



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 29 September 2004

Psalm 45[44]

My heart overflows

1. "To the king I must speak the song I have made" (Ps 45[44]): these words at the beginning of the Psalm give the reader an idea of the basic character of this hymn. The court scribe who composed it reveals to us straightaway that it is a song in honour of the Jewish sovereign. Indeed, glancing through the verses of this composition, we realize that we are in the presence of an epithalamium, a nuptial song.

Scholars have endeavoured to identify the historical coordinates of the Psalm on the basis of certain clues, such as the linking of the queen with the Phoenician city of Tyre (cf. v. 13), but have failed to identify the royal couple precisely. It is significant that a Jewish king comes into the scene. This allowed the Judaic tradition to transform the text into a hymn to the Messiah-King, and the Christian tradition to reinterpret the Psalm in a Christological key and, because of the queen's presence, also in a Marian perspective.

2. The Liturgy of Vespers treats this Psalm as a prayer, dividing it into two parts. We have just heard the first part (cf. vv. 2-10) which, after the introduction of the scribe who wrote the text already mentioned (cf. v. 2), presents a splendid portrait of the sovereign who is about to celebrate his wedding.

This is why Judaism has recognized Psalm 45[44] as a nuptial song that exalts the beauty and intensity of the gift of love between the bride and the bridegroom. Women, in particular, can repeat with the Song of Songs: "My beloved is mine and I am his" (2: 16). "I am my beloved's and my

beloved is mine" (6: 3).

3. The traits of the royal bridegroom are outlined solemnly, with recourse to all the pomp of a court scene. He bears the military emblems (cf. Ps 45[44]: 4-6), to which are added sumptuous, scented robes, while music resounds in the background of the spacious ivory halls of shimmering palaces (vv. 9-10). The throne is set in the centre, and there is also a reference to the sceptre, both insignia of power and royal investiture (cf. vv. 7-8).

At this point we would like to highlight two elements. First of all, the beauty of the bridegroom, a sign of inner splendour and divine blessings: "You are the fairest of the children of men" (v. 3). On the very basis of this verse, Christian tradition pictures Christ in the form of a perfect and attractive man. In a world that is all too often marred by ugliness and ugly deeds, this image is an invitation to rediscover the "*via pulchritudinis*" in faith, in theology and in social life, in order to ascend to the beauty of the divine.

4. Beauty, however, is not an end in itself. The second point we would like to make concerns the encounter between beauty and justice. Indeed, the sovereign "rides on in triumph for the cause of truth and goodness and right" (v. 5); his "love is for justice; [his] hatred for evil" (v. 8), and the sceptre of his kingdom is "a sceptre of justice" (v. 7). Beauty must be combined with goodness and holiness of life so as to make the luminous face of God who is good, admirable and just shine out in the world.

In v. 7, experts have supposed that the name "God" is addressed to the king himself because he is consecrated to the Lord and therefore in a certain way belongs to the sphere of the divine: "Your throne, O God, shall endure for ever". Or it might be an invocation to the one supreme king, the Lord, who bends down to the Messiah-King. It is certain that the *Letter to the Hebrews*, in applying the Psalm to Christ, has no hesitation in recognizing the full and not merely symbolic divinity of the Son who has entered into his glory (cf. Heb 1: 8-9).

5. Following this Christological interpretation, let us conclude by referring to the voice of the Fathers of the Church, who attribute further spiritual values to each verse. Thus, St John Chrysostom interweaves this Christological application with the sentence of the Psalm in which it says that "God has blessed" the Messiah-King "for ever more" (cf. Ps 45[44]: 3).

"The first Adam was subjected to an overwhelming curse, whereas the second Adam was filled with the greatest blessing. The former had heard: 'cursed is the ground because of you' (Gn 3: 17), and again: 'cursed is he who does the work of the Lord with slackness' (Jer 48: 10), 'cursed be he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them' (Dt 27: 26), and 'a hanged man is accursed by God' (Dt 21: 23). You see how many curses? Christ has set you free from all these curses, 'having become a curse for us' (cf. Gal 3: 13). Indeed, just as he humbled himself to lift you up and died to make you immortal, so he became a curse in order to crown you with

blessings. Can anything ever compare to this blessing, when due to a curse he lavishes a blessing upon you? Indeed, he himself had no need of blessing, but he gives it to you" (*Expositio in Psalmum XLIV*, 4: PG 55, 188-189).

To English-speaking pilgrims

I extend a warm welcome to the English-speaking pilgrims here today, including groups from Britain and Ireland, Scandinavia and the United States of America. I greet especially the new students of the Venerable English College. Upon all of you I invoke the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

To special groups

I now address a cordial greeting to the Italian-speaking pilgrims, and in particular, to my Brothers in the Episcopate taking part in the meeting organized for Military Ordinaries, and to the numerous student priests of the Pontifical Colleges of St Peter and St Paul in Rome. I then greet the faithful of the Diocese of Belluno-Feltre, accompanied by their Pastor, Bishop Giuseppe Andrich, as well as the representatives of the Seniors Association of the Fiat Firm.

I thank you all for coming and wish you every desired good in the Lord.

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*.

Dear Friends, I assure each of you a special remembrance in prayer and I bless you from my heart.