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## Preface

*“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel” (2 Timothy 2:8).*

This book is a collection of meditations presented to the pontifical household in the presence of Pope Benedict XVI in Advent 2005 and Lent 2006. Their common theme is faith in Christ today, seen from two different angles. The first part, the Advent series, is oriented to the proclamation of Christ; the second part, the Lenten series, is oriented to the imitation of Christ, especially Christ in his passion.

According to the New Testament, the faith “that saves” and “that overcomes the world” is not a generic faith in a creator God or in some kind of afterlife, but faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and in his paschal mystery. In light of the affirmations by Paul and John and of the experience of the early church, these first meditations reflect on the challenges that faith in Christ encounters in modern culture and on the way to respond to them. In many ways, those challenges are more similar to those encountered at the beginning of the church than to those in subsequent centuries. This means that to re-evangelize the *post-Christian* world we need to take as a model the method used at the beginning to evangelize the *pre-Christian* world.

No proclamation will be effective, however, if Christ does not live in the heart of the person who is doing the proclaiming, just as infection is not spread by talking about a sickness but by contact with someone who is infected. The aim of the second series is to reflect on the “participation in his suffering” (see Philippians 3:10).

It has been said that the gospels are “passion narratives with extended introductions.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, however, this most important part of the gospels is also the least read. The passion accounts are proclaimed only once during the liturgy, in Holy Week, when, furthermore, there is no opportunity to comment on them because of the length of the services. Many Christians can reach the end of their lives without ever having been “exposed” to the beneficial rays and salvific energy that emanate from the account of the passion of Christ. This is what is attempted in these meditations, following the invitation from the First Letter of Peter: “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (2:21).

According to the ancient and venerable Roman Martyrology, the first words that the priest says in the Mass immediately after the consecration are *Unde et memores beatae Passionis*, “We celebrate the memory of . . . his passion . . . .” This objective “memory” actualized in the liturgical celebration should always be accompanied by the personal remembrance of believers—the subjective “memory,” recalled with deep feeling—of the passion that has saved them. This is what the apostle exhorted his disciple Timothy to do when he said, “Remember Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:8).

1. Martin Kähler, chapter 10, fn. 11, *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* [*Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus*], foreword by Paul Tillich, intro., ed., and trans. by Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 80.