



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 22 August 2001

Psalm 35 (36)

Malice of Sinner vs. Goodness of Lord

Lauds on Wednesday of Week One

1. There are two fundamental attitudes that every man can adopt every time that a new day of work and human relations begins: we can choose good or give way to evil. Psalm 35 (36), which we have just heard, draws up the two opposing views. On the one hand, there is the person who plots iniquity on the "bed" he is about to rise from; on the other hand, instead, is the upright person who seeks the light of God, "source of all life" (see v. 10). The abyss of the goodness of God, a living fountain that quenches our thirst and a light that enlightens our hearts, is opposed to the abyss of malice of the wicked person.

There are two types of men described in the prayer of the Psalm just recited, which the Liturgy of the Hours prescribes for Lauds of Wednesday of the First Week.

2. The first portrait presented by the Psalmist is that of the sinner (cf. vv. 2-5). As the original Hebrew says, "transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart" for in his heart there is "the oracle of sin" (v. 2). This expression is forceful. It makes us think that a Satanic word, as opposed to a divine word, resounds in the heart and words of the wicked.

Evil seems to be innate to him, to the point that it flows out in word and deed (cf. vv. 3-4). He spends his days choosing "evil ways", from early morning when he is still "on his bed" (v. 5), until evening when he is ready to fall asleep. The sinner's constant choice derives from an option that involves his whole life and generates death.

3. However the Psalmist tends completely toward the other portrait in which he desires to be reflected: that of the man who seeks the face of God (cf. vv. 6-13). He raises a true and proper chant to divine love (cf. vv. 6-11), which he follows in the end, with a humble prayer to be delivered from the dark fascination of evil and to be enlightened forever with the light of grace.

The prayer articulates a true and proper litany of terms, which express in images the God of love: grace, faithfulness, justice, judgement, salvation, protective shadow, abundance, delight, and life. In particular, it underlines four of the divine traits; they are expressed with Hebrew terms which have a more intense value than can be appreciated in the terms we use in modern languages.

4. There is above all the term, *hésed*, "grace", which is at once faithfulness, love, loyalty and tenderness. It is one of the basic ways to express the covenant between the Lord and his people. It is important to note that it can be found 127 times in the Psalter, more than half of all the times it occurs in the rest of the Old Testament. Then there is the term *'emunáh*, coming from the root of *amen*, the word of faith, and meaning stability, security, unconditional fidelity. *Sedeqáh* follows, "justice", which has a salvific meaning: it is the holy and provident attitude of God, who through his interventions in history, frees the faithful from evil and from injustice. Last of all, we find *mishpát*, the "judgement" with which God governs his creatures, caring for the poor and the oppressed and humbling the arrogant and the overbearing.

Four theological terms, which the person who prays repeats in his profession of faith, while he steps out on the paths of the world, with the certainty of having with him a loving, faithful, just and saving God.

5. To the various titles with which we exalt God, the Psalmist adds two powerful images. On the one hand, the abundance of food: it makes us think above all of the sacred banquet, which was celebrated in the temple of Zion with the flesh of sacrificial victims. There are also the images of the fountain and the torrent, whose waters quench not just the parched throat, but also the soul (cf. vv. 9-10; *Ps* 41,2-3; 62,2-6). The Lord refreshes and satisfies the person who prays, making him share in his fullness of immortal life.

The symbol of light provides another image: "in your light we see the light" (v. 10). It is a brightness that radiates almost as "a cascade" and is a sign of God's unveiling his glory to the faithful. This is what happened to Moses on Sinai (cf. *Ex* 34,29-30) and it takes place for the Christian to the degree that "with unveiled face reflecting the glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed in the same likeness" (II *Cor* 3,18).

In the language of the Psalms, "to see the light of the face of God" means concretely to meet the Lord in the temple, whenever the liturgical prayer is celebrated and the word of God is proclaimed. The Christian also shares the same experience when he celebrates the praise of the Lord at the beginning of the day, before he goes out to face the challenges of daily life that are not always

straightforward.

I extend a special welcome to the delegates from the Ecumenical Pastoral Centre in Cape Town, South Africa. May the Lord bless our efforts at the beginning of the Third Christian Millennium to foster greater unity among Christians. May he help us to bear common witness in proclaiming the wisdom of the Gospel to the world. I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from Denmark, Malta, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Japan, Taiwan and the United States of America, and upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you all!