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We remember your grace, o Lord, in your holy temple....

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Canisianum, 5 July 1998, reunion of the American alumni of the Canisianum

As central idea for this short reflection I would like to choose the words of the opening prayer of this holy mass which is as follows:

"We remember your grace, o Lord, in your holy temple"

In an hour like this we are at first overwhelmed with memories. We see the corridors and rooms where we had lived, we think of people we had met, superiors and professors, who had guided us - the Canisianum has always had very credible personalities as examples for us. We remember lectures, thoughts and visions that have marked our lives. We also remember the hours in this chapel, hours that were sometimes decisive for our ministry, we remember spiritual experiences we would not want to miss. We may also remember the fun we had, and, last but not least, we may think of the mountains and slopes we raced down in our skis. All this is part of real studies in the Tyrol.

But it would not be enough, if we only had a few nostalgic memories and nothing more. The fact that we have come together here and now under the spell of the "Everlasting" seems to be one of those moments in life which give us the impression that time stands still as the philosopher Jeanne Hersch once formulated it... One of those moments which resemble a small stream in the mountains running down noisily from stone to stone and then all of a sudden forming a small lake where the water stands still. If one bends forward one can see to the bottom of it, one can see the stones and the dark mud. And if one looks at it from a different angle, one can see the sky reflected on the smooth surface of the small lake. Doesn't this picture reflect our busy lives? We rush from one appointment to another, from one task to another. We too need those "small artificial lakes" of our soul to bend over and reflect on our lives and look at the basis of our existence. And what catches our eye first? Isn't it the transitoriness of our lives? Don't moments like these teach us that time is flying and the older we get the more we experience this. And don't we discover deep down in our soul the dark sides of our existence - our shortcomings, our dubiousness, our failures and our sins? - It does us good to recognize in such moments this fragile side of our existence.

But, we can also see heaven mirrored in our life if we look at it from a different standpoint. Looking back on our whole life, the years that have passed, don't we feel in our souls that life is a gift? Everything has to be looked at from this standpoint. Our childhood, our parents, our families, the qualities we have, the values we were taught, people we met, good people, knowledge, insight, convictions, difficult moments we have come through, bitter moments - all this was given to us - the dark as well as the bright sides of life. Healthiness of the body and the soul, illnesses we have overcome, forgiven sins, everything we did well, positive response from people, the joy of faith, undying hope - all this was given to us. The perceptible beauty of nature, liturgy, music, art - all that was given to us. Brothers with whom one got on well and after all, even those with whom one did not get on so well were given to us ... and the many people co-operating with us, who were always near at hand and who supported us in our pastoral work - they were given to us.

In an hour like this we should feel a hot wave of gratitude rise in ourselves. The more one humbly looks at the artificial lake of existence, the more one sees that heaven is everywhere

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reflected, even where one had already seen the dark lake bed. There are flushings and lightnings of God's grace wherever you look. And the following sentence is true for me too: "Lord, your grace is as wide as the sky, your faithfulness will go as far as the clouds!" (Ps 36,6)

This attitude of fundamental gratitude ought to be characterizing us in this hour now that we remember the past. Didn't Blaise Pascal say that it was the tragedy of the atheist that he didn't know whom to thank... You cannot say thank you to something, destiny, chance, law of nature, the universe, history, cosmos or chaos ... you can only say thank you to someone. And we should not forget that gratitude is the noblest motivation for religiousness. Of course, you can find God in difficult moments too, we learn to pray when we are in distress, but the deepest and most lasting motivation still remains gratitude. And that's why, dear friends, we can only celebrate this hour in the Canisianum as "Eucharistia", as thanksgiving to God.

This may make it clear why I have chosen the prayer of the introitus as central idea:

"We remember your grace, o Lord, in your holy temple!"