



# The Holy See

---

## *GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Wednesday 4 September 2002*

### ***"They shall beat their swords into plowshares"***

*Canticle of the second chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (2,2-5)*

*Lauds on Monday of the third week*

1. The daily liturgy of Lauds, in addition to the Psalms, always offers a canticle from the Old Testament. Indeed, it is well known that besides the Psalter, the true prayer book of Israel and later of the Church, another sort of "Psalter" exists, found among the various historical, prophetic and sapiential pages of the Bible. It also consists in hymns, supplications, praises and invocations, often of great beauty and spiritual intensity.

In our spiritual pilgrimage through the prayers of the *Liturgy of Lauds*, we have already seen many of these songs that are scattered through the pages of the Bible. We will now examine one that is really admirable, the work of Isaiah, one of Israel's greatest prophets, who lived in eighth century before Christ. He was the witness of the difficult times lived by the Kingdom of Judah, but also sang of messianic hope in deeply poetic language.

2. This is the case with the Canticle we have just heard, which is placed very near the beginning of the Book of Isaiah, in the first verses of chapter two. It is introduced by a later editorial note which says: "The Vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem" (Is 2,1). The hymn is conceived as a prophetic vision describing a goal towards which the history of Israel moves in hope. It is not by accident that the first words: "In the last days" (v. 2), that is, in the fullness of time. It is therefore an invitation not to be fixed on the present that is so wretched, but to sense beneath the surface of daily events the mysterious presence of divine action leading history towards a very different horizon of light and peace.

This Messianic "vision" will be taken up again in chapter 60 of the same Book in a broader

perspective, a sign of the rethinking of the prophet's essential and incisive words, those of the Canticum we have just heard. The Prophet Micah (cf. 4,1-3) will take up the same hymn, although his ending (cf. 4,4-5) differs from that of the oracle of Isaiah (cf. Is 2,5).

3. At the heart of Isaiah's "vision" rises Mount Zion, which speaking figuratively will rise above all the other mountains, since it is God's dwelling place and so the place of contact with heaven (cf. I Kgs 8,22-53). From here according to Isaiah's saying in 60, 1-6, a light will emanate that will rend and disperse the darkness and toward it will move processions of nations from every corner of the earth.

The power of attraction of Zion is based on two realities that emanate from the Holy Mountain of Jerusalem: the Law and the Word of the Lord. In truth, they constitute a single reality which is the source of life, light and peace, an expression of the mystery of the Lord and of his will. When the nations reach the summit of Zion where the temple of God rises, then the miracle will take place which humanity has always awaited and for which it longs. The peoples will drop their weapons which will then be collected and made into tools for peaceful work: swords will be beaten into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks. Thus will dawn a horizon of peace, of *shalôm* in Hebrew (cf. Is 60,17), a word particularly cherished by Messianic theology. At last the curtain falls forever on war and hatred.

4. Isaiah's saying ends with an appeal, in harmony with the spirituality of the hymns of pilgrimage to Jerusalem: "O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord" (Is 2,5). Israel must not be a mere a spectator of this radical historical transformation; she cannot dissociate herself from the invitation that rang out in the opening, on the peoples' lips: "Come, let us climb the mountain of the Lord" (v. 3).

We Christians are also challenged by this Canticum of Isaiah. In commenting on it, the Fathers of the Church of the fourth and fifth centuries (Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Theodoret of Cyr, Cyril of Alexandria) saw it fulfilled with the coming of Christ. Consequently they identified the Church with the "mountain of the house of the Lord ... established as the highest of the mountains", from which came the Word of the Lord and to which the pagan peoples streamed, in the new era of peace inaugurated by the Gospel.

5. Already the martyr St Justin, in *The First Apology*, written about the year 153, announced that the verse of the Canticum which says: "the word of the Lord [would go forth] from Jerusalem" (cf. v. 3) had come to pass. He wrote "For twelve illiterate men, unskilled in the art of speaking, went out from Jerusalem into the world, and by the power of God they announced to the men of every nation that they were sent by Christ to teach everyone the word of God; and we, who once killed one another, [now] not only do not wage war against our enemies, but, in order to avoid lying or deceiving our examiners, we even meet death cheerfully, confessing Christ". (*Prima Apologia*, 39,3: *Gli apologeti greci*, Rome 1986, p. 118. *The First Apology*, chapter 39, pp. 75-76, CUA

Press).

For this reason, in a special way let us Christians welcome the prophet's appeal and seek to lay the foundations of the civilization of love and peace in which there will be no more war, "and death will be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor pain any more for the former things have passed away" (Apoc 21,4).

\*\*\*

I am pleased to greet the athletes and representatives of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom Federation. My cordial welcome also goes to the Capuchin Brothers from Africa taking part in a programme of spiritual renewal. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from Ireland, Malta, the Philippines, South Africa and the United States I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

*The Holy Father ended with kind words and a blessing for the young people, the sick and the newly-wed.*