



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 30 May 2001*

1. *"In the morning you hear me; in the morning I offer you my prayer watching and waiting" (v. 4).*

These words make Psalm 5 a morning prayer, well suited for use at Lauds, the believer's prayer at the start of the day. Tension and anxiety over the dangers and bitterness which the believer has to face shape the background tone of the prayer. But confidence in God is never weakened because he is always ready to sustain the faithful person so that he will not stumble on the path of life.

*"No one except the Church possesses such confidence" (Jerome, 59th Treatise on the Psalms, 5,27: PL 26,829).* St Augustine, calling our attention to the title given the Psalm, which reads in the Latin version: *For her who receives the inheritance*, says: "It refers to the Church who receives the inheritance of eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, so that she possesses God himself, adheres to him, and finds her happiness in him, in keeping with what is written: "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth' (Mt 5,5)", (*Enarr. in ps. 5: CCL 38,1, 2-3*).

2. As often happens in the Psalms of "supplication" addressed to the Lord to be freed from evil, three persons come into the picture in the Psalm. Above all, *God* appears (vv. 2-7), he is the real *You* to whom the person praying turns with confidence. A certainty emerges in the face of the worries of a tiring and perhaps dangerous day. The Lord is a God who is consistent, just in the face of injustice, far removed from any compromise with evil: "You are not a God who delights in wickedness" (v. 5).

A long list of evil persons the boastful, the foolish, evildoers, the liar, the bloodthirsty, the deceitful pass before the Lord's gaze. He is the holy and just God and he is on the side of the one who follows his way of truth and love, opposing the one who "chooses the paths which lead to the kingdom of shadows" (cf. Prv 2,18). The faithful person will not feel alone and abandoned when he

will confront the city, taking his part in society and in the tangled web of daily affairs.

3. In verses 8-9 of our morning prayer the second person, the person who prays, presents himself as an *I* revealing that his whole person is dedicated to God and to his "great mercy". He is certain that the gates of the temple, the place of communion and of divine intimacy, locked for the unjust, are wide open for him. He enters them to enjoy the security of divine protection, while outside, evil flourishes and celebrates apparent and temporary victories.

From his morning prayer in the temple, the faithful one receives the interior energy to face an often hostile world. The Lord himself will take him by the hand and lead him through the streets of the city, even more, he "will make straight his way" before him, as the Psalmist says with a simple but provocative image. In the original Hebrew text such serene confidence is based on two terms (*hésed* and *sedaqáh*): "mercy or fidelity" on the one hand, and "justice or salvation" on the other. They are the typical words to celebrate the covenant that unites the Lord with his people and with each believer.

4. Finally, we see outlined on the horizon the dark figure of the third character of the daily drama: they are the *enemies*, the *evil ones*, who were already in the background in the preceding verses. After the "You" of God and the "I" of the person who prays, there is now a "They" that indicates a hostile group, symbol of the evil of the world (vv. 10-11). Their physiognomy is sketched on the basis of *the word*, the fundamental element in social communication. Four elements mouth, heart, throat and tongue express the radical nature of the inner malice of their choices. Their mouth is full of falsehood, their heart constantly plots perfidy, their throat is like an open tomb, quick to wish only death, their seductive tongue is "full of deadly poison" (Jas 3,8).

5. After such a bitter and realistic picture of the perverse person who attacks the just one, the Psalmist invokes the divine condemnation in a verse (v. 11) which the Christian use of the Psalm omits, since the Church wants to be conformed to the New Testament revelation of merciful love, which offers to the evil one the possibility of conversion.

The prayer of the Psalmist at this point comes to an end full of light and peace (vv. 12-13) after the dark profile of the sinner just drawn. A wave of serenity and joy wraps the one who is faithful to the Lord. The day which now begins, opens up before the believer. Even though it may be marked by effort and anxieties, it will always have over it the sun of divine blessing. The Psalmist, who knows the heart and style of God profoundly, has no doubt: "Lord, you bless the just; you cover him with benevolence as with a shield" (v. 13).

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I extend a special greeting to the group from the Melkite Archdiocese of Akka, to the groups of disabled persons, and to all the young people present, especially the members of the Australian

National Youth Performing Arts Group. As we prepare to celebrate Pentecost, I invoke the abundant gifts of the Holy Spirit upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Finland, Israel, Australia, Indonesia, Japan and the United States.