



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 26 May 2004

Canticle in Revelation ([11: 17-18](#) and [12: 10, 12](#))

Hymn of thanksgiving to God

1. The Canticle presented in the Liturgy of Vespers which we have just raised to the "Lord God Almighty", results from the selection of a few verses from chapters 11 and 12 of the Book of Revelation. The last of the seven trumpets that resonate in this book of endeavour and hope has now sounded. The 24 elders of the heavenly court who represent all the just of the Old and New Covenants (cf. Rv 4: 4; 11: 6) chant a hymn that was perhaps already in use at the liturgical assemblies of the early Church. They worship God, sovereign of the world and of history, now ready to establish his Kingdom of justice, love and truth.

In this prayer we can feel the heartbeat of the just who wait in hope for the coming of the Lord to brighten human existence, often enveloped in the darkness of sin, injustice, falsehood and violence.

2. The hymn sung by the 24 elders is modulated on the reference to two Psalms: the second Psalm which is a Messianic hymn (cf. 2: 1-5) and Psalm 99[98] which celebrates the royalty of God (cf. v. 1). The goal of exalting the just and definitive judgment that the Lord is about to make over the whole of human history is reached in this way.

His beneficial intervention has two aspects, just as the face of God has two features that define it. He is indeed a judge, but he is also a saviour; he condemns evil but rewards fidelity; he is justice but above all he is love.

The identity of the just, now saved in the Kingdom of God, is significant. They are divided into three categories of "servants" of the Lord: the prophets, the saints and those who fear his name (cf. Rv 11: 18). This is a sort of spiritual portrait of the People of God, according to the gifts they received in Baptism and which flourished in their life of faith and love; it is a "sketch" drawn out in both the small and the great (cf. 19: 5).

3. Our hymn, as has been said, was composed also with the use of other verses from chapter 12, which refer to a grandiose and glorious scene of the Apocalypse. In it, there is a battle between the woman who has given birth to the Messiah and the dragon of wickedness and violence. In this duel between good and evil, between the Church and Satan, a heavenly voice suddenly rings out announcing the defeat of the "accuser" (cf. 12: 10). This is the translation of the Hebrew name for "Satan", used to describe a figure whom the Book of Job says is a member of the celestial court of God, in which he fulfils the role of public minister (cf. Jb 1: 9-11; 2: 4-5; Zec 3: 1).

He "accuse[ed] our brethren day and night before our God", that is, he cast doubt on the sincerity of the faith of the just. The satanic dragon is silenced and the cause of its defeat is "the blood of the Lamb" (Rv 12: 11), the passion and the death of Christ our Redeemer.

The witness of Christian martyrdom is associated with his victory. There is intimate sharing in the redeeming work of the Lamb by the faithful who, with no second thoughts, "loved not their lives even unto death" (*ibid.*). This thought stems from Christ's words: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn 12: 25).

4. The heavenly soloist who has sung the canticle brings it to a conclusion by inviting the entire choir of angels to sing joyfully in unison for the salvation obtained (cf. Rv 12: 12). Let us associate ourselves with that voice in our own thanksgiving, festive and hopeful, even amid the trials that mark our way to glory.

Let us do so by listening to the words that the martyr St Polycarp addressed to the "Lord God Almighty" when he was already bound and waiting to be burned at the stake: "Lord God Almighty, Father of your beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ... blessed are you for having deemed me worthy on this day and in this hour to take my place among the ranks of the martyrs, in Christ's chalice, for the resurrection to eternal life of soul and body, in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit.

May I be welcomed among them today in your presence as a succulent and pleasing sacrifice, just as you, our true God and far from falsehood, disposed and manifested and accomplished beforehand. Above all things, therefore, I praise you, I bless you, and I glorify you in your eternal and heavenly High Priest and beloved Son, Jesus Christ, through whom may you be glorified, with him and with the Holy Spirit, now and for ever and ever. Amen" (*Atti e passioni dei martiri*, Milan, 1987, p. 23).

To special groups

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking visitors present at this Audience today, in particular the pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Chicago led by their Archbishop, Cardinal Francis George. Upon all of you, especially those from England, Ireland, Sweden, Indonesia and the United States of America, I cordially invoke an abundance of grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lastly, I address you, dear *young people*, dear *sick people* and dear *newly-weds*. I hope that each one of you will imitate St Philip Neri, whose Memorial we celebrate today: strive like him to serve God in joy and to love your neighbour with Gospel simplicity.