



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday, 2 July 2003

Psalm 146[145]

"Praise the Lord, O my soul!

1. Psalm 146[145] that we have just heard is an "alleluia", the first of five which complete the entire collection in the Psalter. The Jewish liturgical tradition formerly used this hymn as a morning song of praise; it culminates in the proclamation of God's sovereignty over human history. Indeed, the Psalm ends with the declaration: "The Lord will reign for ever" (v. 10).

From this follows a comforting truth: we are not left to ourselves, the events of our days are not overshadowed by chaos or fate, they do not represent a mere sequence of private acts without sense or direction. From this conviction develops a true and proper profession of faith in God, celebrated in a sort of litany in which the attributes of his love and kindness are proclaimed (cf. vv. 6-9).

2. God is the Creator of heaven and earth who faithfully keeps the covenant that binds him to his people; it is He who brings justice to the oppressed, provides food to sustain the hungry and sets prisoners free. It is He who opens the eyes of the blind, who picks up those who have fallen, who loves the just, protects the foreigner, supports the orphan and the widow. It is he who muddles the ways of the unjust and who reigns sovereign over all beings and over all ages.

These are 12 theological assertions which, with their perfect number, are intended as an expression of the fullness and perfection of divine action. The Lord is not a Sovereign remote from his creatures but is involved in their history as the One who metes out justice and ranks himself on the side of the lowliest, of the victims, the oppressed, the unfortunate.

3. Man, therefore, finds himself facing a radical choice between two contrasting possibilities: on

one side there is the temptation to "trust in princes" (cf. v. 3), adopting their criteria inspired by wickedness, selfishness and pride. In fact, this is a slippery slope, a ruinous road, a "crooked path and a devious way" (cf. Prv 2: 15), whose goal is despair.

Indeed, the Psalmist reminds us that man is a frail, mortal being, as the very word *'adam* implies; in Hebrew, this word is used to signify earth, matter, dust. Man - the Bible constantly states - is like a palace that crumbles [to dust] (cf. Eccl 12: 1-7), a spider's web that can be torn apart by the wind (cf. Jb 8: 14), a strip of grass that is green at dawn but has withered by evening (cf. Ps 90[89]: 5-6; 103[102]: 15-16). When death assails him, all his plans disintegrate and he returns to dust: "When his breath departs he returns to his earth; on that very day his plans perish" (Ps 146[145]: 4).

4. However, there is another possibility open to man, and the Psalmist exalts it with a beatitude: "Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (v. 5). This is the path of trust in God, eternal and faithful. The *amen*, which is the Hebrew word for faith, precisely means being based on the steadfast solidity of the Lord, on his eternity, on his infinite power. Above all, however, it means sharing his choices, on which the profession of faith and praise described above has shed light.

We must live in consistency with the divine will, offer food to the hungry, visit prisoners, sustain and comfort the sick, protect and welcome foreigners, devote ourselves to the poor and the lowly. In practice this corresponds exactly to the spirit of the Beatitudes; it means opting for that proposal of love which saves us already in this life and will later become the object of our examination at the last judgment, which will seal history. Then we will be judged on our decision to serve Christ in the hungry, the thirsty, the foreigner, the naked, the sick, the prisoner. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25: 40): this is what the Lord will say at that time.

5. Let us conclude our meditation on Psalm 146[145] with an idea for reflection which is offered to us by the Christian tradition that followed.

When Origen, the great third-century writer, reaches verse 7 of our Psalm which says: "[the Lord] gives food to the hungry, the Lord sets the prisoners free", he finds in it an implicit reference to the Eucharist: "We hunger for Christ and he himself will give us the bread of heaven. "Give us this day our daily bread'. Those who say these words are hungry; those who feel the need for bread are hungry". And this hunger is fully satisfied by the Sacrament of the Eucharist, in which man is nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. Origene-Gerolamo, *74 Omelie sul Libro dei Salmi*, Milan 1993, pp. 526-527).

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors:

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from Sierra Leone, England, Scotland, Canada and the United States. I thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. In a special way I greet the many student groups present. Upon all of you I cordially invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

I then greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Tomorrow we will be celebrating the Feast of the Apostle Thomas. May his intercession increase your faith, dear *young people*, so that you may be ready to witness to Christ in every milieu. May it help you, dear *sick people*, to offer up every suffering so that God's saving plan can be achieved in the world. Lastly, may it sustain you, dear *newly-weds*, in your commitment to nourish your family with daily and faithful prayer.

At the end the Holy Father prayed for peace in Liberia and Uganda.

I am following with deep sorrow the dramatic events in Liberia and in the northern region of Uganda. I appeal to everyone to do their utmost so that those beloved African peoples may rediscover peace and safety, and not be denied the future to which they are entitled. I also express my closeness to the local Churches whose persons and institutions have been harshly hit, and I encourage their Pastors and the faithful to be strong and firm in hope. May our insistent prayer obtain this from the divine Mercy!
