



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 10 November 2004

Psalm 62[61]

"In God alone be at rest!"

1. The gentle words of Psalm 62[61] have just resounded; it is a hymn of trust that opens with what appears to be an antiphon, repeated halfway through the text. It is like a peaceful and strong ejaculatory prayer, an invocation that also becomes a programme of life: "In God alone is my soul at rest; my help comes from him. He alone is my rock, my stronghold, my fortress: I stand firm" (vv. 2-3, 6-7).

2. As the Psalm continues, however, two types of trust are compared. They are two fundamental choices, one good and the other perverse, which involve two types of moral behaviour. Above all, there is trust in God, exalted in the opening invocation where there enters into the picture a symbol of stability and of security, like the rock, the "fortress"; that is, a stronghold and bulwark of protection.

The Psalmist repeats: "In God is my safety and glory, the rock of my strength; my sure "refuge"" (cf. v. 8). He affirms this after having called to mind the hostile conspiracies of his enemies who try to "thrust him down from his eminence" (cf. vv. 4-5).

3. There is then another trust of an idolatrous nature, upon which the person of prayer insistently directs his critical eye. It is a trust that searches for security and stability in violence, plunder and riches.

The appeal now becomes crystal clear: "Do not put your trust in oppression nor vain hopes on

plunder. Do not set your heart on riches, even when they increase" (v. 11).

Here, three idols are evoked and rejected as contrary to human dignity and to social coexistence.

4. The first false god is the violence that humanity unfortunately still continues to resort to in our blood-stained days. Marching alongside this idol is the vast procession of wars, oppression, prevarication, torture and abominable assassinations inflicted without a moment's remorse.

The second false god is plunder, manifested in extortion, social injustice, usury and political and economic corruption. Too many people cultivate the "illusion" of satisfying their own greed in this way.

Finally, riches are the third idol upon which man sets his heart with the false hope of being rescued from death (cf. Ps 49[48]), and assuring himself of prestige and power of the first order.

5. Serving this diabolical triad, man forgets that idols are unreliable: they are, indeed, harmful. By taking refuge in things and in himself, man tends to forget that he is "a breath... an illusion"; what is more, weighed on a scale he is "less than a breath" (Ps 62[61]: 10; cf. Ps 39[38]: 6-7).

If we were more aware of our fallen nature and of the limits to which creatures are subject, we would shun the path of trust in idols and would not programme our lives based on a scale of fragile and inconsistent pseudo-values. Instead, we would be oriented toward the "other trust", which finds its centre in the Lord, source of eternity and peace. Indeed, to God alone "belongs power"; only he is the source of grace; he alone is the author of justice, "repaying each man according to his deeds" (cf. Ps 62[61]: 12-13).

6. The Second Vatican Council applied to priests the invitation of Psalm 62[61] to "not set your heart on riches" (v. 11b). The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests exhorts: "Priests, far from setting their hearts on riches, must always avoid all avarice and carefully refrain from all appearance of trafficking" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 17).

And yet, this appeal to reject misplaced trust and to choose that which leads us to God is relevant to everyone and must become our guiding star in our daily behaviour, moral decisions and lifestyle.

7. Undeniably, this is a difficult road that entails trial for the righteous and courageous decision-making, always marked, however, by trust in God (cf. Ps 62[61]: 2). In this light the Fathers of the Church have looked upon the man of prayer in Psalm 62[61] as the prefiguration of Christ and have placed the opening invocation of complete trust in and adherence to God on his lips.

St Ambrose elaborates on this subject in the *Commento al Salmo 61* [Comment on Psalm 61]:

"What must our Lord Jesus have done first, in taking upon himself the flesh of man to purify it in his own body, if not to cancel the evil influence of original sin? By means of disobedience, that is, violating the divine prescriptions, sin became permeated. Before all else, then, he had to restore obedience to prevent the hotbed of sin from spreading.... He took obedience upon himself in order to pour it out upon us" (*Commento a Dodici Salmi* 61, 4: *SAEMO*, VIII, Milan-Rome, 1980, p. 283).

To English-speaking pilgrims

I extend a special welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including groups from England, Ireland, Japan and the United States of America. Upon all of you I invoke the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and I wish you many blessings during your stay in Rome.

To special groups

I greet the *young people*, *sick people* and *newly-weds* present and encourage them to offer to the Lord every good aspiration and project.