



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 9 November 2005

Psalm 135,1-9

"His mercy endures for ever!"

Evening Prayer - Monday of Week Fourth

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. This Psalm was called "the Great Hallel", that is, the grandiose and solemn praise that the Jews intoned during their Passover liturgy. We are referring to Psalm 136[135], whose first part we have just heard, in accordance with the way the Liturgy of Vespers divides it (cf. vv. 1-9).

Let us first reflect on the refrain "for his mercy endures for ever". At the centre of the phrase the word "mercy" rings out. In fact, it is a legitimate but limited translation of the original Hebrew term *hesed*. This is actually a word that belongs to the characteristic terminology used in the Bible to express the Covenant that exists between the Lord and his People. The term seeks to define the attitudes deriving from this relationship: faithfulness, loyalty, love, and of course, God's mercy.

We have here a concise summary that portrays the deep, personal bond established by the Creator with his creature. With this relationship, God does not appear in the Bible as an impassive and implacable Lord against whose mysterious power it is useless to struggle.

Instead, he shows himself as a person who loves his creatures, watches over them, follows them on their way through history and suffers because of the infidelities with which the people often oppose his *hesed*, his merciful and fatherly love.

2. The first visible sign of this divine love, says the Psalmist, is to be sought in creation and then in history. The gaze, full of admiration and wonder, will rest first of all on creation: the skies, the earth, the seas, the sun, the moon and the stars.

Even before discovering the God who reveals himself in the history of a people, there is a cosmic revelation, open to all, offered to the whole of humanity by the one Creator, "God of gods" and "Lord of lords" (cf. vv. 2, 3).

As sung in Psalm 19[18]: "The heavens proclaim the glory of God and the firmament shows forth the work of his hands. Day unto day takes up the story and night unto night makes known the message" (vv. 2-3). Thus, a divine message exists, secretly engraved in creation and a sign of the *hesed*, the loving fidelity of God who gives his creatures being and life, water and food, light and time.

A clear vision is essential in order to contemplate this divine revelation, recalling the recommendation of the Book of Wisdom that invites us to recognize "the greatness and the beauty of created things, [whose] original author, by analogy, is seen" (Wis 13: 5; cf. Rom 1: 20).

Prayerful praise, therefore, flows from contemplation of the "marvellous works" (cf. Ps 136[135]: 4) that God has wrought in creation that are transformed into a joyful hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

3. Consequently, we rise from the works of creation to the greatness of God and to his loving mercy. This is what we are taught by the Fathers of the Church, in whose voices resound the constant Christian *Tradition*. Thus, St Basil the Great, in one of the initial pages of his first homily on the Hexaemeron, where he comments on the creation narrative in the first chapter of Genesis, pauses to consider God's wise action and is brought to recognize God's goodness as the dynamic centre of creation. The following are several sayings from the long reflection of the Holy Bishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia: "'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. My words give way, overwhelmed by wonder at this thought" (1, 2, 1: *Sulla Genesi [Omelia sull'Esamerone]*, Milan, 1990, pp. 9, 11).

In fact, even if some, "deceived by the atheism they bore within them, imagined that the universe lacked guidance and order, at the mercy as it were of chance", the sacred author instead "immediately enlightened our minds with the Name of God at the beginning of the account, saying: "In the beginning... God created...'. And what beauty there is in this order!" (1, 2, 3: *ibid.*, p. 11).

"So if the world has a beginning and has been created, it seeks the One who gave it being and is its Creator.... Moses prepared you with his teaching, impressing in our souls as a seal and amulet the Most Holy Name of God, when he says: "In the beginning God created'. Blessed nature,

goodness exempt from envy, the one who is the object of love to all reasonable beings, beauty in addition to everything else that is desirable, the principle of beings, the source of life, the light of the mind, inaccessible wisdom, in brief, it is he who "in the beginning created the heavens and the earth" (1, 2, 6-7: *ibid.*, p. 13).

I find the words of this fourth-century Father surprisingly up to date when he says: Some people, "deceived by the atheism they bore within them, imagined that the universe lacked guidance and order, at the mercy as it were of chance". How many these "some people" are today! Deceived by atheism they consider and seek to prove that it is scientific to think that all things lack guidance and order as though they were at the mercy of chance. The Lord through Sacred Scripture reawakens our reason which has fallen asleep and tells us: in the beginning was the creative Word. In the beginning the creative Word - this Word that created all things, that created this intelligent design which is the cosmos - is also love.

Therefore, let us allow this Word of God to awaken us; let us pray that it will additionally illumine our minds so that we can perceive the message of creation - also written in our hearts - that the beginning of all things is creative wisdom, and this wisdom is love, it is goodness: "his mercy endures for ever".

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To special groups

I am happy to greet the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including visitors from China, Indonesia and Japan, from England, Africa and North America. I pray that your visit to Rome will strengthen your faith and renew your love for the Lord, and ask God's Blessing upon all of you, and upon your families and loved ones.

Lastly, my thoughts go to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Today, when we are celebrating the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, the Cathedral of Rome, I invite you, dear brothers and sisters, to join the whole Church in addressing to Christ the Saviour, Redeemer of man and of history, an ardent prayer that humanity will accept the gift of his freedom and salvation.

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