



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 18th August 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Among the themes especially suggested to the People of God for their reflection in this third year of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, we find conversion, which includes deliverance from evil (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 50). This theme has a profound effect on our experience. Our entire personal and community history, in fact, is a struggle against evil. The petition: "Deliver us from evil" or from the "Evil One" which is contained in the *Our Father*, punctuates our prayer to overcome sin and be liberated from all connivance with evil. It reminds us of our daily struggle, but above all, of the secret for overcoming it: the strength of God, revealed and offered to us in Jesus (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2853).

2. Moral evil causes suffering which is presented, especially in the Old Testament, as a punishment connected with conduct that is contrary to God's law. Moreover, Sacred Scripture reveals that after sinning, one can ask God for mercy, that is, for his pardon for the fault and the end of the pain it has brought. A sincere return to God and deliverance from evil are two aspects of one process. Thus, for example, Jeremiah urges the people: "Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness" (*Jer* 3:22). In the Book of Lamentations, the prospect of returning to the Lord (cf. 5:21) and the experience of his mercy is underlined: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (3:22, cf. v. 32).

Israel's whole history is read in the light of the dialectic: "sin, punishment, repentance — mercy" (cf. eg., *Jgs* 3:7-10): this is the nucleus central to the tradition of Deuteronomy. Indeed, the historical defeat of the kingdom and city of Jerusalem is interpreted as divine punishment for the

lack of fidelity to the Covenant.

3. In the Bible, the lamentations people raised to God when they fell prey to suffering are accompanied by recognition of the sin committed and trust in his liberating intervention. The confession of sin is one of the elements through which this trust emerges. In this regard, certain psalms which forcefully express the confession of sin and the individual's repentance for it are very revealing (cf. *Ps* 38:18; 41:4). The admission of guilt, effectively described in Psalm 51, is indispensable to start life anew. The confession of one's sin highlights God's justice as a reflection: "Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless in your judgement" (v. 4). In the Psalms we continuously see the prayer for help and the trusting expectation of liberation for Israel (cf. *Ps* 88; 130). On the Cross, Jesus himself prayed with the words of Psalm 22 to obtain the Father's loving intervention in his last hour.

4. In expressing these words to the Father, Jesus gives a voice to that expectation of deliverance from evil which, in the biblical perspective, occurs through a person who accepts suffering together with its expiatory value: this is the case of the mysterious figure of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah (42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). Other figures also assume this role, like the prophet who suffers for and expiates the iniquities of Israel (cf. *Ez* 4:4-5), he whom they have pierced, on whom they will turn their eyes (cf. *Zec* 12:10-11; *Jn* 19:37; cf. also *Rv* 1:7), the martyrs who accept their suffering in expiation for their people's sins (cf. *2 Mc* 7:37-38).

Jesus is the synthesis of all these figures and reinterprets them. It is only in and through him that we become aware of evil and call on the Father to deliver us from it.

In the prayer of the *Our Father*, the reference to evil becomes explicit; here, the term *ponerós* (*Mt* 6:13), which in itself is an adjectival form, can indicate a personification of evil. In the world, this is provoked by that spiritual being, called by biblical revelation the devil or Satan, who deliberately set himself against God (cf. *CCC*, n. 2851f.). Human "evil" constituted by the Evil One or instigated by him is also presented in our time in an attractive form that seduces minds and hearts so as to cause the very sense of evil and sin to be lost. It is a question of that "mystery of evil" of which St Paul speaks (cf. *2 Thes* 2:7). This is certainly linked to human freedom, "but deep within its human reality there are factors at work which place it beyond the merely human, in the border-area where man's conscience, will and sensitivity are in contact with the dark forces which, according to St Paul, are active in the world almost to the point of ruling it" (*Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, n. 14).

Unfortunately, human beings can become the protagonists of evil, that is, of "an evil and adulterous generation" (*Mt* 12:39).

5. We believe that Jesus conquered Satan once and for all, thereby removing our fear of him. To every generation the Church represents, as the Apostle Peter did in his discourse to Cornelius, the

liberating image of Jesus of Nazareth who “went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (*Acts* 10:38).

If, in Jesus, the devil was defeated, the Lord’s victory must still be freely accepted by each of us, until evil is completely eliminated. The struggle against evil therefore requires determination and constant vigilance. Ultimate deliverance from it can only be seen in an eschatological perspective (cf. *Rv* 21:4).

Over and above our efforts and even our failures, these comforting words of Christ endure: “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (*Jn* 16:33).

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today’s audience, especially those from England, Taiwan and the United States of America. Wishing you a pleasant visit to Christian Rome, I invoke upon you and your families the abundant blessings of almighty God.
