



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday 29 January 2003

Book of Wisdom (1-6.9-11)

True wisdom is a participation in the mind of God

1. The canticle we just heard now presents a great part of a long prayer placed on the lips of Solomon, who in the biblical tradition is considered *the just and wise king* par excellence. It is offered to us in the ninth chapter of the *Book of Wisdom*, an Old Testament work that was written in Greek, perhaps at Alexandria, Egypt, at the dawn of the Christian era. In it we can perceive tones of the lively, open Judaism of the Jewish Diaspora in the Hellenistic world.

This Book offers us three currents of theological thought: blessed immortality as the final end of the life of the just (cf. cc. 1-5); wisdom as a divine gift and guide of life and of the decisions of the faithful (cf. cc. 6-9); the history of salvation, especially the fundamental event of the Exodus from Egyptian oppression, as a sign of that struggle between good and evil that leads to full salvation and redemption (cf. cc. 10-19).

2. Solomon lived about ten centuries before the inspired author of the *Book of Wisdom*, but has been considered the founder and ideal author of all later sapiential thought. The prayer in the form of a hymn placed on his lips is a solemn invocation addressed to "the God of my fathers, Lord of mercy" (9,1), that he would grant the precious gift of wisdom.

In our text there is a clear allusion to the scene narrated in the *First Book of Kings* when Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, goes up on the heights of Gibeon where there was a sanctuary. After celebrating a grandiose sacrifice, he has a revelation in a dream at night. To the request of God himself, who invited him to ask for a gift, he replies: "Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong" (I Kgs 3,9).

3. The starting point offered by Solomon's prayer is developed in our Canticum in a series of appeals to the Lord to grant the irreplaceable treasure of wisdom.

In the passage presented by the *Liturgy of Lauds* we find these two prayers: "Give me Wisdom ... send her forth from your holy heavens and from your glorious throne" (Wis 9,4.10). Without this gift we are conscious that we lack a guide, as if we were without a polar star to direct us in the moral choices of life: "I am ... a man weak and short-lived and lacking in comprehension of judgement and of laws ... if Wisdom, which comes from you be not with [me] [I] shall be held in no esteem" (vv. 5-6).

It is easy to intuit that this "wisdom" is not mere intelligence or practical ability, but rather a participation in the very mind of God who "with his wisdom [has] established man" (cf. v. 2). Thus it is the ability to penetrate the deep meaning of being, of life and of history, going beyond the surface of things and events to discover their ultimate meaning, willed by the Lord.

4. Wisdom is a lamp that enlightens the moral choices of daily life and leads us on the straight path "to understand what is pleasing in [the] eyes [of the Lord] and what is conformable with your commands" (cf. v. 9). For this reason the Liturgy makes us pray with the words of the *Book of Wisdom* at the beginning of the day, so that God may be close to us with his wisdom and "assist us and support us in our (daily) toil" (cf. v. 10), revealing to us the good and evil, the just and unjust.

Taking the hand of divine Wisdom, we go forward confidently in the world. We cling to her loving her with a spousal love after the example of Solomon who, according to the *Book of Wisdom*, confessed: "I loved and sought after her from my youth; I sought to take her for my bride and was enamoured of her beauty" (Wis 8,2).

The Fathers of the Church identified Christ as the Wisdom of God, following St Paul who defined Christ as "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Cor 1,24).

Let us conclude with the prayer St Ambrose addresses to Christ: "Teach me words rich in wisdom for you are Wisdom! Open my heart, you who have opened the Book! Open the door that is in Heaven, for you are the Door! If we are introduced through you, we will possess the eternal Kingdom. Whoever enters through you will not be deceived, for he cannot err who enters the dwelling place of Truth" (*Commento al Salmo 118/1 [Comment on Psalm 118]: SAEMO 9, p. 377*).

To English-speaking visitors and pilgrims

I extend a special welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including the groups from

Denmark, Australia and the United States. May your visit to Rome be a time of spiritual enrichment. Upon all of you, I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

Finally, I address the *young people*, the *sick*, and the *newly-weds*.

The day after tomorrow we will be celebrating the *liturgical memorial of St John Bosco, priest and educator*. *Turn to him, dear young people*, as an authentic teacher of life and holiness. Dear *sick persons*, learn from his spiritual experience how in every circumstance to put your trust in the crucified Christ. And you, dear *newly-weds*, ask his intercession so that he may help you to take up generously your mission as spouses.