



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 19 August 1998*

1. In the eighth chapter of his Letter to the Romans, as he explains the action of the Holy Spirit who makes us sons of the Father in Christ Jesus (cf. *Rom* 8:14-16), the Apostle Paul introduces the theme of the world's path towards its fulfilment according to the divine plan. Indeed the Holy Spirit, as we have already explained in previous catecheses, is present and active in creation and in the history of salvation. We could say that he enfolds the cosmos in God's love and mercy, and thus directs humanity's history towards its definitive goal.

The cosmos is created by God as the dwelling place of man and the theatre of his adventure of freedom. In the dialogue with grace, every human being is called to accept responsibly the gift of divine sonship in Jesus Christ. For this reason, the created world acquires its true significance in man and for man. He cannot, of course, dispose as he pleases of the cosmos in which he lives, but must, through his intelligence, consciously bring the Creator's work to completion.

"Man", teaches *Gaudium et spes*, "was created in God's image and was commanded to conquer the earth with all it contains and to rule the world in justice and holiness: he was to acknowledge God as maker of all things and relate himself and the totality of creation to him, so that through the dominion of all things by man the name of God would be majestic in all the earth" (n. 34).

2. For the divine plan to be fulfilled, man must use his freedom in harmony with God's will and overcome the disorder introduced into human life and into the world by sin. Without the gift of the Holy Spirit, this twofold achievement cannot occur. The prophets of the Old Testament put great stress on this. Thus the prophet *Ezekiel* says: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my

ordinances ... you shall be my people, and I will be your God" (*Ez 36:26-28*).

This profound personal and community renewal, awaited in the "fullness of time" and brought about by the Holy Spirit, will to some extent involve the whole cosmos. Isaiah writes: "Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, / and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field... / Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, / and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. / And the effect of righteousness will be peace, / and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever. / My people will abide in a peaceful habitation" (*Is 32:15-18*).

3. For the Apostle Peter, this promise is fulfilled in Christ Jesus, crucified and risen. In fact, through the Spirit Christ redeems and sanctifies whoever accepts his Word of salvation in faith, transforming his heart and consequently social relations.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the world of men becomes a "spatium verae fraternitatis", a place of true brotherhood (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 37). This transformation of man's behaviour and of social relations is expressed in ecclesial life, in the commitment to temporal realities and in dialogue with all people of goodwill. This witness becomes a prophetic sign and leaven in history towards the advent of the kingdom, overcoming everything that prevents communion among men.

4. The cosmos is also called, in a mysterious but real way, to participate in this newness of life in the building up of universal peace through justice and love. As the Apostle Paul teaches, "the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (*Rom 8:19-23*).

Creation, given life by the presence of the Creator Spirit, is called to become "a dwelling place of peace" for the entire human family. Creation achieves this goal by means of the freedom of man whom God has appointed as its guardian. If man selfishly withdraws into himself, through a false conception of freedom, he fatally involves creation itself in this perversion.

On the contrary, through the gift of the Holy Spirit which Jesus Christ pours out upon us from his side pierced on the Cross, man acquires the true freedom of a son in the Son. He can thus understand the true meaning of creation and work to make it a "dwelling place of peace".

In this sense, Paul can say that creation is groaning and awaiting the revelation of the sons of God. Only if man, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, recognizes himself as a son of God in Christ and looks at creation with fraternal sentiment, can the whole cosmos be set free and redeemed in accordance with the divine plan.

5. The consequence of these reflections is truly comforting: the Holy Spirit is the true hope of the world. Not only does he work in the hearts of men into which he introduces that wonderful participation in the filial relationship which Jesus Christ lives with the Father, but he exalts and perfects human activities in the world.

As the Second Vatican Council teaches, they “must be purified and perfected by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. Redeemed by Christ and made a new creature by the Holy Spirit, man can, indeed he must, love the things of God’s creation: it is from God that he has received them, and it is as flowing from God’s hand that he looks upon them and reveres them. Man thanks his divine benefactor for all these things, he uses them and enjoys them in a spirit of poverty and freedom: thus he is brought to a true possession of the world, as having nothing yet possessing everything: ‘All [things] are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s’ (1 Cor 3:22-23)” (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 37).

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*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, the Holy Father said:*

I cordially welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present, especially those from Ireland, Hong Kong, Japan and the United States of America. I gladly invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ upon you and your families.

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