



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

*GENERAL AUDIENCE*

*Wednesday, 12 January 2005*

## **"By the blood of the Lamb"**

1. The hymn that has just resounded ideally comes down from heaven. In fact, the Book of Revelation that presents it links the first part (cf. 11: 17-18) to the "twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God" (11: 16), and in the second strophe (cf. 12: 10-12) to "a loud voice in heaven" (12: 10).

We are thus involved in a grandiose portrayal of the divine court where God and the Lamb, that is, Christ, surrounded by the "Council of the Crown", judge human history in good and in evil but also reveal history's ultimate end of salvation and glory. The role of the Canticles that spangle the Book of Revelation is to illustrate the topic of the divine lordship that controls the often bewildering flow of human events.

2. In this regard, the first passage of our Canticle is significant. It is set on the lips of the 24 elders who seem to symbolize God's Chosen People in their two historical phases, the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles of the Church.

Now, the almighty and eternal Lord God "has taken [his] great power and begun to reign" (11: 17). His entry into history does not only aim to curb the violent reactions of rebels (cf. Ps 2: 1, 5), but above all to exalt and reward the just. These are defined with a series of words used to describe the spiritual features of Christians. They are "servants" who comply faithfully with the divine law; they are "prophets", endowed with the revealed word that interprets and judges history; they are "saints", consecrated to God, who revere his name, that is, they are ready to adore him and to do his will. Among them there are "small and great", an expression dear to the author of the Book of

Revelation (cf. 13: 16; 19: 5, 18; 20: 12) which he uses to designate the People of God in its unity and variety.

3. Thus, let us move on to the second part of our Canticle. After the dramatic scene of the woman with child "clothed with the sun" and the terrible red dragon (cf. 12: 1-9), a mysterious voice intones a hymn of thanksgiving and joy.

The joy derives from the fact that Satan, the ancient enemy whose role at the heavenly court was that of the "accuser of our brethren" (12: 10), as we see in the Book of Job (cf. 1: 6-11; 2: 4-5), was "thrown down" from heaven. Henceforth, therefore, he no longer possesses such great power. He knows "that his time is short" (Rv 12: 12), for history is nearing the radical turning point of liberation from evil and he consequently reacts with "great wrath".

On the other side towers the risen Christ, whose blood is the principle of salvation (cf. 12: 11). He has received from the Father a royal authority over the entire universe; in him are fulfilled "the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God" (12: 10).

Associated with Christ's victory are the Christian martyrs who chose the way of the Cross, neither succumbing to evil nor giving in to its virulence but keeping themselves for the Father, united with the death of Christ through a witness of self-giving and courage that has brought them to "[love] not their lives even unto death" (12: 11). We seem to hear an echo of Christ's words: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn 12: 25).

4. The words of the Book of Revelation about those who have conquered Satan and evil "by the blood of the Lamb", ring out in a splendid prayer attributed to Simeon, the Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in Persia. Before dying on 17 April 341, a martyr with many other companions during the persecution of King Shapur II, he addressed the following petition to Christ:

"Lord, give me this crown: you know how I have loved you with all my heart and all my life. I will be happy to see you and you will give me rest.... I want to persevere heroically in my vocation, fulfilling with fortitude the task assigned to me and setting an example to all your people in the East.... I will receive the life that knows no suffering, apprehension or anguish, that knows neither persecutor nor persecuted, oppressor nor oppressed, tyrant nor victim. There I will no longer see the intimidation of kings, the terror of prefects or anyone who cites me at the tribunal and frightens me more and more, or who entices and terrifies me. O path of all pilgrims, my sore feet will be healed in you; in you the weariness of my limbs will find rest, Christ, the chrism of our anointing. In you, the cup of our salvation, will the sorrow of my heart dissolve; in you, our comfort and joy, the tears in my eyes will be wiped away" (A. Hamman, *Preghiere dei Primi Cristiani*, Milan, 1955, pp. 80-81).

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking pilgrims present at this Audience, especially those from Finland, New Zealand and the United States of America. Upon you and your loved ones, I invoke the Lord's Blessings of health and joy. Happy New Year!

My thoughts also go to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. May the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord that we celebrated last Sunday help you, dear *young people*, to rediscover with joy the gift of faith in Christ; may it make you, dear *sick people*, strong in trial; and may it encourage you, dear *newly-weds*, to make your family a true domestic church.

I greet and bless you all. A happy New Year to everyone!

#### ENGLISH-SPEAKING GROUPS

From Finland:

A group of Lutherans from Helsinki, accompanied by their Bishop.

From New Zealand:

A group of pilgrims from New Zealand.

From the United States of America:

Students and teachers from the University of St Thomas in St Paul, Minnesota; students from St Olaf's College, Northfield, Minnesota.

#### **Rv 11: 17-18; 12: 10-12:**

We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, that you have taken your great power and begun to reign.

The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great.

Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Rejoice, then, O heaven, and you that dwell therein.

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