



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 2 November 2005

Psalm 112[111]

"Open-handed, he gives to the poor"

Evening Prayer - Sunday of Week Fourth

1. After yesterday's celebration of the Solemnity of all the saints of Heaven, we remember today all of the faithful departed. The liturgy invites us to pray for all our loved ones who have passed away, turning our thoughts to the mystery of death, an inheritance common to all men and women.

Enlightened by faith, we look upon the human enigma of death with serenity and hope. Indeed, according to Scripture, it is more than an end; it is a new birth, it is the obligatory passageway through which the fullness of life may be attained by those who model their earthly existence according to the indications of the Word of God.

Psalm 112[111], a composition with a sapiential slant, presents us with the figure of these righteous ones who fear the Lord; they recognize his transcendence and trustingly and lovingly conform themselves to his will in the expectation of encountering him after death.

A "beatitude" is reserved to these faithful: "Happy the man who fears the Lord" (v. 1). The Psalmist immediately explains what this fear consists in: it is shown in docility to God's commandments. He who "takes delight" in observing his commandments is blessed, finding in them joy and peace.

2. Docility to God is therefore the root of hope and interior and exterior harmony. Observance of the moral law is the source of profound peace of conscience. According to the biblical vision of "retribution", the mantle of the divine blessing is spread over the righteous, giving stability and

success to his works and to those of his descendents: "His sons will be powerful on earth; the children of the upright are blessed. Riches and wealth are in his house" (vv. 2-3; cf. v. 9).

However, to this optimistic vision are opposed the bitter observations made by Job, a just man who experiences the mystery of sorrow, feels himself unjustly punished and subjected to apparently senseless trials. Job represents many people who suffer harshly in the world. It is necessary then to read this Psalm in the global context of Revelation, which embraces the reality of human life under all its aspects.

At any rate, the trust the Psalmist wishes to communicate and be lived by those who have chosen to follow the path of morally irreprehensible conduct remains valid, rejecting every other alternative of illusory success gained through injustice and immorality.

3. The heart of this fidelity to the divine Word consists in a fundamental choice of charity towards the poor and needy: "The good man takes pity and lends.... Open-handed, he gives to the poor" (vv. 5, 9). The person of faith, then, is generous; respecting the biblical norms, he offers help to his brother in need, asking nothing in return (cf. Dt 15: 7-11), and without falling into the shame of usury which destroys the lives of the poor.

The righteous one, heeding the continual warning of the prophets, puts himself on the side of the disenfranchised and sustains them with abundant help. "Open-handed, he gives to the poor", as is written in verse 9, thereby expressing an extreme generosity without any self-interest.

4. In addition to the portrait of the faithful and charitable man, "generous, merciful and just", Psalm 112[111] presents finally, in only one verse (cf. v. 10), the profile of the wicked man. This individual sees the success of the right-eous person and is tortured with anger and jealousy. It is the torment of one who has an evil conscience, different from the generous man who has a "firm" and "steadfast heart" (vv. 7-8).

We fix our gaze on the serene face of the faithful person who "open-handed, gives to the poor", and we listen to the words of Clement of Alexandria, the third-century Father of the Church who commented on an affirmation of the Lord that is difficult to understand. In the parable of the unjust steward, the expression appears according to which we must do good with "unjust money". From there arises the question: are money and wealth unjust in themselves, or what does the Lord wish to say?

Clement of Alexandria explains this parable very well in his homily "What rich man can be saved?", and he states: Jesus "declares unjust by nature any possession one has for oneself as one's own good and does not make it available for those who need it; rather, he declares that from this injustice it is possible to accomplish a just and praiseworthy work, giving relief to one of those little ones who have an eternal dwelling-place near the Father (cf. Mt 10: 42; 18: 10)" (31, 6;

Collana di Testi Patristici, CXLVIII, Rome, 1999, pp. 56-57).

Addressing the reader, Clement warns: "See in the first place that he has not ordered you to ask, nor wait to be asked, but you yourself search out those who are worth being listened to, insofar as they are disciples of the Saviour" (31, 7: *ibid.*, p. 57).

Then, citing another biblical text, he comments: "Beautiful, therefore, is the saying of the Apostle: 'God loves a cheerful giver' (II Cor 9: 7), who enjoys giving and does not sparingly sow, so as to reap in the same way; instead, he shares without ramifications and distinctions and sorrow: this is authentic of doing good" (31, 8: *ibid.*).

On this day in which we commemorate the dead, as I was saying at the beginning of our meeting, we are all called to face the enigma of death and therefore with the question of how to live well, how to find happiness. This Psalm answers: happy is the man who gives; happy is the man who does not live life for himself but gives; happy is the man who is merciful, generous and just; happy is the man who lives in the love of God and neighbour. In this way we live well and have no reason to fear death because we experience the everlasting happiness that comes from God.

To special groups

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims present at today's Audience. I extend particular greetings to the groups from England, Ireland, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Malta, Canada and the United States of America. May your pilgrimage strengthen your faith and renew your love for the Lord, the Giver of Life, and may God bless you all!

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, *sick people* and *newly-weds*. The Solemnity of All Saints that we celebrated yesterday and today's Commemoration of the Faithful Departed give us the opportunity to reflect once more on the authentic meaning of earthly existence and on its value for eternity.

May these days of reflection and prayer be for you, dear *young people*, an invitation to imitate the heroism of the saints, who spent their lives for God and neighbour. May they be a consolation for you, dear *sick people*, associated with the mystery of Christ's passion. May they be a favourable occasion for you, dear *newly-weds*, to understand ever better that you are called to witness by your reciprocal fidelity to the love with which God encompasses every person.

We conclude our meeting with the singing of the *Pater Noster*.

