



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 8 February 2006

Psalm 145[144]: 14-21

"The Lord is faithful in all his words"

Vespers of Friday of the 4th Week

1. Following the liturgy that divides it into two parts, let us return to , a wonderful hymn in honour of the Lord, a loving King who is attentive to his creatures. Let us now meditate upon the second part of the Psalm: they are verses 14 to 21, which take up the fundamental theme of the hymn's first part.

In them are exalted the divine compassion, tenderness, fidelity and goodness which are extended to the whole of humanity, involving every creature. The Psalm now focuses on the love that the Lord reserves particularly for the poor and the weak.

Divine kingship is not, therefore, detached and haughty, as can be the case in the exercise of human power. God expresses his sovereignty by bending down to meet the frailest and most helpless of his creatures.

2. Indeed, he is first and foremost a father who supports those who falter and raises those who have fallen into the dust of humiliation (cf. v. 14). Consequently, living beings are reaching out to the Lord like hungry beggars and he gives them, like a tender parent, the food they need to survive (cf. v. 15).

At this point the profession of faith in justice and holiness, the two divine qualities par excellence,

emerges from the lips of the person praying: "The Lord is just in all his ways and loving in all his deeds" (cf. v. 17).

In Hebrew we have two typical adjectives to illustrate the Covenant between God and his People: *saadiq* and *hasid*. They express justice that seeks to save and to liberate from evil, and the faithfulness that is a sign of the Lord's loving greatness.

3. The Psalmist takes the side of those who have benefited, whom he describes in various words: in practice, these terms portray true believers. They "call on" the Lord in trusting prayer, they seek him in life with a sincere heart (cf. v. 18); they "fear" their God, respecting his will and obeying his word (cf. v. 19), but above all "love" him, certain that he will take them under the mantle of his protection and his closeness (cf. v. 20).

Then, the Psalmist's closing words are the ones with which he opened his hymn: an invitation to praise and bless the Lord and his "name", that is, as a living and holy Person who works and saves in the world and in history.

Indeed, his call is an assurance that every creature marked by the gift of life associates himself or herself with the prayerful praise: "Let all mankind bless his holy name for ever, for ages unending" (v. 21). This is a sort of perennial hymn that must be raised from earth to heaven; it is a community celebration of God's universal love, source of peace, joy and salvation.

4. To conclude our reflection, let us return to that sweet verse which says: "[The Lord] is close to all who call him, who call on him from their hearts" (v. 18). This sentence was particularly dear to Barsanuphius of Gaza, an ascetic who died in the mid-sixth century, to whom monks, ecclesiastics and lay people would often turn because of the wisdom of his discernment.

Thus, for example, to one disciple who expressed his desire "to seek the causes of the various temptations that assailed him", Barsanuphius responded: "Brother John, do not fear any of the temptations that come to test you, for the Lord will not let you fall prey to them. So, whenever one of these temptations comes to you, do not tire yourself by endeavouring to discern what is at stake, but cry out Jesus' Name: "Jesus, help me!". And he will hear you, for he "is close to all who call on him". Do not be discouraged, but run on with enthusiasm and you will reach the destination in Christ Jesus, Our Lord" (Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, *Epistolario*, 39: *Collana di Testi Patristici*, XCIII, Rome, 1991, p. 109).

And these words of the ancient Father also apply to us. In our difficulties, problems, temptations, we must not simply make a theoretical reflection - where do they come from? - but must react positively; we must call on the Lord, we must keep alive our contact with the Lord. Indeed, we must cry out the Name of Jesus: "Jesus, help me!".

And let us be certain that he hears us, because he is close to those who seek him. Let us not feel discouraged, but let us run on with enthusiasm, as this Father says, and we too will reach the destination of our lives: Jesus, the Lord.

I am pleased to welcome the English-speaking pilgrims present at this Audience, especially those from Ireland and the United States of America. Upon all of you I invoke the Lord's Blessings of health and joy.

I then greet you, dear Bishops taking part in the International Meeting organized by the Community of Sant'Egidio, and I hope that these days of reflection and prayer will be fruitful for the ministry you are called to carry out in your Dioceses.

Lastly, my thoughts turn to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Today, we are celebrating the liturgical memorial of St Jerome Emiliani, Founder of the Order of Clerics Regular of Somaschi, and St Josephine Bakhita, a particularly lovable saint. May the courage of these two faithful witnesses of Christ help you, dear *young people*, to open your hearts to the heroism of holiness in daily life. May it sustain you, dear *sick people*, in persevering patiently and in offering your prayer and suffering for the whole Church. And may it give you, dear *newly-weds*, the courage to make your families communities of love, filled with Christian values.

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