



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Psalms of Lauds

Canticle of Isaiah 12,1-6

Draw water with joy at the fountain of salvation

1. The hymn just proclaimed appears as a song of joy in the *Liturgy of Lauds*. It is a concluding seal on the sections of the Book of Isaiah known for their Messianic reading. It includes chapters 6-12, generally known as the "Book of Emmanuel". In fact, at the centre of those prophetic sayings towers the figure of a sovereign, who while belonging to the historic Davidic dynasty, reveals transfigured features and receives glorious titles: "Wonderful counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace" (Is 9,6).

The concrete figure of the king of Judah that Isaiah promises as son and successor of Achaz, the sovereign of the time, known to be far removed from the Davidic ideals, is the sign of a higher promise: that of the Messiah-King who will bring to its fullness the name "Emmanuel", namely, "God-with-us", becoming the perfect presence of the divine in human history. It is easy to understand, then, how the New Testament and Christianity did intuit in the profile of the king the personal features of Jesus Christ, Son of God become man in solidarity with us.

2. Scholars now think that the hymn which we are dealing with (cf. Is 12,1-6), on account of its literary quality and its general tone, to be a composition written at a time later than that of the prophet Isaiah who lived in the eighth century before Christ. It is almost like a quotation, a text that resembles a psalm, thought out, perhaps, for liturgical use, that has been inserted here as the conclusion for the "Book of Emmanuel". In fact, it repeats some of the themes: salvation, trust, joy, divine action, the presence among the people of the "Holy One of Israel", an expression that

indicates both the "holy" transcendence of God, and his loving and active closeness on which the people of Israel can rely.

The singer is a person who has lived a bitter experience, felt to be an act of divine judgment. But now the trial is over, the purification has taken place; in the place of the Lord's anger there is a smile, his readiness to save and console.

3. The hymn's two stanzas delineate two moments. In the first (cf. vv.1-3), that begins with the invitation to pray: "You will say on that day", the word "salvation" stands out, it is repeated three times and applied to the Lord: "God indeed is my salvation.... He has become my salvation ... the wells of salvation". Let us recall that the name Isaiah like that of Jesus contains the root of the Hebrew verb *y/śa'*, which alludes to bringing about "salvation". For this reason the one praying has the absolute certainty that divine grace is at the root of his liberation and hope.

It is important to note that he refers implicitly to the great salvific event of the exodus from the slavery of Egypt, as he quotes the words of Moses' song of deliverance, "the Lord God is my strength and my song" (Ex 15,2).

4. The salvation granted by God, that can make joy and trust flower even on the dark day of the trial, is portrayed by the classic image in the Bible of water: "You will draw water with joy at the fountain of salvation" (Is 12,3). It reminds us of the scene of the Samaritan woman, when Jesus offers her the possibility of having in herself a "spring of water that will well up to eternal life" (Jn 4,14).

Cyril of Alexandria commented in a marvelous way: "Jesus calls the life-giving gift of the Spirit living water, the only one through which humanity, even though it was completely abandoned, like the tree trunks on the mountains, and dry, and deprived of every kind of virtue by the deceit of the devil, is restored to the former beauty of its nature.... The Saviour calls the grace of the Holy Spirit water, and if one participates in him, he will have in himself the source of divine teachings, so that he will no longer need the advice of others, and will be able to exhort those who are thirsting for the Word of God. Such were the holy prophets and apostles of God and their successors in the ministry while they were alive on earth. Of them it is written: *"You will draw water with joy at the fountain of salvation"* (*Commento al Vangelo di Giovanni [Comment on the Gospel of John]*, II, 4, Roma 1994, pp. 272,275).

Unfortunately, humanity often abandons this fountain that will quench the thirst of the entire being of the person, as the Prophet Jeremiah points out with sadness: "They have abandoned me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can not hold water" (Jer 2,13). Even Isaiah, a few pages before, exalted the "waters of Shiloah, that run slowly", symbol of the Lord present in Zion, and threatened the chastisement of the flooding of the "waters of the river, namely, the Euphrates, great and mighty" (Is 8,6-7), symbol of the military and

economic might and of idolatry, waters that then fascinated Judah, that would later submerge her.

5. Another invitation, "On that day you will say" the second stanza begins (cf. Is 12,4-6), that is a continual call to joyful praise in honour of the Lord. The commands to praise are multiplied: "Praise, invoke, manifest, proclaim, sing, shout, exult".

At the centre of the praise there is a unique profession of faith in God the Saviour who works in history and is beside his creature, sharing his up's and down's: "The Lord has done great works ... great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel" (vv. 5.6). This profession of faith also has a missionary function: "Among the nations make known his deeds ... let this be known throughout all the earth" (vv. 4.5). The salvation that they have obtained must be witnessed to the world, so that all humanity may run to the fountain of peace, joy and freedom.

At the end of the catechesis the Holy Father addressed the groups of pilgrims in French, English, German, Spanish [see the appeal for Venezuela below], Portuguese, Flemish, Lithuanian, Slovak, and Italian.

I warmly welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially the priests from Vietnam who are returning to their country after studies in Europe. Dear priests: tell your brothers and sisters in the faith that I pray for them every day; I pray for the peace and progress of the whole nation. Upon the pilgrims and visitors from England, Sweden, Denmark, Canada and the United States, I invoke the peace of the Risen Christ. God bless you all!

Appeal for Peace and a Climate of Reconciliation in Venezuela, in the Spanish-language.

The dramatic events that the people of Venezuela have experienced in the last few days move me to make an appeal to the authorities and citizens of that beloved nation so they will make every effort to foster a climate of peaceful coexistence permeated by the spirit of reconciliation. May they put aside every temptation to revenge or violence and, in a spirit of brotherhood, solidarity and collaboration, may they move towards the higher goals of justice, respect for law and genuine progress for all.