



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 15 September 2004

Canticle in the Book of Revelation (19: 1-7)

"Alleluia... Praise our God!"

1. The Book of Revelation is studded with Canticles that are raised to God, Lord of the universe and of history. We have just heard one of them, which we constantly encounter in every one of the four weeks embraced by the Liturgy of Vespers.

"Alleluia", a word of Hebrew origin which means "praise the Lord", punctuates this hymn.

Curiously, in the New Testament it recurs only in this passage of the Book of Revelation, in which it is repeated five times. The Liturgy takes just a few verses of the text of chapter 19. Framed by the narrative, they are intoned in heaven by a "great multitude"; it is like a powerful chorus raised by all the elect who celebrate their Lord with joy and festivity (cf. Rv 19: 1).

2. So it is that the Church on earth harmonizes her song of praise with the song of the just who already contemplate God's glory. Thus, a channel of communication between history and eternity is created: its starting point is the earthly liturgy of the ecclesial community, and its goal is the liturgy in Heaven where our brothers and sisters who preceded us on the path of faith have already arrived.

This communion of praise substantially celebrates three themes: first of all, the great attributes of God, his "salvation, glory and power" (v. 1; cf. v. 7), that is, his saving transcendence and omnipotence. Prayer is the contemplation of divine glory, of the ineffable mystery, of the ocean of light and love that is God.

Secondly, the Canticle exalts the "reign" of the Lord, that is, the divine plan of humanity's redemption. Taking up a theme dear to the so-called Psalms of the Kingdom of God (cf. Ps 47[46]; 96[95]-99[98]) our Canticle proclaims here: "the Lord our God the Almighty reigns!" (Rv 19: 6), intervening in history with supreme authority. History, of course, is entrusted to human freedom which generates good and evil but is ultimately sealed by the decisions of divine Providence. The Book of Revelation precisely celebrates the goal towards which God's effective action leads history, even through the storms, distress and havoc wrought by evil, by man and by Satan.

Another passage from the Book of Revelation says: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were. For you have assumed your great power and have established your reign" (11: 17).

3. Lastly, the third topic of the hymn is characteristic of the Book of Revelation and its symbology: "(for) the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (19: 7). As we will have occasion to examine more deeply in future meditations on this Canticle, the definitive goal to which the last book of the Bible leads us is the nuptial encounter between the Lamb who is Christ and the purified and transfigured bride who is redeemed humanity.

The phrase "the marriage of the Lamb has come" refers to the supreme moment, as our "nuptial" text suggests, of intimacy between creature and Creator, in the joy and peace of salvation.

4. Let us end with the words from one of the discourses of St Augustine, who illustrates and eulogizes the spiritual significance of singing the "Alleluia". "We sing this word in unison, converging on it in a communion of sentiments and encouraging one another to praise God. However, only one who has done nothing to displease him can praise God with a peaceful conscience. Moreover, with regard to the present, when we are pilgrims on this earth, we sing *Alleluia* as a consolation, to be strengthened along the way; the *Alleluia* we are saying now is like the traveller's song; yet, as we take this difficult path, we are striving to reach that homeland where repose awaits us, where, once all that we are involved in today has passed away, all that will be left is the *Alleluia*" (n. 255, 1: *Discorsi*, IV/2, Rome, 1984, p. 597).

To English-speaking pilgrims

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking pilgrims present at this Audience, especially those from England, Sweden and the United States of America. Upon you and your loved ones, I invoke the Lord's blessings of peace and joy.

To Italian-speaking pilgrims

I warmly welcome the Italian-speaking pilgrims. In particular I greet the Franciscan Handmaids of the Good Shepherd, who have gathered here on the centenary of the birth of their Foundress, the Servant of God Mother Teresa Napoli; the participants in the course organized by the Athenaeum of the Holy Cross; the representatives of the Primosole Association of Palermo and of the Parents' Association in Florence, and those taking part in the San Pio da Pietrelcina Marathon.

To special groups

My thoughts also go to the *young people*, the *sick people* and the *newly-weds*.

Dear friends, today we are commemorating Our Lady of Sorrows, who remained faithfully by the Cross of Jesus. My hope for you is that you may find in her comfort and support, in order to overcome every obstacle in your daily lives.