



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord (Comment on Psalm 62)

1. Psalm 62 on which we are reflecting today is the Psalm of mystical love, which celebrates total adherence to God based on an almost physical yearning and reaching its fullness in a close and everlasting embrace. Prayer becomes longing, thirst and hunger, because it involves the soul and the body.

As St Teresa of Avila wrote: *"Thirst, I think, means the desire for something very necessary for us so necessary that if we have none of it we shall die."* (*The Way of Perfection*, chap. XIX). The liturgy presents to us the first two verses of the Psalm which are indeed focused on the symbols of thirst and hunger, while the third verse evokes a dark horizon, that of the divine judgement of evil, in contrast to the brightness and confident longing of the rest of the Psalm.

Believers long to be filled with God, the source of living water

2. Let us begin our meditation with the first *song*, that of *the thirst* for God (cf. vv. 2-4). It is dawn, the sun is rising in the clear blue sky of the Holy Land, and the person praying begins his day by going to the temple to seek God's light. He has an almost instinctive, one might say "physical" need for that encounter with the Lord. Just as the dried-out earth is dead until it is watered by the rain and the earth's gaping cracks suggest the image of its parched and thirsty mouth, so the believer yearns for God, to be filled with him and thus to live in communion with him.

The prophet Jeremiah had already proclaimed: the Lord is the "source of living waters", and had reproached the people for building "broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (2: 13). Jesus himself would exclaim aloud: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me; let him drink who believes in me" (Jn

7: 37-38). At high noon on a quiet, sunny day, he promises the Samaritan woman: "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst; the water that I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4: 14).

3. The prayer of Psalm 62 is interwoven with the song of the wonderful Psalm 42: "as the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.... When shall I come and behold the face of God?" (vv. 2-3). Now in Old Testament language the Hebrew "soul" is indicated by the term *nefesh*, which in some texts means "throat" and whose meaning in many others is broadened to encompass the whole of the person. Taken in these dimensions, the word helps us to realize how essential and profound our need for God is; without him we lack breath and even life itself. For this reason the Psalmist comes to the point of putting physical existence itself on the second level, if union with God should be lacking: "for your steadfast love is better than life" (Ps 62: 3). In Ps 73 he will also repeat to the Lord: "There is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.... for me it is good to be near God" (Ps 73: 25-28).

4. After the song about thirst, the Psalmist sings a song about hunger (cf. Ps 62: 5-8). With the images of "the soul feasting as with marrow and fat" and of being filled, the person praying is probably referring to one of the sacrifices that were celebrated in the temple of Zion: the so-called sacrifice "of communion", that is, a sacred banquet at which the faithful ate the flesh of the sacrifice. Another fundamental need of life is used here as a symbol of communion with God: hunger is appeased when people hear the divine Word and encounter the Lord. Indeed "man does not live by bread alone, but ... by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (Dt 8: 3; cf. Mt 4: 4). And here flashes across the Christian's mind the thought of the banquet that Christ prepared on the last evening of his earthly life, whose deep value he had explained in his discourse at Capernaum: "For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (Jn 6: 55-56).

5. Through the mystical food of communion with God, "the soul clings to him" as the Psalmist says. Once again the word "soul" suggests the whole human being. Here one rightly finds the mention of an embrace, an almost physical clinging; henceforth God and man are in full communion and on the lips of his creature only joyful and grateful praise can bloom. Even during the dark night we feel protected by God's wings, just as the ark of the Covenant is covered by the wings of the cherubim. And then the ecstatic expression of jubilation blossoms: "In the shadow of your wings I sing for joy". Fear is dispelled, the embrace does not cling to emptiness but to God himself, our souls are upheld by the power of his right hand (cf. Ps 62: 7-8).

6. In reading the Psalm in the light of the Easter mystery, our hunger and thirst which impel us towards God find their fulfillment in the crucified and risen Christ, from whom we receive the gift of the Spirit and the sacraments which give us new life and the nourishment that sustains it. St John Chrysostom reminds us in commenting on the Johannine phrase: from his side "flowed

blood and water" (cf. Jn 19: 34), he says "that baptism and the mysteries [that is, the Eucharist] were symbolized in that blood and water". And he concludes: "Have you seen how Christ has united his bride to himself? Have you seen with what kind of food he feeds us all? By the same food we are formed and are fed. As a woman feeds her child with her own blood and milk, so too Christ himself continually feeds those whom he has begotten with his own blood" (Homily III address to catechumens, 16-19 *passim*: SC 50 bis, 160-162).

I warmly greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present, especially those from England, Finland, Ghana, Korea and the United States. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of the Risen Lord.