



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Humanity's journey to the Father

1. In this final year of preparation for the Jubilee, the theme on which we are reflecting, that is, humanity's journey to the Father, suggests that we meditate on the eschatological perspective, in other words, on the final end of human history. Particularly in our time, everything proceeds at incredible speed, both because of scientific and technological discoveries and because of the media's influence. As a result, we spontaneously ask ourselves what is humanity's destiny and final goal. The Word of God offers us a precise answer to this question and shows us the plan of salvation that the Father carries out in history through Christ by the work of the Spirit.

In the Old Testament, the fundamental reference-point is the Exodus, with its focus on entering the promised land. The Exodus is not only a historical event, but the revelation of God's saving work which will be gradually fulfilled, as the prophets endeavour to show by shedding light on the present and future of Israel.

2. During the Exile, the prophets foretell a new Exodus, a return to the promised land. With this renewed gift of land, not only will God bring together his people scattered among the nations, but he will transform the heart of each one, that is, his capacity to know, love and act: "I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (*Ez 11:19-20; cf. 36:26-28*).

Through their commitment to observing the norms established by the Covenant, the people will be able to live in an environment similar to the one that came from God's hands at the moment of creation: "This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and

desolate and ruined cities are now inhabited and fortified” (ibid., 36:35). This will be a new covenant, expressed concretely in the observance of a law written upon their hearts (cf. *Jer* 31:31-34).

Then the horizon broadens and a new land is promised. The final goal is a new Jerusalem, where all affliction will cease, as we read in the Book of Isaiah: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.... I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress” (*Is* 65:17-19).

3. Revelation takes up this vision. John writes: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (*Rv* 21:1f.).

The passage to this new creation requires a commitment to holiness, which the New Testament will clothe in absolute radicalism, as we read in the Second Letter of Peter: “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (*2 Pt* 3:11-13).

4. Christ's resurrection, ascension and the announcement of his second coming have opened new eschatological horizons. In the Last Supper discourse, Jesus says: “I go to prepare a place for you. And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (*Jn* 14:2-3). Therefore, St Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (*1 Thes* 4:16-17).

We have not been told the date of this final event. We must wait patiently for the risen Jesus, who, when asked by the Apostles themselves to restore the kingdom of Israel, answered by inviting them to preach and to bear witness: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (*Acts* 1:7-8).

5. We should await the final event with serene hope, as we build in our time that kingdom which at the end Christ will hand over to the Father: “After then will come the end, when, after having destroyed every sovereignty, authority and power, he will hand over the kingdom to God the

Father” (1 *Cor* 15:24). With Christ, victorious over the enemy powers, we too will share in the new creation, which will consist in a definitive return of all things to the One from whom all things come: “When, finally, all has been subjected to the Son, he will then subject himself to the One who made all things subject to him, so that God may be all in all” (ibid., 15:28).

Therefore we must be convinced that “our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Phil* 3:20). Here we have no lasting city (cf. *Heb* 13:14). Pilgrims in search of a permanent dwelling-place, we must long, like our Fathers in the faith, for a better country, “that is, a heavenly one” (ibid., 11:16).

To the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims the Holy Father said:

I warmly welcome the Missionary Sisters of Charity and the delegation from the Canon Law Department of the Catholic University of America. I extend a special greeting to the pilgrims from the Diocese of Meki in Ethiopia. The conflict between your country and Eritrea is a cause of great sadness to me. Let us pray that peace will be promptly and permanently restored. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Scotland, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Japan, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God.