



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 6 October 2004

Psalm 45[44]

"Listen, O daughter!"

1. The sweet feminine portrait that the liturgy has offered us forms the second scene of the diptych which makes up Psalm 45[44]. It is a serene and joyful nuptial song that we read in the Liturgy of Vespers. Thus, after meditating on the king who is celebrating his wedding (cf. vv. 2-10), our gaze now shifts to the figure of the queen, his bride (cf. vv. 11-18). This nuptial perspective enables us to dedicate the Psalm to all couples who live their marriage with inner intensity and freshness, a sign of a "great mystery", as St Paul suggests: the mystery of the Father's love for humanity and Christ's love for his Church (cf. Eph 5: 32). However, the Psalm unfolds a further horizon.

In fact, the Jewish king is in the limelight and in view of this the subsequent Judaic tradition saw in him the features of the Davidic Messiah, whereas Christianity transformed the hymn into a song in honour of Christ.

2. Now, however, our attention is held by the profile of the queen which the court poet, the author of the Psalm (cf. Ps 45[44]: 2), paints with great delicacy and feeling. The reference to the Phoenician city of Tyre (cf. v. 13) leads us to suppose that she is a foreign princess. The appeal to forget her own people and her father's house (cf. v. 11), which she has had to leave, thus acquires particular meaning.

The vocation to marriage is a turning point in life and changes a person's existence, as has already emerged in the Book of Genesis: "Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gn 2: 24). The queen-bride, with her wedding

procession that is bearing gifts, now advances towards the king who is entranced by her beauty (cf. Ps 45[44]: 12-13).

3. The Psalmist's insistence in exalting the woman is important: she is "clothed with splendour" (v. 14), and this magnificence is illustrated by her wedding robes, woven of gold and richly embroidered (cf. vv. 14-15).

The Bible loves beauty as a reflection of God's splendour; even clothing can be raised to a sign of dazzling inner light and purity of soul.

The thought runs parallel, on the one hand, to the marvellous pages of the *Song of Songs* (cf. vv. 4 and 7), and on the other, to the echo in the Book of Revelation that portrays the "marriage of the Lamb", that is, of Christ, with the community of the redeemed, focusing on the symbolic value of the wedding robes: "The marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (Rv 19: 7-8).

4. Besides beauty, the joy is exalted that transpires from the festive procession of "maiden companions", the bridesmaids who accompany the bride "with joy and gladness" (Ps 45[44]: 15-16). True joy, far deeper than mere merriment, is an expression of love that shares with a serene heart in the good of the beloved.

Now, according to the concluding hopes expressed, another reality radically inherent in marriage is also described: fertility. Indeed, "sons" are mentioned, and "peoples" (cf. vv. 17-18). The future, not only of the dynasty but of humanity, is brought about precisely because the couple offers new creatures to the world.

In our time, this is an important topic in the West, which is often unable to entrust its existence to the future by begetting and protecting new creatures who will continue the civilization of peoples and realize the history of salvation.

5. Many Fathers of the Church, as is well known, interpreted the portrait of the queen by applying it to Mary, from the very first words of the appeal: "Listen, O daughter, give ear..." (v. 11). This also happens, for example, in the *Homily on the Mother of God* by Chrysippus of Jerusalem. He was a Cappadocian who was part of the monks who founded the monastery of St Euthymius in Palestine. He became a priest and was the custodian of the Holy Cross in the Basilica of Anastasius in Jerusalem.

"My discourse is addressed to you", he says, turning to Mary, "to you who must go as bride to the great sovereign; to you I address my discourse, to you who are about to conceive the Word of God in the way that he knows.... "Listen, O daughter, give ear to my words"; indeed, the auspicious

announcement of the world's redemption is coming true. Listen, and what you will hear will gladden your heart.... "Forget your own people and your father's house': pay no attention to your earthly parents, for you will be transformed into a heavenly queen. And "listen', he says, "to how much the One who is Creator and Lord of all things loves you'. Indeed, the "king', he says, "will desire your beauty'; the Father himself will take you as bride; the Holy Spirit will arrange all the conditions that are necessary for these nuptials.... Do not believe you will give birth to a human child, "for he is your Lord and you will adore him'. Your Creator has become your child; you will conceive and with all the others, you will worship him as your Lord" (Marian texts of the first millennium, I, Rome, 1988, pp. 605-606).

To English-speaking pilgrims

I am pleased to welcome the English-speaking pilgrims present at this Audience, especially those from Britain, Ireland and the United States of America. In a special way I greet the young people from Sudan and the deacon candidates from the North American College. Upon all of you I invoke the Lord's blessings of peace and joy.

To special groups

I address a cordial greeting to the Italian-speaking pilgrims, and in particular, to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*.

Dear friends, tomorrow the Church will be celebrating the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. I invite you to treasure this prayer, so dear to the tradition of the Christian people. Make the Rosary your daily prayer.