



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday, 9 April 2003

Psalm 134[135]

"Praise the name of the Lord!"

1. *The Liturgy of Lauds*, whose development we are following in our catecheses, presents to us the first part of Psalm 134 [135] which we have just heard the choir sing. The text reveals a closely-packed series of allusions to other biblical passages, and it seems to be pervaded by an Easter atmosphere. Not for nothing has the Judaic tradition linked our Psalm to the next one, Psalm 135 [136], considering the whole as the "Great *Hallel*", the solemn, festive praise to be raised to the Lord at Easter.

Indeed, the Psalm brings the Exodus to the fore with its mention of the "plagues" of Egypt and its evocation of the entry into the promised land. But let us now look at the subsequent stages which Psalm 134 [135] reveals in the development of the first 12 verses: it is a reflection that we would like to turn into a prayer.

2. The Psalm opens with the characteristic invitation to praise, a typical feature of the hymns addressed to the Lord in the Psalter. The appeal to sing the *Alleluia* is addressed to the "servants of the Lord" (cf. v. 1), who in the original Hebrew "stand" in the sacred area of the temple (cf. v. 2), that is, in the ritual attitude of prayer (cf. Ps 133[134]: 1-2).

The first to be involved in this praise are the ministers of worship, priests and Levites, who live and work "in the courts of the house of our God" (cf. Ps 134[135]: 2). However, all the faithful are associated, in spirit, with these "servants of the Lord". In fact, immediately after the mention of the election of all Israel to be ally and witness of the Lord's love follows: "For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession" (v. 4). In this perspective, two basic qualities of God are celebrated: he is "good" and he is "gracious" (cf. v. 3). The bond between us and the

Lord is marked by love, intimacy and joyful adherence.

3. After the invitation to praise, the Psalmist continues with a solemn profession of faith that starts with the words "I know", that is, I recognize, I believe (cf. v. 5). Two articles of faith are sung by a soloist on behalf of the entire people, assembled for the liturgy. He first exalts God's work in the whole universe: He is the Lord of the cosmos *par excellence*: "The Lord does whatever he wills, in heaven and on earth" (v. 6). He even commands the seas and the depths, which are the emblem of chaos, of negative forces, of limitation and the void.

Again, it is the Lord, with recourse to his "storehouses" (cf. v. 7), who produces the clouds, lightning, rain and winds. In ancient times, people in the Near East imagined that the elements were stored in special containers, rather like heavenly caskets, from which God drew them and scattered them on earth.

4. The other element of the profession of faith concerns the history of salvation. God the Creator is now recognized as the redeeming Lord, calling to mind the fundamental events of Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt. The Psalmist initially cites the "plague" of the first-born (cf. Ex 12: 29-30) that sums up all the "signs and miracles" that God the Liberator worked during the epic of the Exodus (cf. Ps 134[135]: 8-9). Immediately afterwards are recalled the sensational victories that enabled Israel to overcome the difficulties and obstacles with which its path was strewn (cf. vv. 10-11). Finally, the promised land, which Israel receives as "a heritage" from the Lord, can be discerned on the horizon (cf. v. 12).

All these signs of the covenant, more broadly expressed in the following Psalm, 135 [136], testify to the basic truth, announced in the first Commandment of the Decalogue. God is one and he is a person who works and speaks, loves and saves: "the Lord is great... our God is above all gods" (v. 5; cf. Ex 20: 2-3; Ps 95 [94]: 3).

5. Following this profession of faith, we too raise our praise to God. Pope St Clement I, in his *Letter to the Corinthians*, addresses this invitation to us: "Let us gaze upon the Father and Creator of the whole universe. Let us cherish his gifts and benefits of peace, magnificent and sublime. Let us contemplate him with our minds and turn the eyes of our soul to the greatness of his will! Only think how just he is to all his creatures. The heavens that move as he orders obey him in harmony. Day and night take the course he has established and are not confused with each other.

The sun and moon and the multitudes of stars revolve harmoniously according to his directions, never deviating from the orbits he has assigned to them. The earth, made fertile through his will, produces abundant food for men and women, for wild beasts and for all the animals that live on it, without reluctance and changing none of his orders" (19,2-20,4: *I Padri Apostolici*, Rome, 1984, pp. 62-63). Clement I concludes observing: "The Creator and Lord of the universe disposes that all these things should be in peace and concord, beneficent to all and especially to us who call on

his mercy through Our Lord Jesus Christ. To him be glory and majesty for ever and ever. Amen" (20,11-12: *ibid.*, p. 63).

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors

I am pleased to extend special greetings to the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, the Faroe Islands and the United States of America. Upon all of you, I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

I now address a cordial greeting to you, *young people*, *sick people* and *newly-weds*.

In this last stretch of Lent, I urge you to continue with commitment the spiritual journey towards Easter.

I ask you, dear *young people*, to intensify your witness of love for the cross of Christ; I ask you, dear *sick people*, to live the trial of pain as an act of love for the crucified and risen Jesus; and I ask you, dear *newly-weds*, to imitate in your spousal union the enduring fidelity of the Lord to the Church, his Bride.

Appeal for Africa

While fighting with destruction and death continues in Baghdad and other urban centres in Iraq, equally disturbing news is arriving from the African continent. In the past few days we have received information about massacres and summary executions. The scene of these crimes was the tortured Great Lakes region and, especially, an area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As I raise to God a fervent prayer for the repose of the victims' souls, I address a heartfelt appeal to political leaders and to all people of good will to do their utmost to put an end to the violence and abuses, setting aside selfish personal and group interests, with the effective collaboration of the international community.

Thus, every effort for reconciliation among the Congolese, Ugandan and Rwandan peoples should be encouraged, as well as the parallel efforts being made in Burundi and in the Sudan, in the hope that the long-desired peace may soon blossom from them.

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