



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Castelgandolfo

Wednesday, 20 August 2003

Psalm 147

"Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!"

1. The Psalm now offered for our reflection makes up the second part of the preceding Psalm 147[146]. However, the ancient Greek and Latin translations, followed by the Liturgy, considered it as an independent hymn, since its opening is clearly distinguishable from what goes before it. This beginning has also become famous because it has often been put to music in Latin: *Lauda, Jerusalem, Dominum*. These opening words comprise the typical invitation of psalmody to celebrate and praise the Lord: now Jerusalem, a personification of the people, is summoned to exalt and glorify her God (cf. v. 12).

Mention is made, first of all, of the reason for which the praying community must raise its praise to the Lord. Its nature is historic: it was He, the Liberator of Israel from the Babylonian exile, who gave security to his people by "strengthening the bars of the gates" of the city (cf. v. 13).

When Jerusalem had fallen under the assault of King Nebuchadnezzar's army in 586 B.C., the Book of Lamentations presents the Lord himself as the judge of Israel's sin, as he "determined to lay in ruins the wall of the daughter of Zion.... Her gates have sunk into the ground; he has ruined and broken her bars" (Lam 2: 8, 9). Now, instead, the Lord returns as the builder of the Holy City; in the restored temple He blesses his sons and daughters once again. Thus mention is made of the work carried out by Nehemiah (cf. 3: 1-38), who restored the walls of Jerusalem, so that it would become again an oasis of serenity and peace.

2. Indeed, peace, *shalom*, is evoked without hesitation, as it is contained symbolically in the very name of Jerusalem. The prophet Isaiah had already promised the city: "I will make your overseers

peace and your taskmakers righteousness" (Is 60: 17).

However, other than repairing the walls of the city, blessing and reconciling her in security, God offers Israel other essential gifts described at the end of the Psalm. Here, indeed, the gifts of Revelation, the Law and the divine regulations are recalled: "He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel" (Ps 147: 19).

In this way, the election of Israel and her sole mission among the peoples is celebrated: to proclaim to the world the Word of God. It is a prophetic and priestly mission, because "what great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?" (Dt 4: 8). It is through Israel and, therefore, also through the Christian community, namely the Church, that the Word of God resounds in the world and becomes instruction and light for all peoples (cf. Ps 147: 20).

3. So far, we have described the first reason to give praise to the Lord: it is a historical reason, one linked to the liberating and revealing action of God with his people.

There remains, however, another reason for exultation and praise: it is of a cosmic nature, connected to the divine creative action. The divine Word bursts in to give life to being. Like a messenger, it runs from one corner of the earth to the other (cf. Ps 147: 15). And suddenly, there is a flowering of wonders.

Now winter arrives, its climatic phenomena painted with a touch of poetry: the snow is like wool because of its whiteness, the frost with its delicate particles is like the dust of the desert (cf. v. 16), the hail is like morsels of bread thrown to the ground, the ice congeals the earth and halts vegetation (cf. v. 17). It is a winter scene that invites one to discover the wonders of creation which will be taken up again in a very picturesque page of another book of the Bible, that of Sirach (43: 18-20).

4. Behold, then, the reblossoming of springtime, always through the action of the divine Word: the ice melts, the warm wind blows and the waters flow (cf. Ps 147: 18), repeating the perennial cycle of the seasons and therefore the same possibility of life for men and women.

Naturally, metaphorical readings of these divine gifts are not lacking. The "finest of wheat" makes one think of the immense gift of the Eucharistic bread. Indeed, Origen, the great Christian writer of the third century, identified that wheat as a sign of Christ himself and, in particular, of Sacred Scripture.

This is his commentary: "Our Lord is the grain of wheat that falls to the earth, and multiplies itself for us. But this grain of wheat is supremely copious. The Word of God is supremely copious, it encloses all delights in itself. All that you see, comes from the Word of God, in the same way as

the Jews recount: when they ate the manna, it took on the taste in the mouth that each one desired. So also with the flesh of Christ, which is the word of the teaching, namely, understanding of the Sacred Scriptures, the greater our desire, the greater the nourishment we receive. If you are holy, you find refreshment; if you are a sinner, you find torment" (Origen-Jerome, *74 omelie sul libro dei Salmi* [74 Homilies on the Book of Psalms], Milan 1993, pp. 543-44).

5. The Lord, therefore, acts with his Word not only in creation but also in history. He reveals himself with the silent language of nature (cf. Ps 19[18]: 2-7), but expresses himself in an explicit way through the Bible and his personal communication through the prophets and fully through the Son (cf. Heb 1: 1, 2). They are two different but converging gifts of His love.

For this reason, our praise must rise to heaven each day. It is our gratitude which blossoms at dawn in the prayer of Lauds to bless the Lord of life and freedom, of existence and faith, of creation and redemption.

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 Scotland, the United States of America, Japan and Hong Kong. Upon all of you I cordially invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

I also greet with affection the *young people*, the *sick people* and the *newly-weds*. Calling to mind the admirable figure of St Bernard, abbot and doctor of the Church, whom we are commemorating today, I hope that each one grows always more in the love of God, who gives full meaning to youth, to suffering and to family life.

PEACE APPEAL

The tragic news that is arriving from Baghdad and from Jerusalem can only cause in our heart profound sadness and unanimous reproof. While we entrust to divine mercy the people who lost their lives and implore consolation for those who mourn, we pray to the God of peace that wisdom will prevail in hearts and that those responsible for public affairs will be able to break this fatal spiral of hatred and violence.
