



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 9 February 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. As you have heard from the readers, our meeting opened with the "*Great Hallel*", Psalm 136 (135), which is a solemn litany for soloist and choir. It is sung to the *hesed* of God, that is, to his faithful love revealed through the events of salvation history, especially the deliverance from slavery in Egypt and the gift of the promised land. Israel's profession of faith in God (cf. *Dt* 26: 5-9; *Jos* 24: 1-13) proclaims God's actions in human history: the Lord is not an impassive emperor surrounded with a halo of light and relegated to the golden heavens; he sees the affliction of his people in Egypt, hears their cry and comes down to deliver them (cf. *Ex* 3: 7-8).

2. Well, now we will try to explain God's presence in history in the light of the Trinitarian revelation which, although fulfilled completely in the New Testament, is already in some way anticipated and foreshadowed in the Old. We will begin then with the Father, whose features can already be glimpsed when God intervenes in history on behalf of the righteous who call upon him as a tender and loving father. He is "the father of orphans and the defender of widows" (*Ps* 68: 6); he is also a father to his rebellious and sinful people.

Two prophetic texts, extraordinarily beautiful and intense, introduce a delicate soliloquy of God concerning his "degenerate children" (*Dt* 32: 5). Through them God reveals his constancy and loving presence in the tangle of human history. In Jeremiah the Lord exclaims: "I am a father to Israel.... Is he not my favoured son, the child in whom I delight? Often as I threaten him, I still remember him with favour; my heart stirs for him, I must show him mercy" (*Jer* 31: 9; 20). The other wonderful confession by God can be read in Hosea: "When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son.... It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks; and I bent down to them

and fed them.... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender" (*Hos* 11: 1, 3-4, 8).

3. We must draw the conclusion from these biblical passages that God the Father is far from indifferent to what happens to us. Indeed, he even sends his Only-begotten *Son* into the heart of history, as Christ himself testifies in his night-time conversation with Nicodemus: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (*Jn* 3: 16-17). The Son enters into time and space as the living and life-giving centre that gives definitive meaning to the flow of history, saving it from dissipation and triviality. In particular, all humanity, with its joys and sorrows, its tormented history of good and evil, converges upon the Cross of Christ, source of salvation and eternal life: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself" (*Jn* 12: 32). The Letter to the Hebrews will proclaim Christ's perennial presence in history in one dazzling sentence: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (13: 8).

4. To discover this hidden yet effective presence in the flow of events, to discern the kingdom of God which is now in our midst (cf. *Lk* 17: 21), we must look beyond the outward appearances of historical dates and events. Here the *Holy Spirit* comes into action. Even if the Old Testament does not yet offer an explicit revelation of his person, certain saving initiatives can certainly be "appropriated" to him. It is he who spurs the judges of Israel (cf. *Jgs* 3: 10), David (cf. *1 Sam* 16: 13) and the Messiah King (cf. *Is* 11: 1-2; 42: 1), but above all he pours himself out in the prophets, whose mission is to reveal the divine glory hidden in history, the Lord's plan underlying the events of our lives. The prophet Isaiah offers a most effective passage, which will be taken up by Christ in his programmatic address at the synagogue of Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted, he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (*Is* 61: 1-2; *Lk* 4: 18-19).

5. The Spirit of God not only reveals the meaning of history, but instils the strength to cooperate with the divine plan that is fulfilled in it. In the light of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, history ceases to be a succession of events that fade into the abyss of death, but becomes a land made fruitful by the seed of eternity, a path leading to that sublime goal in which "God will be all in all" (*1 Cor* 15: 28). The Jubilee, which calls to mind "the year of favour" announced by Isaiah and inaugurated by Christ, is intended to be the epiphany of this seed and this glory, so that everyone, sustained by God's presence, may hope in a new world which is more genuinely Christian and human.

May each of us then, in stammering something of the mystery of the Trinity at work in our history, make his own the adoring wonder of St Gregory of Nazianzus, theologian and poet, when he sings: "Glory to God the Father and the Son, King of the universe. Glory to the Spirit, worthy of

praise and all-holy. The Trinity is the one God who created and filled all things ... giving life to all things by his Spirit, so that all creatures might sing praise to their wise Creator, the one cause of life and its duration. More than any other, may the rational creature always celebrate him as the great King and good Father" (*Dogmatic Poems, XXI, Hymnus alias: PG 37, 510-511*).

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To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I extend a special welcome to the members of the Joint College of African-American Pentecostal Bishops. I am confident that your visit to Rome will help to strengthen ecumenical relations between Catholics and Pentecostals. I greet the members of the Tamil Organization of Rome, who are celebrating the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of their foundation. Upon all the pilgrims from England, Australia, Japan and the United States of America I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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