



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 28 November 2001*

### ***All peoples praise God's faithful love***

*Psalm 116 [117]*

1. This is the shortest of the psalms. In Hebrew it has only 17 words, and nine of them are noteworthy. It is a short doxology, namely, an essential hymn of praise, that ideally functions as the conclusion of longer psalms. This happened sometimes in the liturgy, as it happens now with our *Glory be to the Father*, that we use to end the recitation of every psalm.

Indeed, these few words of prayer are found to be deeply meaningful for acclaiming the covenant of the Lord with his people from a universal point of view. In this light, the Apostle Paul uses the first verse of the Psalm to invite the peoples of the world to glorify God. In fact, he writes to the Christians of Rome: That the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy as it is written: "Praise the Lord, all you nations; all you peoples exalt him" (Rom 15,9.11).

2. As often happens with this kind of psalm, the brief hymn that we are meditating on opens with an invitation to praise that is directed not only to Israel, but to all the peoples of the earth. An *Alleluia* should burst forth from the hearts of all the just who seek and love God with a sincere heart. Once again, the Psalter reflects a vision of vast perspective, nourished by Israel's experience during the Babylonian exile in the 6th century before Christ. At the time the Hebrew people met other nations and cultures and felt the need to announce their own faith to those among whom they lived. The Psalter portrays the concept that good flourishes in many places and can be directed toward the one Lord and Creator.

Hence, we can speak of an "ecumenism" of prayer that now holds in one embrace peoples who

are different by origin, history and culture. We are in line with the great "vision" of Isaiah who describes "at the end of days" the procession of all the nations towards "the mountain of the house of the Lord". Then the swords and spears will fall from their hands; they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, so that humanity can live in peace, singing its song of praise to the one Lord of all, listening to his word and observing his law (cf. Is 2,1-5).

3. Within this universal horizon Israel, the Chosen People, has a mission to fulfill. They should proclaim two great divine virtues, that they had experienced living the covenant with the Lord (cf. v.2). The two virtues, that are the fundamental features of the face of God, the "good binomial" of God, as St Gregory of Nyssa said (cf. *On the Titles of the Psalms*, {the Italian original is *Sui titoli dei Salmi*, Rome, 1994, p.183), are expressed with other Hebrew words which, in translation, do not convey the full richness of their meaning.

The first is *hésed*, a term repeatedly used in the Psalter, that I have commented on before. It points to the richness of the profound sentiments that pass between two persons, linked by an authentic and constant bond. It includes values such as love, fidelity, mercy, goodness, and tenderness.

Between God and us, there is a relationship which is not cold, as is the case between an emperor and his subject, but alive like that between two friends, two spouses, parents and their children.

4. The second term is *eméth* and is a synonym for the first. It is beloved of the Psalter, where it appears half of all the time that it is used in the rest of the Old Testament.

The term itself expresses "truth", namely, the genuineness of a relationship, its authenticity and loyalty, that remain despite obstacles and trials; it is pure and joyful fidelity that knows no betrayal. It is no accident that the Psalmist declares that it "is faithful forever"(v.2). The faithful love of God will never fail and will not abandon us to ourselves or to the darkness of nihilism, or to a blind destiny, or to the void or death.

God loves us with an unconditional, tireless, never ending love. It is the message of our Psalm, brief as a sigh of prayer from the heart, but intense as a great canticle.

Church praises God in word and deed

5. The words that it suggests are like an echo of the song that resounds in the heavenly Jerusalem, where a great multitude of every tongue, people and nation, sings the divine glory before the throne of God and the Lamb (cf. Apoc. 7,9). The pilgrim Church joins in this canticle with infinite expressions of praise, often accompanied by poetic genius and musical art. We think, for example, of the *Te Deum*, which generations of Christians throughout the centuries have used to praise and to thank: "We praise you O God, we confess you O Lord, all the earth venerates you, eternal Father". For its part, the short psalm that we are meditating on today, is an effective

synthesis of the perennial liturgy of praise with which the Church raises her voice in the world uniting herself to the perfect praise that Christ himself addresses to his Father.

Let us praise the Lord! Let us praise him unceasingly. But our lives must express our praise, more than our words. We will hardly be credible if with our psalm we invite the peoples to give glory to the Lord, and we did not take seriously the Lord's admonition: "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5,16). In singing psalm 116{117}, as in all the psalms praising the Lord, the Church, People of God, strives to become herself a hymn of praise.

*The Holy Father then addressed the pilgrims and visitors in French, English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Croatian, and Italian. He greeted the English visitors with these thoughts.*

I extend a special greeting to the Sisters of the Divine Saviour in Rome for their General Chapter: may the Lord's light and grace accompany you in your deliberations and guide you always in your life of service in the Church. I am pleased to greet also two groups from Norway: the Pastoral Council of the Prelature of Trondheim with Bishop Georg Müller, and a group of Church of Norway clergy from Stavanger. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present, I invoke the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of all the universe.

In his Italian greetings, he greeted the Bishop of Massa Carrara-Pontremoli and the faithful, the seminarians of the Seminary of Ravenna and the Sisters of St Charles Borromeo in Rome for their General Chapter. He greeted the participants in a course of study organized by the "School of Medicine of the Hospitals of Rome". He also greeted young people, sick persons and newly-weds. The Holy Father's greeting of the medical personnel was seen as a swift reaction to the recent human cloning experiments reported by the Advanced Cell Technology Inc of Worcester, Mass, USA. Here is a translation.

Dearly beloved, I express appreciation for your professional dedication and I encourage you to defend the life and the dignity of the person without compromise, as you work within the respect of the moral law. True humanism can never allow methods and experiments that constitute "scientifically and systematically programmed threats" against human life (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 17).

*The Holy Father then held up for the young people the person of St Andrew. May he be a model of Christian following and witness. May St. Andrew intercede for you beloved sick persons so that the divine consolation promised by Jesus to the afflicted may fill your hearts and strengthen your faith. Dear newly weds, strive to correspond faithfully to the plan of love that Christ makes you share in with the sacrament of marriage.*

*At the end of his greetings in different languages, Pope John Paul II said he had "learned with great sorrow the news of the explosion yesterday which involved a building in the Montesacro neighbourhood of Rome". He added that*

"In this moment of pain, I am especially close to all those who have been struck by this tragic event; to them I express sentiments of comfort and affection. Let us together call upon the Lord to grant the eternal prize to those who lost their lives, with a special thought for the firemen who died while generously fulfilling their duty. Let us pray that there will be no lack of solidarity with the families who bemoan the loss of loved ones and who must face the serious discomfort following such a grave accident".