ST. PAUL AND THE APOSTLES

VATICAN CITY, 24 SEP 2008 (VIS) - During his general audience, held this morning in St. Peter's Square in the presence of some 15,000 faithful, Benedict XVI continued his catechesis on the life and work of St. Paul, focusing today on his relationship with the Apostles.

St. Paul, he said, "though he was practically a contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth, never had the opportunity of meeting Him during His public life. For this reason ... he felt the need to consult the Master's first disciples, who had been chosen by Him to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth".

Thus, in his Letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of his meetings with Peter, James and John, whom he recognises as "pillars of the Church, while in his Letter to the Corinthians he makes it clear that for him Christ's words at the Last Supper are "the centre of the life of the Church", said the Pope.

"The words of the Last Supper", the Holy Father explained, "on the one hand demonstrate that the Eucharist illuminates the curse of the cross, making it a blessing, while on the other they explain the scope of Jesus' death and resurrection. ... The Church is built and recognises herself as the 'Body of Christ', from and in the Eucharist".

Christ's resurrection affects the present existence of believers, affirmed the Pope. We can say that "He is risen and continues to live in the Eucharist and in the Church".

"The importance Paul assigns to the living Tradition of the Church, which he transmits to his communities, shows how wrong is the view that attributes the invention of Christianity to him. Before evangelising in the name of Jesus Christ, his Lord, he met Him on the road to Damascus and frequented Him in the Church, observing His life in the Twelve and in those who had followed Him along the roads of Galilee.

"In forthcoming catecheses", the Holy Father added, "we will have the opportunity to give deeper consideration to the contributions Paul made to the early Church. Yet the mission he received from the Risen One concerning the evangelisation of the Gentiles needed to be confirmed and guaranteed by those who gave him ... their right hand in a sign of approval and acceptance".

"The more we seek the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth along the roads of Galilee", Benedict XVI concluded, "the more we understand that He assumed our humanity, sharing it in everything except in sin. Our faith is not born of a myth, nor of an idea, but of a meeting with the Risen One in the life of the Church".