



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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A future more worthy of the human person

1. If we cast a glance at the world and its history, at first sight the banner of war, violence, oppression, injustice and moral decay seems to predominate. It seems, as in the vision of chapter 6 of Revelation, that horsemen are riding through the barren lands of the earth, bearing now the crown of victorious power, now the sword of violence, now the scales of poverty and famine, now death's sharp sickle (cf. *Rv* 6: 1-8).

Faced with the tragedies of history and rampant immorality, we feel like repeating the question posed to God by the prophet Jeremiah, giving voice to so many suffering and oppressed people: "Righteous are you, O Lord, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?" (12: 1). Unlike Moses, who beheld the promised land from the top of Mount Nebo (cf. *Dt* 34: 1), we look out over a troubled world in which the kingdom of God struggles to make headway.

2. In the second century St Irenaeus identified the reason for this in the freedom of man who, instead of following the divine plan of peaceful harmony (cf. *Gn* 2), severed his relationship with God, with man and with the world. Thus the Bishop of Lyons wrote: "It is not God's art, which can raise children of Abraham from stones, that is at fault, but those who do not follow him are the cause of their own failed perfection. Indeed, it is not the light that fails through the fault of those who have been blinded, but those who have been blinded remain in darkness through their own fault, while the light continues to shine. The light does not subdue anyone by force, nor does God constrain anyone to accept his art" (*Adversus Haereses* IV, 39, 3).

Thus a continuous effort of conversion is needed to straighten humanity's course, so that it may freely choose to follow "God's art", that is, his plan of peace and love, of truth and justice. It is this art that is fully revealed in Christ and which the convert Paulinus of Nola made his own with this touching plan of life: "My only art is faith and my music is Christ" (*Carmen XX*, 32).

3. With faith the Holy Spirit also plants the seed of hope in the human heart. For faith, as the Letter to the Hebrews says, is "assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (11: 1). Against a horizon that is often marked by discouragement, pessimism, choices of death, inertia and superficiality, Christians must be open to the hope that springs from faith. This is portrayed in the Gospel scene of the storm that broke out on the lake: "Master, Master, we are perishing!", the disciples cry. And Christ asks them: "Where is your faith?" (*Lk* 8: 24-25). With faith in Christ and in the kingdom of God we are never lost, and the hope of tranquil calm reappears on the horizon.

For a future worthy of man it is also necessary to reinvigorate the active faith that gives rise to hope. On this subject a French poet wrote: "Hope is the anxious waiting of the good sower; it is the longing of those who are candidates for heaven. Hope is the infinity of love" (Charles Péguy, *Le porche du mystère de la deuxième vertu*).

4. Love for humanity, for its material and spiritual well-being, for its authentic progress, must stir all believers. Everything done to create a better future, a more habitable land and a more fraternal society participates, even if indirectly, in building up God's kingdom. Precisely in the perspective of this kingdom, "man - living man - represents the primary and fundamental way for the Church" (*Evangelium vitae*, n. 2; cf. *Redemptor hominis*, n. 14). It is the way that Christ himself followed, while at the same time making himself man's "way" (cf. *Jn* 14: 6).

On this way we are called first of all to dispel our fear of the future. This fear often grips the younger generation, prompting it to react with indifference, with resignation in the face of life's demands, with self-destruction through drugs, violence and apathy. We must show the joy of every child that is born (cf. *Jn* 16: 21), so that he will be welcomed with love and given the chance to grow in body and mind. In this way we cooperate in the very work of Christ, who described his mission in this way: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (*Jn* 10: 10).

5. At the start of this Audience we heard the Apostle John's message to fathers and sons, to the elders and the young, that they should continue to struggle and hope together, in the certainty that evil and the devil can be overcome through the heavenly Father's effective presence. To restore hope is a fundamental task of the Church. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council has left us this illuminating comment: "We can justly consider that the future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 31). In this perspective, I would like to suggest to you once again the appeal to trust which I addressed to the United Nations Organization in 1995: "We must not be afraid of the future.... We have within us the capacities for wisdom and virtue. With these gifts, and with the

help of God's grace, we can build in the next century and the next millennium a civilization worthy of the human person, a true culture of freedom. We can and must do so! And in doing so, we shall see that the tears of this century have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the human spirit" (*Insegnamenti XVIII/2* [1995], p. 744).

The Holy Father appealed for an "effective and honest dialogue" in Colombia and asked for an end to "the kidnappings, acts of terrorism, attempts on life and the scourge of drug-trafficking".

The news from Colombia regarding an alarming increase in violence can only prompt me to ask everyone to rediscover the supreme value of life: "There can be no peace when this most basic good is not protected" (*Message for the World Day of Peace 2001*, n. 19).

I would also invite all parties to promote an effective and honest dialogue, as I plead for an end to the kidnappings, acts of terrorism, attempts on life and the scourge of drug-trafficking.

It is time to return to the Lord of Life, so that he may move the hearts of all Colombians and make them understand that they are one great family.

I welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially the Asahikawa Choir from Japan, the choir and orchestra of Muskegon School, Michigan, and the students from Australia and the United States of America. Upon all of you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.