



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*1. In his Letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul quotes, not without surprise, a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah (cf. 65: 1), in which God says through the mouth of the prophet: "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me" (*Rom* 10: 20)Well then, after having reflected in our preceding catecheses on the glory of the Trinity manifested in the cosmos and in history, now we want to begin an inward journey, exploring the mysterious ways in which God comes to meet man in order to share his life and glory with him. For God loves the creature formed in his image and likeness and, like the caring shepherd in the parable we have just heard (cf. *Lk* 15: 4-7), he never tires of searching for him, even when he appears indifferent or even hostile to the divine life, like the sheep which wanders from the flock and is lost in inaccessible and dangerous places.2. Pursued by God, man already senses his presence, already basks in the light on his shoulders and already hearkens to the voice calling him from afar. And so he himself begins to search for the God who is searching for him: sought out, he begins to seek; loved, he begins to love. Today we will start to trace this stirring interaction between God's initiative and man's reponse, discovering it as a fundamental element of religious experience. In fact, an echo of this experience is also heard in some voices far removed from Christianity, a sign of the universal human desire to know God and to receive his kindness. Even an enemy of the biblical Israel, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, who had destroyed the holy city, Jerusalem, in 587-586 B.C., addressed the Godhead in these words: "Without you, Lord, what would be the king whom you love and have called by name? How could he be good in your eyes? You guide his name, you lead him by the right path! ... By your grace, O Lord, which you richly share with everyone, your sublime majesty becomes mercy and you make the fear of your divinity dwell in my heart. Give me what is good for you, since you have formed my life!" (cf. G. Pettinato, *Babilonia*, Milan 1994, p. 182).3. Our Muslim brethren also express a similar belief by often repeating throughout their day the prayer that opens the Koran and precisely celebrates the way in which God, "the Lord of Creation, the Compassionate, the Merciful", guides those upon whom he pours out his grace. The great biblical tradition especially prompts the faithful to call often upon God to receive the necessary light and strength from him to do good. Thus the Psalmist prays in Psalm 119: "Instruct me, O Lord, in the way of your statutes, that I may exactly observe them. Give me discernment, that I may observe your law and keep it with all my heart. Lead me in the path of your commands, for in it I

delight.... Turn away my eyes from seeing what is vain; by your way give me life" (vv. 33-35, 37).⁴ In universal religious experience, especially in what is transmitted by the Bible, we thus find an awareness of God's primacy as he searches for man in order to lead him into the realm of his light and mystery. In the beginning there is the Word, which breaks through the silence of the void, the "favour" of God (*Lk* 2: 14), who never abandons those he has created to themselves. Certainly, this absolute beginning does not eliminate the need for human action or the human obligation to respond; man is called to let himself be touched by God and to open his life's door to him, but he also has the ability to turn down these invitations. In this regard, the Book of Revelation puts amazing words on Christ's lips: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (*Rv* 3: 20). If Christ were not to travel the world's roads, we would be left alone within our narrow horizons. Still, we must open the door to him, so that we can have him at our table in a communion of life and love.⁵ The journey of God's encounter with man will unfold under the banner of love. On the one hand, divine Trinitarian love goes before us, surrounds us and constantly opens the way for us to the Father's house. There the Father is waiting to embrace us, as in the Gospel parable of the "prodigal son", or better of the "merciful Father" (cf. *Lk* 15: 11-32). On the other hand, fraternal love is asked of us as a response to God's love: "Beloved", John admonishes us in his First Letter, "if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.... God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 *Jn* 4: 11, 16). Salvation, life and eternal joy blossom from the embrace of divine love and human love.* * *I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, Scotland, Denmark, Tanzania, Indonesia, Japan, Canada and the United States of America. With special affection, I greet the priests from the Logos Pastoral Centre in Rome and the Sisters of the Resurrection. Upon all of you I invoke the peace and joy of our Lord Jesus Christ. © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana