



# The Holy See

---

JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 26 August 1998*

*Created in the divine image and likeness, the human person is capable of knowing God and of welcoming the gift that God makes of himself.*

1. The history of salvation is God's gradual communication of himself to humanity, which reaches its summit in Jesus Christ. God the Father, in the Word made man, wishes to share his own life with everyone: in short, he wants to communicate himself. This divine self-communication takes place in the Holy Spirit, the bond of love between eternity and time, the Trinity and history.

If God opens himself to man in his Spirit, man, on the other hand, is created as a subject capable of accepting the divine self-communication. Man — as the tradition of Christian thought maintains — is “capax Dei”: capable of knowing God and of receiving the gift he makes of himself. Indeed, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gn* 1:26), he is able to live a personal relationship with him and to respond with loving obedience to the covenant relationship offered to him by his Creator.

Against the background of this biblical teaching, the gift of the Spirit, promised to man and bestowed upon him “without measure” by Jesus Christ, therefore means a “call to friendship, in which the transcendent 'depths of God' become in some way opened to participation on the part of man” (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, n. 34).

In this regard, the Second Vatican Council teaches: “The invisible God (cf. *Col* 1:15; *1 Tm* 1:17), from the fullness of his love, addresses men as his friends (cf. *Ex* 33:11; *Jn* 15:14f.), and moves among them (cf. *Bar* 3:38), in order to invite and receive them into his own company” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 2).

2. Therefore, if God, through his Spirit, communicates himself to man, man is continuously called to give himself to God with his whole being. This is his deepest vocation. He is constantly asked to do so by the Holy Spirit, who, enlightening his mind and sustaining his will, brings him into the mystery of divine sonship in Jesus Christ and invites him to live it consistently.

Down the centuries, all the generous and sincere efforts of human intelligence and freedom to draw close to the ineffable and transcendent mystery of God are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Particularly in the history of the Old Covenant made by Yahweh with the people of Israel, we see this meeting between God and man gradually taking place within the communion disclosed by the Spirit.

For example, there is the striking and intensely beautiful account of the prophet Elijah's encounter with God in the breath of the Spirit: "And [the Lord] said: 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord'. And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" (1 Kgs 19:11-13).

3. But the complete and definitive meeting between God and man — awaited and contemplated in hope by the patriarchs and prophets — is Jesus Christ. He, true God and true man, "in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22). Jesus Christ accomplishes this revelation with his whole life. Indeed, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, he always strives to fulfil the Father's will, and on the wood of the Cross offers himself "once for all" to the Father, "through the eternal Spirit" (*Heb* 9:12, 14).

Through the paschal event, Christ teaches us that, "if man is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake, man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 24). Now, the Holy Spirit himself, communicated in fullness to the Church of Jesus Christ, ensures that man, by recognizing himself in Christ, will increasingly "discover himself in a sincere giving of himself".

4. This eternal truth about man revealed to us by Jesus Christ has a particular timeliness in our day. Even amid sharp contradictions, the world today is experiencing a season of intense "socialization" (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 6), both with regard to interpersonal relationships within various human communities, and with regard to relations among peoples, races, different societies and cultures.

Throughout this journey towards communion and unity, the Holy Spirit's action is also necessary for us to overcome the obstacles and dangers which threaten humanity's progress. "As the Year 2000 since the birth of Christ draws near, it is a question of ensuring that an ever greater number of people 'may fully find themselves ... through a sincere gift of self' .... Through the action of the Spirit-Paraclete, may there be accomplished in our world a process of true growth in humanity, in both individual and community life. In this regard Jesus himself 'when he prayed to the Father, 'that all may be one ... as we are one' (Jn 17:21-22) ... implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine persons and the union of the children of God in truth and charity'" (*Dominium et Vivificantem*, n. 59).

---

*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:*

I warmly welcome the group of pilgrims from Göteborg, Sweden. I extend a special greeting to the Buddhist groups from Japan. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from Japan, Sweden, Taiwan, Malta, Great Britain and the United States of America, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

---

*At the General Audience of Wednesday, 26 August, the Holy Father expressed his sorrow at the massacre of a priest, three women religious, a seminarian and 32 lay people that occurred in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 24 August. The Pope also prayed that this nation and all Africa would no longer be denied peace and prosperity.*

I was deeply saddened to receive the news of the massacre that took place last Monday in Kasika, a parish in the Diocese of Uvira in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Fr Stanislas Bwabulakombe, three religious from the Congregation of the Daughters of the Resurrection, one seminarian and 32 lay people were slaughtered in retaliation. All the victims were Congolese. I firmly deplore this criminal act! May God welcome into his mercy these brothers and sisters of ours who have suffered the anguish of such a violent and unjust death. We implore the Lord that they will be the last victims of a war which has returned to strike another cruel blow to the Congolese people. May their innocent blood, united with Jesus' blood in his redeeming sacrifice, help to heal hearts laden with hatred and revenge and open them to sentiments of brotherhood and love, so that this nation and the entire African continent will no longer be denied peace and prosperity.

---