

The faith taught by Jesus

VATICAN CITY - The teaching of the bishops and unity with the pope guarantee that one's faith truly is the faith taught by Jesus to his apostles, Pope Benedict XVI said.

"The true Gospel is that imparted by the bishops, who have received it in an uninterrupted chain from the apostles," the pope said March 28 at his weekly general audience.

The pope's audience talk focused on the ministry and writings of St. Irenaeus of Lyon, who died in the very first years of the third century.

"Irenaeus is most of all a man of faith and a pastor," the pope said. "As a writer he had a double aim: to defend true doctrine against the attacks of the heretics and to explain the truths of the faith with clarity."

The main targets of his admonitions were the gnostics, who taught a secret, "often strange and extravagant" version of Christianity, which only the most intellectually advanced could understand, he said.

The attempt to promote "an elite, intellectualized Christianity" attracted many adherents, but also led to multiple currents within gnosticism, the pope said.

St. Irenaeus taught "that there is no secret doctrine behind the common creed of the church, that there does not exist a superior Christianity for the intellectuals," he said.

"The publicly confessed faith of the church is the faith common to all," he said, and "only this faith is apostolic. It comes from the apostles and therefore from Jesus and from God."

St. Irenaeus taught that the creed contains the essential truths of Christian faith and the bishops - through apostolic succession - have been entrusted with the responsibility of guaranteeing that faith is interpreted and applied correctly throughout history.

"One must observe what the bishops say and give special consideration to the

teaching of the pre-eminent and ancient church of Rome," the seat of the pope, he said.

Pope Benedict said, "Because of its antiquity, the church of Rome has the greater apostolicity; it traces its origin from the pillars of the apostolic college, Peter and Paul. All the churches must be in accord with the church of Rome, recognizing in it the standard of the true apostolic tradition, of the one, common faith of the church."

Against the secret and very diverse versions of Christianity presented by the gnostics, he said, St. Irenaeus taught that true Christian faith "is public, not private or secret," and anyone can learn it through the teaching of the bishops.

In addition, St. Irenaeus insisted there is only one Christian faith and it is the same for all, no matter what their nation, culture or language, he said.

The third quality of true Christianity emphasized by St. Irenaeus, he said, is that it is "pneumatic, or spiritual."

"Where there is the church, there is the spirit of God and where there is the spirit of God there is the church and every grace," the pope said.

"Irenaeus does not limit himself to defining the concept of tradition, and his interpretation of tradition is not 'traditionalism' because this tradition is always enlivened internally by the Holy Spirit, which continually makes it new, alive and interpreted and understood," the pope said.