer"¹⁰ and for this reason intimately linked to death, so much so that the κόσμος is a house

³ Cfr. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium* 13-21, in: HThK NT V/3, 337-341; part. 344 s.3; Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*. Kapitel 11-21, in: ÖTK 4/2, 705-709; Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*, in: ThK NT 4/2, 279-285; Charles Kingsley Barrett, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, in: KEK 534-537.

⁴ Cfr. Barrett, *Das Evangelium* 534; cfr. la posizione opposta: Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium* 338 s.

⁵ Cfr. Wengst, *Johannesevangelium* 282; Becker, *Das Evangelium* 707.

⁶ Cfr. Barrett, *Das Evangelium* 534

⁷ Cfr. Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, *Der Tod Jesu im Johannesevangelium*. Die erste Abschiedsrede als Schlüsseltext für den Passions- und Osterbericht, Editore Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 2004, 423-444; Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, „*Und er übergab den Geist*“ (Joh 19,30). Das Sterben Jesu nach Johannes, in: Jahrbuch der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen 2004, Göttingen 2005, 165-175; Rainer Metzner, *Das Verständnis der Sünde im Johannesevangelium*, Collana: Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, vol. 122, Editore Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2000, 115-158.

⁸ Cfr. Gv 12,31;14,30 s.; 16,11.

⁹ Cfr. Gv 8,44; 12,2.27.

¹⁰ Cfr. Gv 8,44.

for the dead where the denier of life reigns.¹¹ IN John's concept of redemption, eternal life is only possible when the "prince of this world" has been cast out and where, at the same time "all" are drawn towards Jesus who is lifted up on the cross.¹²

John presents the Passover Lamb explicitly: Jesus dies in the afternoon of Passover day at the same time that the lambs are sacrificed in the temple¹³ and the command in the book of Exodus to not break the lambs' legs is thus accomplished (cf. *Ex.* 12:46; *Nm* 9:12)¹⁴.

At the foundation of this is the ancient conception of apotropaic power (the power to ward off evil) that the blood of paschal lambs was held to possess, considered capable of casting out the evil one.¹⁵ In this context we should remember the prescriptions for the "passing over of the Lord" in the book of Exodus 12:21-23. The power of the devil, and therefore the power of death, as defeated by Jesus through his blood poured out on Mount Golgotha, because it carries the strength to push back death and to create life, in union with the water that flows from his side at the same time.

2. "... and water" - «... καὶ ὕδωρ»

The symbolism of the water should also be understood bearing in mind its Old Testament background and that of Judaism and primitive Christianity. It is enough start with the eschatological gift of the Spirit mind, such as in the book of the Prophet Ezekiel (*Ez* 37)¹⁶, or of the eschatological source that flows out from the Temple of Jerusalem¹⁷. Here we find water as the symbol of the Spirit of God in the prophets Isaiah (cf. *Is* 44:3) and *Ezekiel* (cf. *Ez* 36:25 et post.), and in the prophet Jeremiah we discover God as the source of living water (cf. *Jer* 2:13).¹⁸

John is interpreting these texts in a Christological way (Jesus as source, as eschatological Temple) and in a Pneumatological way, and as a background for piercing Christ's side with a lance. This is confirmed by the existence of a network of metaphors throughout his Gospel on the theme of thirst and water¹⁹. In the episode of Christ's being pierced, three important passages in John's Gospel are linked through the pneumatological aspect: Jn. 4:14: "who drinks of the water I will give will no longer have thirst in eternity. Rather, the water that I will give will become in him a source of water that gushes forth for eternal life"; Jn. 7: 37-38: "If someone is thirsty let him come to me, and let him drink who believes in me. As Scripture says – from his entrails will flow out rivers of running water"; and John 19:34: "But one of the soldiers struck his side with a lance, and immediately blood and water came out". John had previously cited Jesus words to Nicodemus on the necessity of being born from water and the Spirit (Jn. 3:5).

¹¹ Cfr. Jürgen Becker, *Johanneisches Christentum*. Seine Geschichte und Theologie im Überblick, Editore Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2004, 147.

¹² Cfr. *Gv* 12,31-33.

¹³ Cfr. *Gv* 19,14; Becker, *Das Evangelium* 709: "Waren die Juden gerade beacht, die Gesetze ihres Kultes streng einzuhalten (18,28; 19,31), um durch die Passafeier Heilszuwendung Gottes erfahren zu können, so ist diese ganze Kultpraxis überholt (4,22-26) angesichts des wahren Passalammes Jesus (vgl. 1 Kor 5,7), der allein Gottesoffenbarung bringt (1,18; 5,37f.).

¹⁴ Cfr. *Gv* 12,31-33.

¹⁵ L'aggettivo «apotropaico» (dal greco αποτρέπειν, *apotrèpein* = "allontanare") viene solitamente attribuito ad un oggetto o persona atti a scongiurare, allontanare o annullare influssi maligni. Si parla ad esempio di monile apotropaico, rito o gesto apotropaico.

