



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday 13 November 2002

Psalm 86[87]

Jerusalem, Mother of all Peoples

1. The hymn to Jerusalem, city of peace and universal mother, which we have just heard is unfortunately at variance with the historical experience the city is living. But the task of prayer is to sow confidence and give birth to hope.

The universal perspective of Psalm 86[87] can call to mind the hymn of the Book of Isaiah, who sees all the nations converging toward Zion to hear the Word of the Lord and rediscover the beauty of peace, beating their "swords into ploughshares" and their "spears into pruning hooks" (cf. 2,2-5).

In reality, the Psalm is placed in a very different perspective: that of a movement, that instead of converging on Zion, goes out from Zion. The Psalmist sees in Zion the origin of all peoples. After declaring the primacy of the Holy City, not for its historical or cultural merits, but only because of the love God poured out on it (cf. Ps 86[87],1-3), the Psalm opens to a real celebration of this universality, which makes all peoples brothers and sisters.

2. Zion is sung as mother, not just of Israel, but of all humanity. Such an affirmation is extremely daring. The Psalmist is aware of this and draws attention to it: "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God" (v. 3). How could the modest capital of a small nation be portrayed as the origin of peoples who are far more powerful? How can Zion make this immense claim? The answer is given in the same sentence: Zion is mother of all humanity because she is the "city of God"; she is at the foundation of God's plan.

All the cardinal points of the earth are situated in relation with this mother: Rahab, that is, Egypt,

the great western state; Babylon, the well-known eastern power; Tyre, which personifies the commercial people of the north, while Ethiopia represents the deep south and Palestine, the central area, also a daughter of Zion.

In the spiritual register of Jerusalem, all the peoples of the earth are registered: three times the formula is repeated "This one was born there; that one [was] born in her" (vv. 4.5.6). It is the official juridical expression which at that time declared that a person was a native of a specific city, and as such, entitled to enjoy all the civil rights of that people.

3. It is striking to observe even nations considered hostile to Israel going up to Jerusalem and to be welcomed not as foreigners but as "relatives". Indeed, the Psalmist transforms the procession of these peoples towards Zion into a choral song and a joyful dance: they rediscover their "source" (cf. v. 7) in the city of God from which a river of living water flows that makes the whole world fruitful, in line with what the prophets proclaimed (cf. Ez 47,1-12; Zec 13,1; 14,8; Apoc 22,1-2).

In Jerusalem, all people must discover their spiritual roots, feel they are in their homeland, meet again as members of the same family and embrace one another as brothers and sisters who have come back home.

4. A page of interreligious dialogue, Psalm 86[87] sums up the universal heritage of the prophets (cf. Is 56,6-7; 60,6-7; 66,21; Jos 4,10-11; Mal 1,11, etc.) and anticipates the Christian tradition that applies this Psalm to the "Jerusalem above", which St Paul proclaims, "is free and she is our mother" and has more sons than the earthly Jerusalem (cf. Gal 26-27). The Apocalypse says the same when it sings of "Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God" (Apoc 21,2.10).

Along the lines of Psalm 86[87], the Second Vatican Council sees in the universal Church the place in which "all the just from the time of Adam" are reunited, "from Abel the just one to the last of the elect". The Church will be brought to "glorious completion at the end of time" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 2).

5. This ecclesial interpretation of the Psalm is open, in the Christian tradition, to a reinterpretation in a Mariological key. Jerusalem, for the Psalmist, was a real "metropolis" that is, a "mother-city", in which the Lord himself was present (cf. Zep 3,14-18). In this light, Christianity sings of Mary as the living Zion in whose womb is conceived the Incarnate Word, and consequently the children of God reborn. The voices of the Fathers of the Church - from Ambrose of Milan to Athanasius of Alexandria, from Maximus Confessor to John Damascene, from Chromatius of Aquileia to Germanus of Constantinople - agree on this Christian re-reading of Psalm 86[87].

Let us now listen to a teacher of the Armenian tradition, Gregory of Narek (c. 950-1010), who in his *Panegyric Address to the Blessed Virgin Mary* says to her: "Taking refuge under your most worthy and powerful intercession, we are protected, O holy Mother of God, finding refreshment

and repose under the shadow of your protection as if we were protected by a heavily fortified wall: an ornate wall, gracefully inset with the purest diamonds; a wall encircled by fire, therefore impenetrable to the assaults of thieves; sparkling, blazing, insurmountable and inaccessible to cruel traitors; a wall surrounded on all sides, according to David, whose foundations were laid by the Most High (cf. Ps 86[87], 1.5); a mighty wall of the heavenly city, according to Paul (cf. Gal 4,26; Heb 12,22), where you welcome everyone as its inhabitants because through the corporeal birth of God, you made the children of Jerusalem on earth into children of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Therefore their lips bless your virginal womb and all profess you as the dwelling place and temple of the One who is consubstantial with the Father. Justly, then, what the prophet said rightly applies to you: "You were for us a house of refuge and our help against the torrents on the days of anguish' (cf. Ps 45[46],2)" *Testi mariani del primo millennio*, IV, Rome 1991, p. 589).

To English-speaking pilgrims and visitors

I extend a special welcome to the students of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland, to the members of the NATO Defense College, and to the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships. May these days spent in Rome strengthen you in your spiritual lives and in your commitment to your respective callings. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, especially those from Mauritius and the United States of America, I invoke the abiding peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

Lastly I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and *newly-weds*.

Dear friends, may the Lord's grace help you to fulfil your Christian vocation every day. May it encourage you, dear *young people*, in your effort to be artisans of justice and reconciliation.

May it sustain you, dear *sick people*, so that you may not lose your trust in God who never abandons us in our trials. And may it enlighten you, dear *newly-weds*, so that you may find in the Gospel the joy of generously accepting and serving life, a great divine gift.

Appeal for peace in Colombia

The constant flow of sad news from Colombia this time concerns the kidnapping of Bishop Jorge Enrique Jiménez Carvajal of Zipaquirá, President of the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), together with a priest who accompanied him.

This fact, which intensifies the atmosphere of the violation of human rights and deeply afflicts the civilian population and the Church, impels me to condemn once again every form of violence and the violation of human dignity, which is never the way to peace. As I forcefully call for the release of all the kidnapped and ask that these pastors be able to return to their service to the People of God, I pray that God may grant the peace, much needed to Colombia.