



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 13 October 2004

Canticle in Ephesians 1: 3-10

Blessed be God!

1. We have before us the solemn hymn of blessing that opens the Letter to the Ephesians, a page of great theological and spiritual depth, a marvellous expression of faith and perhaps also of the liturgy of the Church in apostolic times.

The canticle is presented four times during all the weeks into which the Liturgy of Vespers is divided. The faithful may thus contemplate and savour this grandiose image of Christ that is not only the heart of Christian spirituality and worship, but also the principle of unity and of a sense of the universe and of history in its entirety. The blessing rises from humanity to the Father, in the heavenly places (cf. v. 3), starting from the saving work of the Son.

2. It begins with God's eternal plan which Christ is called to accomplish. In this design, our having been chosen as "holy and blameless" shines out first and foremost not so much at the ritual level - as these adjectives used in the Old Testament for sacrificial worship might seem to suggest - but rather "in love" (cf. v. 4). Therefore, it is a question of holiness and of moral, existential, inner purity.

However, the Father has a further goal in mind for us: through Christ he destines us to receive the gift of filial dignity, becoming sons in the Son and brothers and sisters of Jesus (cf. Rom 8: 15, 23; 9: 4; Gal 4: 5). This gift of grace is poured out through "the beloved Son", the Only-Begotten One par excellence (cf. vv. 5-6).

3. It is in this way that the Father works a radical transformation in us: our complete liberation from evil, "redemption through [the] blood" of Christ, "the forgiveness of our trespasses" through "the riches of his grace" (cf. v. 7). Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, a supreme act of love and solidarity, bathes us in superb light, "wisdom and insight" (cf. v. 8). We are transfigured creatures: our sin taken away, we fully know the Lord. And since knowledge, in biblical terms, is an expression of love, it introduces us more deeply into the "mystery" of the divine will (cf. v. 9).

4. A "mystery", namely, a transcendent and perfect project that contains a wonderful saving plan: "to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (v. 10). The Greek text suggests that Christ has become the *kefalaion*, that is, the cardinal point, the central axis on which the whole of creation converges and acquires meaning. The same Greek word refers to another, dear to the Letters to the Ephesians and to the Colossians: *kefalé*, "head", which indicates the role carried out by Christ in the Body of the Church.

Here the gaze is broader and more universal, although it includes the more specific ecclesial dimension of Christ's work. He reconciled "to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col 1: 20).

5. Let us end our reflection with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the redemption that Christ brought about in us. We do so with the words of a text that has been preserved on an ancient papyrus of the fourth century.

"We call on you, Lord God. You know all things, nothing escapes you, O Master of Truth. You have created the universe and you keep watch over every being. You guide on the path of truth those who walk in the darkness and the shadow of death. You desire to save all people and make them know the truth. All together, we offer you praise and hymns of thanksgiving".

The person praying continues: "You have redeemed us, with the precious and immaculate Blood of your Only Son, from all aberrations. You have released us from the devil and have obtained for us glory and freedom. We were dead and you have caused us, body and soul, to be reborn in the Spirit. We were unclean, and you have purified us. We pray therefore, Father of mercies and God of every consolation: strengthen us in our vocation, in adoration and in faithfulness".

The prayer ends with the invocation: "Fortify us, O benevolent Lord, with your strength. Illuminate our souls with your consolation.... Grant us to look at, seek and contemplate the goods of heaven and not those of the earth. Thus, by the power of your grace, glory will be rendered to the Almighty and most holy power worthy of all praise, in Jesus Christ, the beloved Son, with the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen" (A. Hamman, *Preghiere dei Primi Cristiani*, Milan 1955, pp. 92-94).

I greet the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor and I offer the assurance of my prayers for their General Chapter. I also welcome the diocesan pilgrimage groups from Indonesia and Scotland, and the American military chaplains. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, especially those from England, Denmark and the United States, I invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.

To special groups

I hope that you, dear *young people*, *sick people* and *newly-weds* will imitate the example of the Virgin Mary, woman of the Eucharist. At the beginning of the Year of the Eucharist, strive, as she did, to follow Jesus, the way, the truth and the life. Be assiduous adorers of the Most Holy Eucharist!