



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday, 3 September 2003

Psalm 92[91] ***Good vs evil***

***Faithful persons walk the spiritual path of light and joy;
the wicked live blinded by the world, doomed to destruction and death***

1. The canticle just presented to us is the song of a man faithful to Holy God. It is in Psalm 92[91] which, as the ancient title of the composition suggests, was used by Jewish tradition "for the Sabbath". The hymn opens with a general appeal to celebrate and praise the Lord in music and song. It seems to be a never-ending stream of prayer, for divine love must be exalted in the morning when the day begins, but it must also be declared during the day and through the hours of the night.

It was the reference to musical instruments that the Psalmist makes in the introductory invitation that moved St Augustine to meditate in his exposition on Psalm 92[91]: "What does it mean, brothers, to sing praise with the psalter? The psalter is a musical instrument with strings. Our psalter is our work. Those who do good work with their hands praise God with the psalter. Those who confess with their lips, praise him with their singing! Song is on their lips! They praise him with their actions!... So who are those who sing? Those who delight in doing good. Indeed, singing is a sign of cheerfulness. What does the Apostle say? "God loves a cheerful giver" (II Cor 9: 7). Whatever you do, do it joyfully. Then you will be doing good and doing it well. On the other hand, if you are cast down while you work, even if good is done through you, it is not you who do it: you have your lute in your hands, you are not singing" (cf. *Esposizioni sui Salmi*, III, Rome 1976, pp. 192-195).

2. Through St Augustine's words we can enter the heart of our reflection and deal with the fundamental theme of the Psalm: good and evil. Both are scrutinized by the just and holy God, "on high for ever", who is eternal and infinite, who lets no human action escape him.

Thus, two opposite forms of conduct are repeatedly compared. In his conduct, the faithful person is devoted to celebrating the divine works and plumbing the depths of the Lord's thoughts, and on this path his life is radiant with light and joy. By contrast, the Psalmist outlines the dullness of the wicked person, incapable as he is of understanding the hidden meaning of human events.

Ephemeral good fortune makes him arrogant, but in fact he is basically weak and doomed after his fleeting success to destruction and death. The Psalmist, using an interpretative key dear to the Old Testament, that is, retribution, is convinced that God will already reward the righteous in this life, giving them a happy old age, and that he will punish evildoers before long.

Actually, as Job affirmed and Jesus was to teach, history can never be so clearly interpreted. Thus, the Psalmist's vision becomes a plea to the just God "on high for ever", to enter into the sequence of human events, to judge them and make good shine forth.

3. The contrast between the righteous and the wicked is subsequently taken up once again by the person praying. On the one hand, there are the "enemies" of the Lord, the "evildoers", once again doomed to dispersal and destruction. On the other, the faithful appear in their full splendour, embodied by the Psalmist who describes himself with picturesque images taken from Oriental symbology. The righteous person has the irresistible strength of the wild ox and is ready to challenge any adversity; his glorious forehead is anointed with the oil of divine protection that becomes, as it were, a shield to defend the chosen one and guard him. From the heights of his strength and safety, the person praying sees the wicked hurled into the abyss of their ruin.

Psalm 92[91] thus is replete with happiness, confidence and optimism: gifts that we must ask God for precisely in our time when the temptation of distrust and even despair can easily creep in.

4. At the end, in the atmosphere of profound peace that permeates it, our hymn casts a glance at the old age of the righteous and predicts that they will be equally serene. Even when these days loom on his horizon, the spirit of the praying person will still be vital, happy and active, and feel flourishing and fruitful like the palms and cedars planted in the courtyards of the temple of Zion.

The righteous are radicated in God himself, from whom they absorb the sap of divine grace. The life of the Lord nourishes them and makes them flourish and vigorous, that is, able to give to others and to witness to their own faith. The Psalmist's final words in this description of a just, hard-working life and an intense and active old age, are in fact linked to the declaration of the Lord's eternal fidelity. At this point, therefore, we can conclude by proclaiming the canticle that is raised to the glory of God in the last Book of the Bible, Revelation, the book of the terrible struggle between good and evil, but also of hope in Christ's final victory: "Great and wonderful are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the peoples!... For you alone are holy. All nations shall come and worship you, for your judgments have been revealed.... Just are you in these your judgments, you who are and were, O Holy One.... Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!" (cf. 15: 3-4; 16: 5, 7).

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from India, Japan and the United States. Upon all of you I cordially invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

Lastly, I greet the young people, the sick and the newly-weds.

Dear young people, resuming your normal daily activities after the holiday period, may you be witnesses of hope and peace in every circumstance.

Dear sick people, find comfort in the suffering Lord, who continues his work of redemption in every person's life.

Dear newly-weds, make your love ever truer, showing greater solidarity to others.

The Holy Father's affectionate prayer for the worker who died in St Peter's Square and for all victims of industrial accidents

Together with you, I would now like to remember our dear brother Costantino Marchionni, who died while at work in St Peter's Square last Monday. To the Lord, we raise our prayer for him and for those who mourn him as well as for all the victims of work-related incidents. *Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine!*