



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 6 June 2001

1. "Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father" (I Chr 29,10). The canticle of intense praise that the First Book of Chronicles puts on the lips of David makes us relive the outburst of joy with which the community of the first covenant greeted the great preparations made for the building of the temple, fruit of a common effort of the king and of so many who contributed generously with him. They had virtually competed in generosity, because this was called for by a dwelling that was not "destined for a man, but for the Lord God" (I Chr 29,1).

Rereading that event centuries later, the chronicler intuits the sentiments of David and those of the whole people, their joy and their admiration for all those who made their contribution: "The people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord; king David rejoiced greatly" (I Chr 29,9).

2. Such is the context in which the canticle is born. It does not dwell, except briefly, on human satisfaction but centres attention immediately on the glory of God: "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness ... yours is the kingdom ...". The great temptation that is always lurking, when one accomplishes works for the Lord, is that of putting oneself at the centre as if God were indebted to us. David, instead, attributes everything to the Lord. It is not the human being with his intelligence and strength who is the first architect of all that is done, but God himself.

In this way, David expresses the profound truth that all is grace. In a certain sense, all that has been put aside for the temple, is only the restitution, in a very meagre way at that, of all that Israel received in the invaluable gift of the covenant established by God with their Fathers. In the same way David credits the Lord with everything that constituted his fortune, in the military, the political and the economic field. All comes from him.

3. Herein lies the contemplative thrust of these verses. It seems that the author of the Canticum does not have enough words to confess the greatness and power of God. He considers him as "our father", first of all, in his special paternity shown to Israel. This is the first title which elicits our praise "now and forever".

In the Christian use of the prayer we cannot forget that God's fatherhood is fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Son of God. It is he, and only he, who can speak to God calling him properly and affectionately, "Abba" (Mk 14,36). At the same time, through the gift of the Spirit, we share in his sonship, and become "sons in the Son". God the Father's blessing of ancient Israel takes on for us the greater intensity that Jesus showed to us teaching us to call God "our Father".

4. The view of the biblical author extends from the history of salvation to the whole cosmos in order to contemplate the greatness of God the Creator: "All in heaven and on earth is yours". And again, "Yours is the sovereignty; you are exalted as head over all". As in Psalm 8, the one who prays the Canticum lifts his head towards the immense expanse of the heavens, then he looks in wonder at the immensity of the earth, and sees everything under the dominion of the Creator. How can he express the glory of God? The words pile up, in a kind of mystical pursuit: greatness, power, glory, majesty and splendour; and then even force and power. All that man experiences as beautiful and great must be referred to him who is at the origin of everything and governs them. The human creature knows that everything he possesses is the gift of God, as David emphasizes further on in the Canticum: "Who am I and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer you this willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you" (I Chr 29,14).

5. The background of reality as the gift of God helps us to combine the Canticum's sentiments of praise and thanksgiving with an authentic spirituality of "offering" that the Christian liturgy makes us live, above all, in the celebration of the Eucharist. It is what emerges from the two prayers which the priest uses to offer the bread and wine destined to become the Body and Blood of Christ: "Through your goodness we have received this bread, fruit of the earth and of human work; we present it to you so that it may become for us the bread of eternal life" (*N.B.* literal translation of offertory prayer). The prayer is repeated for the wine. We find similar sentiments in the Byzantine *Divine Liturgy* and in the ancient *Roman Canon* when in the Eucharistic anamnesis we express the intention of offering as a gift to God the things that we have received from him.

6. A final application of this vision of God is realized in the Canticum by looking at the human experience of riches and power. Both of these dimensions emerged while David prepared all that was necessary to build the temple. What is a universal temptation could have been a temptation for him: to act as if he were the absolute ruler of what he possessed, to make it the source of pride and the abuse of others. The prayer articulated in the Canticum refers the human being to his state as "poor person" who receives everything from God.

The kings of this earth are no more than images of divine kingship: "Yours is the kingdom, O Lord". The rich cannot forget the origin of their good things: "riches and honour come from you". The powerful should know how to recognize God, the source of "all greatness and power". The Christian is called to use such expressions in prayer, contemplating with exultation the Risen Lord, glorified by God "above all rule and authority, power and dominion" (Eph 1,21). Christ is the true king of the universe.

At the end of the audience the Holy Father made a plea for peace in Central Africa:

From the Central African Republic worrying news has reached us of clashes in progress in that beloved nation, and particularly of great suffering for the persons who live in the capital city, Bangui. For my part, I am close to those populations and I ask all the groups in the struggle to lay down their arms and to cooperate in rebuilding a climate of peace in the country. To this end I also invite you to pray with me to the Lord so that he will place in all hearts sentiments of peace and reconciliation.

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I extend a special greeting to the Filipino community in Rome, which is celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the Philippines, and the Tenth Anniversary of the Filipino chaplaincy. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, Canada and the United States, I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.