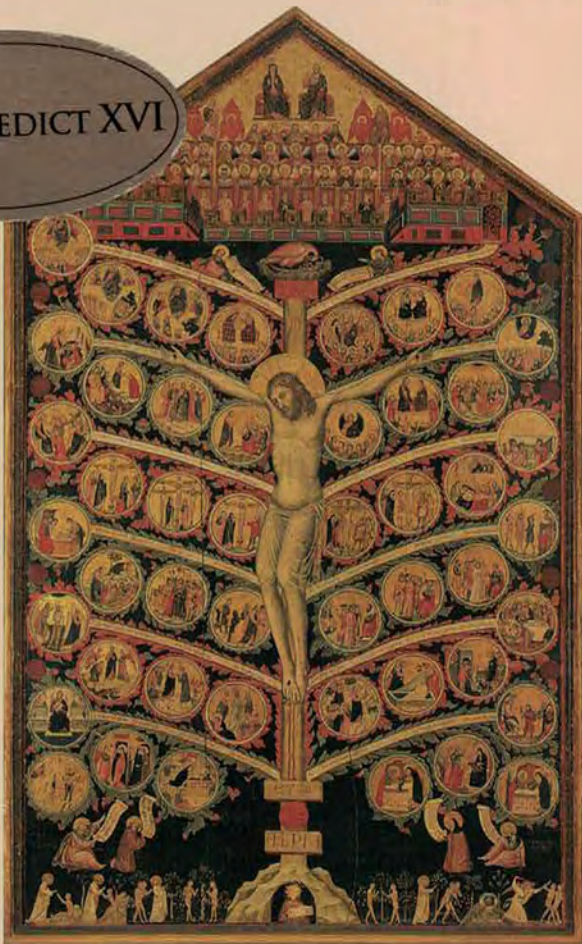


JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER

THE SPIRIT OF THE LITURGY

POPE BENEDICT XVI



*“I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw
all men to myself.” –John 12:32*

IGNATIUS

mysterious synthesis, which is inserted into the immensity of the universe but also into a common history. The path of man that we call history is a specific form of time.

All of this is present in the liturgy and in the liturgy's own particular way of relating to time. The sacred space of the Christian worship of God is itself already opened toward time. Facing east means that when one prays, one is turned toward the rising sun, which has now become a subject of historical significance. It points to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, to his death and new rising. It points to the future of the world and the consummation of all history in the final coming of the Redeemer. Thus time and space are interconnected in Christian prayer. Space itself has become time, and time has, so to speak, become spatial, has entered into space. And just as time and space intertwine, so, too, do history and cosmos. Cosmic time, which is determined by the sun, becomes a representation of human time and of historical time, which moves toward the union of God and world, of history and the universe, of matter and spirit—in a word, toward the New City whose light is God himself. Thus time becomes eternity, and eternity is imparted to time.

In the piety of the Old Testament we find a double division of time: one determined by the weekly rhythm, which moves toward the Sabbath, and the other by the feast days, which are determined partly by the theme of creation (seed-time and harvest, in addition to feasts of the nomadic tradition) and partly by the remembrance of God's actions in history. These two sources are frequently interconnected. This basic arrangement still applies in Christianity. Even in its ordering of time, Christianity retains a profound, interior continuity with its Jewish heritage, in which, in turn, the heritage of the

world's religions is taken up and dedicated to the one God, albeit purified and illuminated by him.

Let us begin with the weekly rhythm. We have already seen that the Sabbath brought the sign of the covenant into time, tied creation and covenant together. This fundamental ordering of things, which was also incorporated into the Decalogue, was still taken for granted in Christianity. But now the covenant was raised up to a new level through the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection, so that henceforth we must speak of a "New Covenant". God has acted once more in a new way, in order to give the covenant its universal breadth and definitive form. But this divine action had something to do with the rhythm of the week. Its climax, toward which everything else was ordered, was the Resurrection of Jesus "on the third day". In our reflections on the Last Supper we saw that Supper, Cross, and Resurrection belong together. Jesus' giving of himself unto death gives the words he speaks at the Supper their realism. On the other hand, his self-giving would be meaningless were death to have the last word. Thus only through the Resurrection does the covenant come fully into being. Now man is forever united with God. Now the two are really bound together indissolubly. Thus the Day of Resurrection is the new Sabbath. It is the day on which the Lord comes among his own and invites them into his "liturgy", into his glorification of God, and communicates himself to them. The morning of the "third day" becomes the hour of Christian worship of God. St. Augustine showed—in regard to the connection of Supper, Cross, and Resurrection—how through their inner unity the Supper has become quite spontaneously the morning sacrifice, and precisely thus is the task entrusted to the apostles at the time of the Last Sup-