¹⁶ Cfr. anche *Zc* 12, 9-14; *Gl* 3,1-5.

¹⁷ Cfr. *Ez* 47,1-12; *Zc* 14,8; *Gl* 4,18; *Ap* 22,1; *Gv* 2,21.

¹⁸ Cfr. anche *Ger* 55,1-3.

¹⁹ Cfr. Michael Theobald, *Herrenworte im Johannesevangelium*, Collana: Herder's biblische Studien 34, ed. da Hans-Josef Klauck/Erich Zenger, Editore Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2002, 455.

Jesus says to the Samaritan woman that the living water is God's gift and that he himself will give it²⁰. John also explicitly refers these rivers of living water to the Holy Spirit: "He said this of the Spirit that was to be received by those who believed in him: in fact there was not the Spirit yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified" (Jn. 7:39).

If we summarise the aspects underlined so far, it is clear that with blood and water that come from Jesus body, John makes explicit the redemptive meaning of his death, particularly so with the presentation of the crucified Jesus as source of the Spirit who gives life²¹. The blood of the true Paschal Lamb that was poured out on Passover Day casts out the "prince of this world" and – through its union with the water of the Holy Spirit – creates on the Cross a space from which the evil one has been expelled²², and where he can no longer do his evil and homicidal work²³: where death has no power any more.

With the affirmation that the Lord lifted up on the cross "draws all to himself"²⁴ what is promised to those who believe is the passage into life²⁵. This is because, for John, salvation is giving life where there was death! The Son who "has life in himself"²⁶ came into the world to give life to those where were dead²⁷. This happens through his word²⁸ which by way of the Spirit²⁹ possesses this life-giving quality: because "the Spirit gives life"³⁰. The Son gives life to those to whom he wishes to do so³¹, in so much as from the Cross he gives the Spirit³² and is "looked upon" by his community gathered in faith as being the crucified and risen giver of the Spirit³³.

3. Look "towards he who has been pierced" (cf. Jn. 19:37)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the background of these reflections what appears clearly is that Saint John wants us to turn our eyes "towards the one whom they pierced" (cf. Jn. 19:37; Zc 12:10). The believers who look towards Him see on the Cross the giver of the Holy Spirit and the source of the two fundamental sacraments of the Church: Baptism and the Eucharist³⁴.

The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a Christological and Pneumatological celebration. It reminds us of the ultimate motivation of the redemption accomplished on the Cross, and it encourages us to accept the gift of the Holy Spirit for our ecclesial life and our personal life. Looking "to-

²⁰ Cfr. Gv 4,10.

²¹ Cfr. Schnackenburg, *Johannesevangelium* 344 s.; Barrett, *Das Evangelium* 534: "Höchstwahrscheinlich sah Joh dann in dem Austreten von Blut und Wasser aus der durchbohrten Seite Christie in Symbol für die Tatsache, dass von dem Gekreuzigten jene lebendigen Ströme ausgingen, durch welche die Menschen erquickt werden und die Kirche lebt."

²² Cfr. Gv 12,31.

²³ Cfr. Gv 8,40-44.

²⁴ Cfr. Gv 12,32 s.

²⁵ Cfr. Gv 5,24.

²⁶ Cfr. Gv 5,26.

²⁷ Cfr. Gv 5,21.

²⁸ Cfr. Gv 5,24; 11,43 s.

²⁹ Cfr. Gv 6,63.68.

³⁰ Cfr. Gv 6,63.

³¹ Cfr. Gv 5,21.

³² Cfr. Gv 19,34.

³³ Cfr. Gv 19,37 = Zc 12,10.

³⁴ Cfr. Barrett, *Das Evangelium* 534: „Brown [...] hat wahrscheinlich recht, wenn er hier einen sekundären, aber eben nur einen sekundären Verweis auf die Sakramente sieht, und zwar deutlicher für die Taufe als für die Eucharistie“; Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium* 282; Becker, *Das Evangelium* 706 s.

wards the one who was pierced” takes place in the liturgical assembly of the Church, and it expresses the encounter with the Risen One, in the Holy Spirit.

To conclude these reflections, I would like to use the words of Cardinal Ratzinger in the conclusion of his essay, written thirty years ago. They were written as part of his contribution to a Congress on the Sacred Heart that took place in Toulouse (24th-28th July 1981). He wrote: “The Heart of Jesus is not self-preservation, rather it is self-donation. This Heart saves the world in opening itself... In the Heart of Jesus, what is placed before us is the centre of Christianity... This Heart calls out to our hearts. It invites us to escape from our useless attempts and self-conservation and to discover together in loving, in the gift of ourselves to him and with him, the fullness of love, love which alone is eternal and which alone conserves the world.”³⁵

Amen.

✠ *Bishop Josef Clemens,
Secretary, Pontifical Council for the Laity,
Vatican City*

³⁵ Ratzinger, *Guardare* 61.