



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 7 November 2001

Psalm 99 [100], Lauds on Friday of the first week

Let the world praise faithful God

1. The tradition of Israel gave the title "*Psalm for the todáh*" to the hymn of praise we just heard, that is thanksgiving in liturgical chant. That is why it is appropriately intoned in the morning Lauds. We can identify three noteworthy elements in the four verses of the joyful hymn, that make its use spiritually fruitful for the Christian community at prayer.

2. First of all, there is an urgent call to prayer, clearly described in a liturgical dimension. Suffice it to list the imperative verbs coupled with indications of liturgical usage that are articulated in the Psalm: "Cry out..., serve the Lord with gladness, come before him singing for joy. Know that the Lord is God...Enter his gates with thanksgiving, his courts with praise, give thanks to him and bless his name". It is series of invitations not just to enter the sacred area of the temple through the gates and courts (cf. Ps 14,1;23,3.7-10), but also to praise God joyfully.

It is like a constant unbroken thread of praise taking the form of a continuous profession of faith and love. Praise that rises from the earth to God, and at the same time nourishes the spirit of the believer.

3. I would like to highlight a secondary detail at the beginning of the hymn, where the Psalmist calls all the earth to acclaim the Lord (cf. v.1). Certainly, the Psalm will then focus attention on the chosen people, but the perspective of the praise is universal, as usual in the Psalter with the "hymns to the Lord the king" (cf. Ps 95-98, [96-99]). The world and history are not at the mercy of chance, chaos, or blind necessity. Instead, a mysterious God governs them, who desires that

humanity live in stability according to just and authentic relations. He "is King. The world is established, it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity... He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth " (Ps 95,10.13).

4. We are in the hands of God, Lord and King, Father and Creator, and we celebrate it, confident that he will not let us fall from his hands. In this light we can appreciate better the third central element of the Psalm. At the centre of the praise that the Psalmist places on our lips, there is, in fact, a profession of faith, expressed through a series of attributes that define the profound reality of God. The essential creed contains the following affirmations: "The Lord is God, our maker to whom we belong, whose people we are. ... Good indeed is the Lord, his steadfast love endures forever, his faithfulness lasts through every age" (cf. vv. 3-5).

5. In the first place, there is a renewed profession of faith in the one God, as required by the first commandment of the Decalogue: "I am the Lord, your God ... You shall not have other gods before me" (Ex 20,2.3). As is often repeated in the Bible: "Know then today and keep well in your heart that the Lord is God in the heavens above, in the earth below and there is no other" (Dt 4,39). Then faith in God the creator is proclaimed, source of being and of life. Then expressed through a "covenant formula", comes the affirmation of the certainty that Israel has of her divine election: "We are his, his people and the sheep of his pasture" (v. 3). It is a certainty that the faithful of the new People of God make their own, in the awareness of being the flock that the supreme Shepherd of souls leads to the eternal pastures of heaven (cf. 1 Pt 2,25).

6. After the proclamation of the one God, creator and source of the covenant, the portrait of the Lord sung by our Psalm continues with the meditation on three divine qualities that the Psalter often exalts: God's goodness, merciful love (*hésed*), faithfulness. They are the three virtues that belong to the covenant of God with his people; they express a bond which will never be broken, through generations, despite the muddy stream of sins, rebellions and human infidelity. With serene confidence in divine love that will never diminish, the people of God journey through history with their daily temptations and weaknesses.

This confidence becomes a hymn, for which sometimes words fail, as St Augustine comments: "the more charity increases, the more aware you will become of what you said and did not say. In fact, before savouring certain things, you thought you could use words to speak about God; when you began to enjoy the taste, you realized that you were not able to explain adequately what you tasted.

If you realize you did not know how to express in words what you tasted, should you for this reason be silent and not praise?... Absolutely not. You will not be so ungrateful. To him are owed honour, respect and the greatest praise ... Listen to the Psalm: "All the earth, cry out with joy to the Lord'. Then you will understand the joy of all the earth if you rejoice before the Lord" (From the *Exposition on the Psalms*, Italian version, *Esposizioni sui Salmi* III/1, Rome 1993, p. 459).

At the end of the commentary, the Holy Father addressed the pilgrims and visitors in English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Croatian and Italian. To the English-speaking pilgrims he said:

I am pleased to offer special greetings to the Marist Brothers participating in a spirituality programme, and the Capuchin Friars from India and Indonesia taking part in a course of continuing formation: may your days in Rome be a grace-filled time of encounter with the Lord, "who is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (*Heb 13:8*). To all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Scotland, Denmark and the United States of America, I invoke the grace and peace of our Saviour Jesus Christ.