set free only when he is set free from death. The oppression of Israel in Egypt was indeed a kind of death, which threatened to, and was intended to, destroy the people as such. Death was imposed on all male progeny. But on the night of Passover the angel of death now passes over Egypt and strikes down its firstborn. Liberation is liberation for life. Christ, the Firstborn from the dead, takes death upon himself and, by his Resurrection, shatters death's power. Death no longer has the last word. The love of the Son proves to be stronger than death because it unites man with God's love, which is God's very being. Thus, in the Resurrection of Christ, it is not just the destiny of an individual that is called to mind. He is now perpetually present, because he lives, and he gathers us up, so that we may live: "[B]ecause I live, you will live also" (Jn 14:19). In the light of Easter, Christians see themselves as people who truly *live*. They have found their way out of an existence that is more death than life. They have discovered real life: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). Deliverance from death is at the same time deliverance from the captivity of individualism, from the prison of self, from the incapacity to love and make a gift of oneself. Thus Easter becomes the great feast of Baptism, in which man, as it were, enacts the passage through the Red Sea, emerges from his own existence into communion with Christ and so into communion with all who belong to Christ. Resurrection builds communion. It creates the new People of God. The grain of wheat that dies all alone does not remain alone but brings much fruit with it. The risen Lord does not remain alone. He draws all mankind to himself and so creates a new universal communion of men. The whole meaning

of the Jewish Passover is made present in the Christian Easter. At the same time, it is not about remembering a past and unrepeatable event, but, as we have seen, "once for all" here becomes "forever". The Risen Lord lives and gives life. He lives and brings about communion. He lives and opens up the future. He lives and shows the way. But we must also not forget that this feast of salvation history, open as it is to the future, to what lies ahead, has its roots in a cosmic celebration, roots that it does not relinquish. The dying and rising moon becomes the sign in the cosmos for death and resurrection. The sun of the first day becomes the messenger of Christ, who "comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy" (Ps 19:5f.). That is why the calendar of the Christian feasts is not to be manipulated at will. The "hour" of Jesus makes its appearance, again and again, within the unity of cosmic and historical time. Through the feast we enter into the rhythm of creation and into God's plan for human history.

A question comes up at this point that I should like to discuss briefly before moving to the Christmas season. The cosmic symbolism that I have been describing has its precise setting in the area of the Mediterranean and the Near East in which the Jewish and Christian religions came into being. By and large it applies to the Northern Hemisphere of the globe. Now in the Southern Hemisphere everything is reversed. The Christian Easter falls, not in the spring, but in the autumn. Christmas coincides, not with the winter solstice, but with high summer. This raises the question of "inculturation" with great urgency. If the cosmic symbolism is so important, ought we not to adjust the liturgical calendar for the Southern

God who manifests himself to his creatures. In this perspective the feast links together several different epiphanies: the adoration of the Magi as the beginning of the Church of the Gentiles, the procession of the nations to the God of Israel (cf. Is 60); the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, in which the voice from above publicly proclaims Jesus as the Son of God; and the wedding at Cana, where he reveals his glory. The narrative of the adoration of the Magi became important for Christian thought, because it shows the inner connection between the wisdom of the nations and the Word of promise in Scripture; because it shows how the language of the cosmos and the truth-seeking thought of man lead to Christ. The mysterious star could become the symbol for these connections and once again emphasize that the language of the cosmos and the language of the human heart trace their descent from the Word of the Father, who in Bethlehem came forth from the silence of God and assembled the fragments of our human knowledge into a complete whole.

The great feasts that structure the year of faith are feasts of Christ and precisely as such are ordered toward the one God who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush and chose Israel as the confessor of faith in his uniqueness. In addition to the sun, which is the image of Christ, there is the moon, which has no light of its own but shines with a brightness that comes from the sun. This is a sign to us that we men are in constant need of a "little" light, whose hidden light helps us to know and love the light of the Creator, God one and triune. That is why the feasts of the saints from earliest times have formed part of the Christian year. We have already encountered Mary, whose person is so closely interwoven with the mystery of Christ that the development of the Christmas cycle inevitably

introduced a Marian note into the Church's year. The Marian dimension of the christological feasts was made visible. Then, in addition, come the commemorations of the apostles and martyrs and, finally, the memorials of the saints of every century. One might say that the saints are, so to speak, new Christian constellations, in which the richness of God's goodness is reflected. Their light, coming from God, enables us to know better the interior richness of God's great light, which we cannot comprehend in the refulgence of its glory.