

Pope Reflects on Message of Christ's Empty Tomb

Leaves Holy Land With Words of Hope

JERUSALEM, MAY 15, 2009 (Zenit.org).- As Benedict XVI ended his eight-day pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he offered the region a reflection on the message of Christ's empty tomb: a message of hope and of the victory of good over evil.

The Pope delivered this message today during a visit to the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, hours before he left the region to return to Rome.

Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land, along with delegates of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and the Armenian Apostolic Church, accompanied the Pope through the doors of the basilica, representing the three principle Churches responsible for organizing the worship in the basilica.

The Holy Father knelt on the floor to kiss and pray for a few moments Stone of Anointing, where tradition says Christ's body was washed and prepared for burial after being taken down from the cross.

Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the custos of the Holy Land, then invoked the Te Deum as the Pontiff entered the chapel containing the Holy Sepulcher, where Christ is believed to have been buried before rising on Easter Sunday.

"Standing in this holy place, and pondering that wondrous event," Benedict XVI asked afterward during a short meditation, "how can we not be 'cut to the heart?'"

"Here Christ died and rose, never to die again. Here the history of humanity was decisively changed.

"The long reign of sin and death was shattered by the triumph of obedience and life; the wood of the cross lay bare the truth about good and evil; God's judgment was passed on this world and the grace of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon humanity.

"Here Christ, the new Adam, taught us that evil never has the last word, that love is stronger than death, that our future, and the future of all humanity, lies in the hands of a faithful and provident God."

A gift of the Spirit

"The empty tomb speaks to us of hope," the Pontiff affirmed. "The hope that does not disappoint because it is the gift of the Spirit of life.

"May hope rise up ever anew, by God's grace, in the hearts of all the people dwelling in these lands! May it take root in your hearts, abide in your families and communities, and inspire in each of you an ever more faithful witness to the Prince of Peace!

"The Church in the Holy Land, which has so often experienced the dark mystery of Golgotha, must never cease to be an intrepid herald of the luminous message of hope which this empty tomb proclaims."

The Pope recalled the message of the Gospel, which "reassures us that God can make all things new, that history need not be repeated, that memories can be healed, that the bitter fruits of recrimination and hostility can be overcome, and that a future of justice, peace, prosperity and cooperation can arise for every man and woman, for the whole human family, and in a special way for the people who dwell in this land so dear to the heart of the Savior."

"May our contemplation of this mystery spur our efforts, both as individuals and as members of the ecclesial community, to grow in the life of the Spirit through conversion, penance and prayer," he continued. "May it help us to overcome, by the power of that same Spirit, every conflict and tension born of the flesh, and to remove every obstacle, both within and without, standing in the way of our common witness to Christ and the reconciling power of his love."

The Holy Father urged those in the Holy Land to contemplate the empty tomb of the Savior: "In that tomb it is called to bury all its anxieties and fears, in order to rise again each day and continue its journey through the streets of Jerusalem, Galilee and beyond, proclaiming the triumph of Christ's forgiveness and the promise of new life."

"The peace for which this strife-torn land yearns has a name," he added, revealing it to be Jesus Christ.

"He is our peace," the Pontiff said, "who reconciled us to God in one body through the Cross, bringing an end to hostility. Into his hands, then, let us entrust all our hope for the future, just as in the hour of darkness he entrusted his spirit into the Father's hands."

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