



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 29 November 2000*

### ***God the Father offers salvation to all nations***

1. The great fresco just offered to us in the Book of Revelation is filled not only with the people of Israel, symbolically represented by the 12 tribes, but also with that great multitude of nations from every land and culture, all clothed in the white robes of a luminous and blessed eternity. I begin with this evocative image to call attention to interreligious dialogue, a subject that has become very timely in our day.

All the just of the earth sing their praise to God, having reached the goal of glory after traveling the steep and tiring road of earthly life. They have passed "through the great tribulation" and have been purified by the blood of the Lamb, "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (*Mt* 26: 28).

They all share, then, in the same source of salvation which God has poured out upon humanity. For "God sent the Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (*Jn* 3: 17).

2. Salvation is offered to all nations, as was already shown by the covenant with Noah (cf. *Gn* 9: 8-17), testifying to the universality of God's manifestation and the human response in faith (cf. [CCC, n. 58](#)). In Abraham, then, "all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (*Gn* 12: 3). They are on the way to the holy city in order to enjoy that peace which will change the face of the world, when swords are beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks (cf. *Is* 2: 2-5).

It is moving to read these words in Isaiah: "The Egyptians will worship [the Lord] with the

Assyrians ... whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage" (*Is* 19: 23, 25). "The princes of the peoples", the Psalmist sings, "are gathered together with the people of the God of Abraham. For God's are the guardians of the earth; he is supreme" (*Ps* 47: 10). Indeed, the prophet Malachi hears as it were a sigh of adoration and praise rising to God from the whole breadth of humanity: "From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts" (*Mal* 1: 11). The same prophet, in fact, wonders: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" (*Mal* 2: 10).

3. A certain form of *faith* thus begins when God is called upon, even if his face is "unknown" (cf. *Acts* 17: 23). All humanity seeks authentic adoration of God and the fraternal communion of men and women under the influence of the "Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body" of Christ (*Redemptor hominis*, n. 6).

In this connection St Irenaeus recalls that God established four covenants with humanity: in Adam, Noah, Moses and Christ (cf. *Adversus Haereses*, 3, 11, 8). The first three aim in spirit at the fullness of Christ and mark the stages of God's dialogue with his creatures, an encounter of disclosure and love, of enlightenment and grace, which the Son gathers in unity, seals in truth and brings to perfection.

4. In this light the faith of all peoples blossoms in *hope*. It is not yet enlightened by the fullness of revelation, which relates it to the divine promises and makes it a "theological" virtue. The sacred books of other religions, however, are open to hope to the extent that they disclose a horizon of divine communion, point to a goal of purification and salvation for history, encourage the search for truth and defend the values of life, holiness, justice, peace and freedom. With this profound striving, which withstands even human contradictions, religious experience opens people to the divine gift of *charity* and its demands.

The interreligious dialogue which the Second Vatican Council encouraged should be seen in this perspective (cf. *Nostra aetate*, n. 2). This dialogue is expressed in the common efforts of all believers for justice, solidarity and peace. It is also expressed in cultural relations, which sow the seed of idealism and transcendence on the often arid ground of politics, the economy and social welfare. It has a significant role in the religious dialogue in which Christians bear complete witness to their faith in Christ, the only Saviour of the world. By this same faith they realize that the way to the fullness of truth (cf. *Jn* 16: 13) calls for humble listening, in order to discover and appreciate every ray of light, which is always the fruit of Christ's Spirit, from wherever it comes.

5. "The Church's mission is to foster 'the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ' (*Rv* 11: 15), at whose service she is placed. Part of her role consists in recognizing that the inchoate reality of this kingdom can be found also beyond the confines of the Church, for example, in the hearts of the followers of other religious traditions, insofar as they live evangelical values and are open to the

action of the Spirit" (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, n. 35). This applies especially - as the Second Vatican Council told us in the Declaration *Nostra aetate* - to the monotheistic religions of Judaism and Islam. In this spirit I expressed the following wish in the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee Year: "May the Jubilee serve to advance mutual dialogue until the day when all of us together - Jews, Christians and Moslems - will exchange the greeting of peace in Jerusalem" (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 2). I thank the Lord for having given me, during my recent pilgrimage to the Holy Places, the joy of this greeting, the promise of relations marked by an ever deeper and more universal peace.

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I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking visitors, especially the Jubilee pilgrims from England and the United States of America. I pray that your visit to Rome will be a time of particular grace for you, as you are renewed in faith, hope and charity at the tombs of the Apostles. Entrusting you and your families to the protection of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, I invoke upon you all the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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