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VATICAN - "AVE MARIA" by Mgr. Luciano Alimandi - "Who do you say that I am?"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16,15). This question which the Lord put to his disciples at Caesarea di Philippi, presents itself with the same intensity to us. The answer cannot affect the figure of Christ since as God and man he is the same "yesterday, today and always" (Heb 13, 8). But for us as human beings the answer determines the course of life. If we can answer with words and deeds that Jesus is the Lord, our Saviour, then our existence will be increasingly in conformity with Him. We are in communion with God and this communion transforms us, making us new creatures.

This was the experience lived by those first men and women who converted to Jesus. Simon Peter because like the other disciples, "he believed and acknowledged" that "Jesus Christ is the Holy One of God " realised that life without Him would have been in vain and confessed to the Lord: "Lord to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life " (cfr. Jn 6, 68-69).

Who do you say that I am? What will be the answer of those not in communion with Jesus in faith and love. To know the Lord we must believe in Him and love Him, in other words we must be disciples, "followers of Jesus", which in the language of the Gospel means believing in Him and trusting in his Word. In this way love will permeate the whole life of those who believe in Christ and this Love, that is the Holy Spirit, will change everything about them.

Since every person is a being in relation, there must be relationships, but if this does not include a relationship with God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit… what will become of this life? If instead a relationship with the Lord is established by "remaining" in Him (cfr. Jn 15, 4), so often heard in the Gospel of St John, life changes because we are no longer isolated we are in communion with the Risen Lord and with all the redeemed on the way to eternity.

Authentic conversion is precisely proprio "remaining" in contact with Jesus. Conversion is not something which happens once and for all, it continues day after day. God gave us will, intelligence and memory the faculties of our soul which we must turn decidedly "convert" to Jesus.. If we do this we experience a special power, providence directing and enveloping our life, a love which never tires of loving and a peace which is ever deeper.

The Year of St Paul we have just begun will help us not to delay on the path of personal conversion and to welcome the light which is Christ. During the Liturgy this light of truth and grace becomes especially intense and it is "right", in every Mass to give thanks and praise to God offering Him our heart open wide.

For a believer in Christ worthy participation at Mass means responding with adoration, praise and offering of one's life to the question: "who do you say that I am?".

The Holy Father Benedict XVI helps us to live the celebration of the Mass with due dignity when he says " In the early Church there was a custom whereby the Bishop or the priest, after the homily, would cry out to the faithful: "Conversi ad Dominum" – turn now towards the Lord. This meant in the first place that they would turn towards the East, towards the rising sun, the sign of Christ returning, whom we go to meet when we celebrate the Eucharist. Where this was not possible, for some reason, they would at least turn towards the image of Christ in the apse, or towards the Cross, so as to orient themselves inwardly towards the Lord. Fundamentally, this involved an interior event; conversion, the turning of our soul towards Jesus Christ and thus towards the living God, towards the true light. Linked with this, then, was the other exclamation that still today, before the Eucharistic Prayer, is addressed to the community of the faithful: "Sursum corda" – "Lift up your hearts", high above all our misguided concerns, desires, anxieties and thoughtlessness – "Lift up your hearts, your inner selves!" In both exclamations we are summoned, as it were, to a renewal of our Baptism: Conversi ad Dominum – we must always turn away from false paths, onto which we stray so often in our thoughts and actions. We must turn ever anew towards him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We must be converted ever anew, turning with our whole life

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towards the Lord. And ever anew we must withdraw our hearts from the force of gravity, which pulls them down, and inwardly we must raise them high: in truth and love." (Benedict XVI, Holy Saturday, 22 March 2008).

May Our Lady help us keep our hearts and minds open to the Lord Jesus as the Pope urges us to do. May she lead us like children to the Source of Life, the Most Holy Eucharist to quench our longing for love and unity. (Agenzia Fides 2/7/2008)

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