



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Paul VI Audience Hall*

*Wednesday, 12 September 2012*

[\[Video\]](#)

### ***Prayer in the second part of the Book of Revelation (Rev. 4:1-22:21)***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Last Wednesday I talked about prayer in the first part of the Book of Revelation. Today let us move on to the second part of the Book. While in the first part prayer is oriented to the Church's inner life, in the second part attention is focused on the whole world; in fact, the Church, on her pilgrimage through history, is part of it in accordance with God's plan. The assembly, which by listening to John's message as it is presented by the speaker has rediscovered its task of cooperating in the development of the Kingdom of God as "priests of God and of Christ" (Rev 20:6; cf. 1:5; 5:10), opens itself to the world of man. And here emerge two ways of living, in a shared dialectic relationship. We might define the first as the "system of Christ", to which the assembly is happy to belong, and the second, as the "earthly system of anti-Kingdom and anti-Covenant, brought into being by the Evil One", who, by deceiving men and women, wishes to create a world that is the opposite of the one willed by Christ and by God (cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Bibbia e Morale. Radici bibliche dell'agire cristiano*, 70). Consequently the assembly must be able to read in depth the history it is living, learning to discern events with faith in order to cooperate, with its action, in spreading the Kingdom of God. And this work of interpretation and discernment in addition to action is linked to prayer.

First of all, after the insistent appeal of Christ who says seven times in the first part of the Book of

Revelation: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), the assembly is invited to come up to heaven to see reality with God’s eyes; and here we rediscover three symbols, key reference points for interpreting history: the throne of God, the Lamb and the scroll (cf. Rev 4:1-5:14).

The first symbol is the throne, on which a figure is seated whom John does not describe because it is beyond the scope of any human representation. John can only hint at the sense of beauty and joy he feels in its presence. This mysterious figure is God, almighty God who did not stay closed in his heaven but made himself close to man, entering into a Covenant with him; in a mysterious but real way God makes his voice, symbolized by thunder and lightening, heard in history. There are various elements that appear around God’s throne, such as the 24 elders and four living creatures who ceaselessly praise the one Lord of history. Thus the first symbol is the throne.

The second symbol is the scroll, which contains God’s plan for events and for people; it is hermetically sealed by seven seals and no one can read it. In the face of this human inability to scrutinize God’s design, John feels a deep sadness that causes him to weep. Yet there is a remedy to man’s bewilderment before the mystery of history; someone is able to open the scroll and to enlighten him.

And here the third symbol appears: Christ, the Lamb immolated in the sacrifice of the Cross but who is standing, which is a sign of his Resurrection. And it is the Lamb himself, Christ who died and is Risen, who breaks open the seals one by one and reveals God’s plan, the profound meaning of history.

What do these symbols mean? They remind us of the way to take to be able to interpret the events of history and of our own life. By raising our gaze to God’s Heaven, in a constant relationship with Christ, opening our hearts and minds to him in personal and community prayer, we learn to see things in a new light and to perceive their truest meaning. Prayer is, as it were, an open window that enables us to keep our gaze turned to God, not only to remember the destination towards which we are bound but also to let God’s will illuminate our earthly pilgrimage and help us live it with intensity and commitment.

How does the Lord guide the Christian community to a deeper interpretation of history? First of all by asking it to consider the present that we are living in realistically. The Lamb then opens the first four seals of the scroll, and the Church sees the world in which it is inserted, a world in which there are various negative elements. There are the wicked deeds of men and women, such as acts of violence that stem from the desire to possess, to dominate each other, even to the point of self-destruction (the second seal); or injustice, because people fail to respect the laws that they have given themselves (the third seal). To these are added the evils that human beings must suffer, such as death, hunger and pestilence (the fourth seal).

In the face of these all too often dramatic situations the ecclesial community is asked never to lose hope, to believe firmly that the apparent omnipotence of the Evil One comes up against the real almightiness which is God's. And the first seal which the Lamb breaks open contains this very message. John recounts: "And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer" (Rev 6:2). God's power that cannot only offset evil but can actually overcome it, entered human history. The colour white refers to the Resurrection: God made himself so close that he came down into the darkness of death to illuminate it with the splendour of his divine life; he took the evil of the world upon his own shoulders to purify it with the fire of his love.

How can we develop in this Christian interpretation of reality? The Book of Revelation tells us that prayer nourishes this vision of light and of deep hope in each one of us and in our communities: it invites us not to let ourselves be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good, to look at the Crucified and Risen Christ who associates us with his victory. The Church lives in history, she does not withdraw into herself but courageously continues on her journey through difficulty and suffering, forcefully asserting that in the end evil does not overcome good, that darkness does not conceal God's splendour. This is an important point for us; as Christians we can never be pessimistic; we know well that on our journey through life we often encounter violence, falsehood, hatred and persecution, but this does not discourage us. Prayer teaches us above all to see God's signs, his presence and his action, indeed, to be lights of goodness ourselves, spreading hope and showing that the victory is God's.

This prospect leads to raising thanksgiving and praise to God and to the Lamb: the 24 elders and four living beings sing together the "new song" which celebrates the work of Christ the Lamb, who will "make all things new" (Rev 21:5). However, this renewal is first of all a gift to be requested. And here we find another element that must characterize prayer: to pray to the Lord insistently that his Kingdom come, that the human heart be docile to the lordship of God and that it be his will that guides both our life and the life of the world.

