CALLED TO LIVE IN CHRIST'S LOVE FOR OTHERS

VATICAN CITY, 26 NOV 2008 (VIS) - Continuing his series of catecheses on St. Paul, in this morning's general audience, held in the Paul VI Hall, the Pope spoke of the consequences deriving from justification by the faith and by the action of the Spirit in Christian life.

In his Letter to the Galatians, the Apostle of the Gentiles "gives radical emphasis to the gratuitousness of justification" and "highlights the relationship between faith and works", said the Pope.

In the same Letter, St, Paul says that "by bearing one another's burdens, believers fulfil the commandment of love. Justified by the gift of faith in Christ, we are called to live in Christ's love for others, because it is on this criterion that we will be judged at the end of our lives".

"Christ's love for us ... claims us, welcomes us, embraces us, sustains us; it even torments us because it forces us not to live for ourselves alone, closed in our own selfishness, by for 'Him Who died and has risen for us'. The love of Christ makes us become, in Him, the 'new creation' that is part of his mystical Body which is the Church.

"Seen in this light", the Holy Father added, "the central importance of justification without works, the main object of Paul's preaching, presents no contradiction to faith working through love, on the contrary it requires that our own faith be expressed in a life in accordance with the Spirit".

Going on then to refer to "the unfounded conflict" some people have seen "between the theology of St. Paul and that of St. James", the Pope pointed out that while the former "is primarily concerned with showing that faith in Christ is necessary and sufficient, James stresses the consequent relationship between faith and works. Hence, for both Paul and James, faith working through love bears witness to the free gift of justification in Christ".

The Pope noted how "we often fall into the same misunderstandings that characterised the community of Corinth. Those Christians thought that having been gratuitously justified in Christ by faith, 'all things are lawful for them'. Often, we too think it is lawful to create divisions within the Church, Body of Christ, celebrating the Eucharist without caring for our brethren in need, or aspiring to the most exalted charisms unaware that we are limbs of one another, etc. The consequences of a faith not incarnated in love are disastrous because it is reduced to the arbitrariness of subjectivism, harmful to us and to our fellow men and women".

"What we must do", he went on, "is gain a renewed awareness that, precisely because we have been justified in Christ, we are no longer our own but have become temples of the Spirit and hence are called to glorify God in our bodies. We would undervalue the priceless value of justification if, bought at a high price by the blood of Christ, we did not glorify it with our body, with all our lives".

"If the ethics which St. Paul proposes to believers do not deteriorate into forms of moralism but retain their importance for us today, this is because ... they are rooted in the individual and community relationship with Christ, to then take concrete form in a life lived according to the Spirit. The essential point is that Christian ethics do not arise from a system of commandments", the Pope concluded, "they are a consequence of our friendship with Christ. This friendship influences our lives, if it is real it is incarnated and fulfilled in love for others. That is why any form of ethical decline is not limited to the individual sphere but is, at the same time, a devaluation of individual and community faith, from which it derives and upon which it has an incisive effect".