



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday 9 October 2002

Psalm 66 [67]

"God is offering His salvation to the whole world"

1. Now we have just heard the voice of the ancient Psalmist, who sang a joyful song of thanksgiving to the Lord. It is a brief but compelling text, which opens out on an immense horizon, to embrace in spirit all the peoples of the earth.

This universal openness probably reflects the prophetic spirit of the age that followed the Babylonian exile, when it was hoped that God would also lead foreigners to his holy mountain to fill them with joy. Their sacrifices and burnt offerings would be pleasing to him, for the temple of the Lord would become "a house of prayer for all peoples" (Is 56,7).

In our Psalm, 66 [67] too, the universal chorus of the nations is invited to join in the praise that Israel raises in the temple of Zion. Indeed, this antiphon is repeated twice: "Let the peoples praise you O God; let all the peoples praise you" (vv. 4-6).

2. Even those who do not belong to the community chosen by God receive a vocation from him: indeed, they are called to know the "way" revealed to Israel. The "way" is the divine plan of salvation, the kingdom of light and peace in whose realization the pagans are also involved since they are invited to listen to the voice of the Lord (cf. v. 3). The result of this obedient listening is the fear of the Lord "to the ends of the earth" (v. 8), an expression that does not evoke fear but rather adoring reverence for the transcendent and glorious mystery of God.

3. At the beginning and end of the psalm there is an insistent desire for the divine blessing: "May God be gracious to us and bless us, may God's face shed its light upon us ... God, our God, has blessed us. May God still give us his blessing" (vv. 2.7-8).

In these words it is easy to hear the echo of the famous priestly blessing which, in God's name, Moses taught Aaron and the descendants of the priestly tribe: "The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you: the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Nm 6,24-26).

Well, according to the Psalmist, this blessing of Israel was to be like a seed of grace and salvation planted in the soil of the whole world and of history, ready to sprout and become a flourishing tree.

We turn in thought to the promise the Lord made to Abraham on the day of his election: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing ... and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (Gn 12,2-3).

4. In the biblical tradition, one of the effects of the divine blessing that was experienced is the gift of life, of fruitfulness and fertility.

In our Psalm there is an explicit reference to this concrete reality, that is precious for existence: "The earth has yielded its fruit" (v. 7). This observation has led scholars to link the Psalm with the rite of thanksgiving for an abundant harvest, the sign of divine favour and a witness for other peoples of the Lord's closeness to Israel.

The same sentence attracted the attention of the Fathers of the Church, who moved from the agricultural horizon to the symbolic perspective. Thus Origen applied the verse to the Virgin Mary and the Eucharist, that is, to Christ who came from the flower of the Virgin and becomes fruit that can be eaten. In this perspective, "the earth is the Blessed Virgin Mary, who comes from our earth, from our seed, from this mud, from this clay, from Adam". This earth has borne its fruit: what it lost in paradise, it has recovered in the Son. "The earth has borne its fruit: first it produced a flower ... then, this flower became a fruit, so that we could eat it, so that we could eat his flesh. Do you want to know what this fruit is? It is the Virgin from the Virgin, the Lord from the handmaid, God from man, the Son from the Mother, the fruit from the earth" (74 *Omelie sul libro dei Salmi*, Milan 1993, p. 141).

5. Let us conclude with St Augustine's words in his commentary on our Psalm. He identifies the fruit that sprouted on earth with the newness that is produced in the human being thanks to the coming of Christ, a newness of conversion, a fruit of praise to God.

Indeed, he describes "the earth as full of thorns". But "there came the hand of One rooting them up, there came a calling by His majesty and mercy, the earth began to confess; now the earth gives her fruit". Certainly, would she give her fruit "unless first she were rained on", "unless first the mercy of God had come from above?" Now we see a mature fruit in the Church thanks to the preaching of the Apostles: Then "by his sending rain through the clouds, by the sending of the Apostles and by their preaching the truth, 'the earth has given her fruit' more abundantly, and that

harvest has now filled the whole world" (*Esposizioni sui Salmi*, II, Rome, 1970, p. 551 [*Exposition on the Psalms by St Augustine*, Oxford 1849, vol. 3, pp. 308-309]).

The Holy Father then addressed and greeted the pilgrims and visitors in the European languages.

I extend a special greeting to the diaconate class of the Pontifical North American College: dear friends, keep your lives ever centred on Jesus Christ so that your ministry in the Church will always reflect his own self-sacrifice for the redemption of the world. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present today, especially those from England, Scotland, Ireland, Norway, Malta, the Philippines, Japan, Trinidad and Tobago, Australia and the United States of America, I invoke joy and peace in the Risen Saviour.

I now address a warm greeting to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-married couples*. October, the month of the Holy Rosary, invites us to appreciate more and more this prayer that is dear to the tradition of the Christian people. I invite you, dear *young people*, to recite it every day. I encourage you, dear *sick people*, to abandon yourselves confidently into the hands of Mary, calling upon her continually with the Rosary. I urge you, dear *newly-married couples*, never to neglect this prayerful meditation of the mysteries of Christ, under the Virgin's gaze.

Tomorrow we will celebrate the "World Day of Sight". I express my spiritual closeness to all who are afflicted with eye diseases, and I encourage those who work for the prevention and cure of blindness to persevere in their dedication to this important activity.

At the end of the General Audience, the Holy Father appealed to the faithful to pray for peace and reconciliation in Africa, especially in Ivory Coast. Here is a translation of his appeal to pray for peace.

From the African continent, already sorely tried by disasters and wars, we continue to receive disturbing news about Ivory Coast, where the fundamental good of peace risks being compromised.

I invite you to join in my prayer that the Lord will inspire in everyone the determination for reconciliation, and that he will support the efforts of the International Community and especially those of the African Union that aim at promoting dialogue. Let us pray, singing the *Our Father* in Latin.

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