In the vision of the Book of Revelation this prayer of petition is portrayed by an important detail: "the 24 elders" and "the four living beings" hold in their hands, together with the harp that accompanies their singing, "golden bowls full of incense" (5:8a) which, as is explained "are the prayers of the saints" (5:8b), namely, of those who have already reached God but also of all of us who are journeying on. And we see that in front of God's throne an angel is holding a golden censer in his hand into which he continues to put grains of incense, that is our prayer, whose sweet fragrance is offered together with the prayers that rise to God (cf. Rev 8:1-4). It is a symbolism that tells us how all our prayers — with every possible limitation, effort, poverty, dryness and imperfection they may have — are so to speak purified and reach God's heart. In other words we can be sure that there is no such thing as superfluous or useless prayers; no prayer is wasted. And prayers are answered, even if the answer is sometimes mysterious, for God is Love and infinite Mercy. "The angel", John writes, "took the censer and filled it with fire from the

altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, loud noises, flashes of lightning and an earthquake” (Rev 8:5). This image means that God is not indifferent to our entreaties, he intervenes and makes his power felt and his voice heard on the earth, he causes the system of the Evil One to tremble and collapse. Often when confronting evil we have the feeling that we are powerless, but our prayers themselves are the first and most effective response we can give and they strengthen our daily commitment to spread goodness. God’s might makes our weakness fruitful (cf. Rom 8:26-27).

I would like to conclude by referring to the closing dialogue (cf. Rev 22:6-21). Jesus repeats several times: “Behold, I am coming soon” (Rev 22:7, 12). This affirmation does not only indicate the future prospect at the end of time but also that of the present: Jesus comes, he makes his dwelling place in those who believe in him and receive him. Thus, guided by the Holy Spirit, the assembly repeats to Jesus a pressing invitation to make himself ever closer: “come” (Rev 22:17a). It is like the “Bride” (22:17) who ardently longs for the fullness of the nuptials. The invocation recurs for the third time: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (22, 20b); and the speaker concludes with words which demonstrate the meaning of this presence: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all” (22:21).

The Book of Revelation, despite the complexity of its symbols, involves us in an extremely rich prayer, which is why we too listen, praise, give thanks, contemplate the Lord and ask him for forgiveness. Its structure as a great liturgical prayer of the community is also a strong appeal to recognize the extraordinary, transforming power of the Eucharist. I would particularly like to extend a pressing invitation to be faithful to Sunday Mass on the Lord’s Day, Sunday, the true centre of the week! The wealth of prayer in the Book of Revelation is reminiscent of a diamond which has a fascinating series of facets but whose value depends on the purity of its one, central core. Likewise the evocative forms of prayer we encounter in the Book of Revelation make the unique, inexpressible preciousness of Jesus Christ shine out. Thank you.

### **To special groups:**

I am pleased to greet the participants in the Communications Seminar sponsored by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. I also welcome the priests taking part in the Institute for Continuing Theological Education at the Pontifical North American College. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, including those from England, Scotland, Wales, Denmark, Malta, India, Korea, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America, I invoke God’s blessings!

And now I address a cordial welcome to the Italian-speaking pilgrims. I greet the religious of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin and of the Federation of the Oratory of St Philip Neri, who are celebrating their General Chapter and their General Congress respectively. May they always be faithful to the charisms of their Founders and I thank them for their valuable contribution to the

New Evangelization. I joyfully welcome the parish groups and associations, especially the representatives of the Italian Society of Veterinary Sciences and the members of the District of Italy and San Marino of *Kiwanis International*. I would like to ask you all to accompany with prayer my upcoming [Apostolic Journey in Lebanon](#) during which I shall present the Post-Synodal Exhortation for the Middle East. May this Visit encourage Christians to encourage peace and brotherhood throughout this Region.

Lastly, a thought for the *young* people, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Today we are celebrating the Most Holy Name of Mary. Dear *young people*, learn to love at the school of the Mother of Jesus; dear *sick people*, ask Mary for help and comfort in suffering with the prayer of the Rosary; and you, dear *newlyweds*, may you be able, like Our Lady, to listen to God's will for your family.

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## APPEAL

Dear pilgrims, at this same time in two days I shall be on my flight to Lebanon. I am very happy about this [Apostolic Journey](#). It will enable me to meet many members of Lebanese society: civil and ecclesial leaders, Catholic faithful of various rites, as well as the other Christians, Muslims and Druzes of this region. I thank the Lord for this richness that cannot continue to exist unless it is lived in enduring peace and reconciliation. I therefore urge all the Christians of the Middle East, whether they belong to the old stock or have recently arrived, to be peacemakers and architects of reconciliation. Let us ask God to strengthen the faith of the Christians of Lebanon and the Middle East and to fill them with hope.

I thank God for their presence and I encourage the Church as a whole to show solidarity to them so that they may continue to witness to Christ in these blessed lands, while seeking communion in unity. I thank God for all the people and all the institutions which, in many ways, help them in this regard. The history of the Middle East shows us the important and often primordial role that is played by the different Christian communities in interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Let us ask God to give this region of the world the peace it so longs for, with respect for the legitimate differences. May God bless Lebanon and the Middle East! May God bless all of you!

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