



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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God satisfies our longing for his presence¹. "*O that you would rend the heavens and come down!*". Isaiah's great cry (63: 19), which well summarizes the longing for God present especially in the history of the biblical Israel, but also in every human heart, was not in vain. God the Father crossed the threshold of his transcendence: through his Son, Jesus Christ, he set out on the paths of man, and his Spirit of life and love penetrated the hearts of his creatures. He does not leave us wandering far from his ways, nor does he let our hearts be hardened forever (cf. *Is* 63: 17). In Christ, God draws near to us, particularly when our "face is sad", and then with the warmth of his word, as happened to the disciples at Emmaus, our hearts begin to burn within us (cf. *Lk* 24: 17, 32). God's passage, though, is mysterious and requires pure eyes and attentive ears to be perceived.

2. In this perspective, we want to focus today on two fundamental attitudes to be adopted towards the God-Emmanuel who decided to meet man both in space and time, and in the depths of his heart. The first attitude is that of waiting, well illustrated in the passage of Mark's Gospel that we heard earlier (cf. *Mk* 13: 33-37). In the original Greek we find three imperatives that mark this waiting. The first is: "Take heed", literally, "Look out, be careful!". "Attention", as the word itself says, means to tend, to be directed towards something with all one's soul. It is the opposite of distraction, which, unfortunately, is almost our habitual state, especially in a frenetic, superficial society such as ours today. We find it difficult to focus on a goal, on a value, and to pursue it with fidelity and consistency. We risk doing so even with God, who came to us through his Incarnation to become the lodestar of our lives.³ The imperative to take heed is followed by "be alert", which in the Gospel's original Greek is the same as "stay awake". There is a strong temptation for us to fall asleep, wound in the coils of the dark night, which in the Bible is the symbol of guilt, inertia and rejection of the light. Thus we can understand the Apostle Paul's exhortation: "You are not in darkness, brethren, ... for you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober" (1 *Thes* 5: 4-6). Only by freeing ourselves from the obscure attraction of darkness and evil can we meet the Father of lights, in whom "there is no variation or shadow due to change" (*Jas* 1: 17).⁴ There is a third imperative expressed twice with the same Greek verb: "Watch!". It is the verb for the sentinel who must be on guard, while he waits patiently for

night-time to pass in order to see the light of dawn breaking on the horizon. The prophet Isaiah vividly and forcefully describes this long wait by introducing a dialogue between two sentinels, which becomes a symbol for the right use of time: *"Watchman, how much longer the night?"*. The watchman replies, *"Morning has come, and again night. If you will ask, ask; come back again"* (Is 21: 11-12). We must question ourselves, be converted and go to meet the Lord. Christ's three appeals: *"Take heed, stay awake, watch!"*, limpidly sum up the Christian watchfulness for meeting the Lord. The waiting must be patient, as St James urges us in his Letter: *"Be patient until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer awaits the precious yield of the soil. He looks forward to it patiently while the soil receives the winter and the spring rains. You, too, be patient. Steady your hearts, because the coming of the Lord is at hand"* (Jas 5: 7-8). If an ear is to grow or a flower blossom, there are times which cannot be forced; for the birth of a human being, nine months are required; to write a book or a worthy piece of music, years must often be spent in patient searching. This is also the law of the spirit. *"Everything that is rushed / will soon fade"*, a poet wrote (R. M. Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*). To encounter the mystery takes patience, inner purification, silence and waiting.

5. We were speaking earlier of the two spiritual attitudes for discovering the God who approaches us. The second - after attentive and watchful waiting - is wonder, marvel. We must open our eyes to admire God, who both conceals and reveals himself in things, and leads us into the realms of mystery. Technological culture, and even more the excessive absorption in material realities, often prevent us from discerning the hidden face of things. In reality, every thing, every event, for those who know how to read them in depth, bears a message which, in the final analysis, leads to God. Thus there are many signs that reveal God's presence. But if they are not to escape us, we must be as pure and simple as children (cf. Mt 18: 3-4), who can admire, wonder at, be astonished and enchanted by God's acts of love and closeness in our regard. In a certain sense, we can apply to the fabric of daily life what the Second Vatican Council said about the fulfilment of God's great plan through the revelation of his Word: "The invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends and moves among them, in order to invite and receive them into fellowship with him" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 2).* * * I warmly greet the many English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at this audience. Upon all of you – from England, Nigeria, the West Indies, India, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada and the United States – I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. I extend a special welcome to the visitors from Sendai and Kagoshima in Japan. May God bless you and your families, and all your fellow-citizens. **Romae Yōkoso domo arigatōo Gozaimasu.** [*"Thank your for your visit"*]. © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana