



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday 23 October 2002

Psalm 85 [86]

All nations shall come and adore You, O Lord

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Psalm 85 [86] just recited, which will be the theme of our reflection, offers an impressive description of the Psalmist. He comes before God with these words: I am "your servant" and "the son of your handmaid" (v. 16). Certainly, the expression can belong to the language of court ceremonial, but was used to indicate the servant adopted as a son by the head of a family or tribe. In this light the Psalmist, who defines himself as "the faithful" of the Lord (cf. v. 2), feels he is bound to God by a bond, not just of obedience, but also of familiarity and communion. For this reason his prayer expresses confident abandonment and hope.

Let us now follow this prayer which the *Liturgy of Lauds* sets out for us at the beginning of a day that will probably bring with it not just work and fatigue, but also misunderstanding and problems.

2. The Psalm begins with an intense appeal which the Psalmist directs to the Lord, trusting in his love (cf. vv. 1-7). At the end he expresses again the certainty that the Lord is a "God of mercy, compassionate, slow to anger, full of love, faithful God" (v. 15; cf. Ex 34,6). The repeated and convinced expressions of confidence reveal a faith that is intact and pure with an act of abandonment to the "Lord, good ... full of love to all who call on him" (Ps 85 [86],5).

At the centre of the Psalm, a hymn is sung to the Lord that alternates feelings of thanksgiving with a profession of faith in the works of salvation that God displays before the peoples (cf. vv. 8-13).

3. Against every temptation to idolatry, the Psalmist proclaims the absolute uniqueness of God (cf.

v. 8). In the end he expresses the bold hope that one day "all the nations" shall adore the God of Israel (v. 9). This wonderful prospect finds its fulfillment in the Church of Christ because he sent his apostles to teach "all nations" (Mt 28,19). No one but the Lord can offer a full liberation because all depend on him as creatures and all must turn to him in an attitude of adoration (cf. Ps 85 [86],9). In fact, he manifests in the cosmos and in history his wonderful works, that give witness to his absolute lordship (cf. v. 10).

At this point the Psalmist presents himself before God with an intense and pure appeal: "Show me, Lord, your way so that I may walk in your truth; give me a simple heart to fear your name" (v. 11).

The petition to be able to know the will of God is wonderful as is the prayer to obtain the gift of "a simple heart" like that of a child, who without duplicity and calculation entrusts himself fully to the Father to direct him on the path of life.

4. Then, from the lips of the faithful flows praise of the merciful God who does not allow him to fall into despair and death, evil and sin (cf. vv. 12-13; Ps 15,10-11).

Psalm 85 [86] is a prayer that is dear to Judaism, that inserted it into the liturgy of one of the most important solemnities, *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement. The Book of the Apocalypse, in turn, extracted a verse from it (cf. v. 9), placing it in the glorious heavenly liturgy at the heart of the "song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb": "All nations shall come and worship you" and the Apocalypse adds: "for your [just] judgments have been revealed" (Apoc 15,4).

St Augustine dedicated a long and passionate commentary to our psalm in his *Expositions on the Psalms* transforming it into a song of Christ and of the Christian. The Latin translation, in v. 2, in conformity with the Greek version of the Septuagint instead of the term "faithful" uses the word "holy one": "Preserve my life for I am holy". In reality, only Christ is holy. However, St Augustine reasons, even the Christian can apply these words to himself: "I am holy for you have sanctified me; because I received, not because I had [it of myself]; because you gave it to me, not because I merited it". Therefore, "every Christian by himself, therefore also the whole Body of Christ may say it, may cry everywhere, while it bears tribulations, many temptations and offences: "Preserve my soul because I am holy. Save your servant, my God, who hopes in you'. See, this holy man is not proud since he puts his trust in God" (*Esposizioni sui Salmi*, vol. II, Rome 1970, p. 1251. For an English translation, cf. *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, vol. IV, Oxford 1850, p. 189).

5. The holy Christian opens himself to the universality of the Church and prays with the Psalmist: "All the nations that you have created shall come and adore you, O Lord" (Ps 85 [86],9). Augustine comments: "All the nations in the one Lord are one people, this is true oneness. As there is the Church and churches, and those are churches which are also the Church, so that is a 'people' which was peoples; formerly, peoples, many peoples, now only one people. Why only one people?"

Because one faith, one hope, one charity, one expectation. Finally, why one people if only one country? Our country is heavenly, our country is Jerusalem.... This people from east to west, from north to the sea, is extended through the four quarters of the whole world" (*ibid.*, p. 1269).

In this universal light our liturgical prayer is transformed into a breath of praise and a hymn of glory to the Lord in the name of every creature.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors

I extend a special greeting to the pilgrims from Gibraltar, accompanied by their Bishop, and to the members of the Cathedral Choir from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present at today's audience - in particular those from England, Wales, Ireland, Gibraltar, Vietnam, Canada and the United States of America - I invoke grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To Lithuanian-speaking pilgrims and visitors

In this year of the Rosary which we have just begun, I invite you to rediscover the efficacy of the prayer of the Rosary for peace in the world and in families.

To young people, sick, newly-weds

Today the liturgy reminds us of the Franciscan priest St John of Capistrano, who gave himself with great generosity for the salvation of souls. May his glorious evangelical witness sustain you, dear *young people*, in your dedication to daily fidelity to Christ; may it encourage you, dear *sick persons*, to follow Christ on the path of trial and suffering; may it help you, dear *newly-weds*, to make of your home the place for the living meeting with the love of God and of your neighbour.