



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 24 March 1999

God the Father's providential love

1. Continuing our meditation on God the Father, today we would like to reflect on his generous and providential love. "The witness of Scripture is unanimous that the solicitude of divine providence is concrete and immediate; God cares for all, from the least things to the great events of the world and its history" (CCC, n. 303). We can begin with a text from the Book of Wisdom, in which divine Providence is seen guiding a boat in the middle of the sea: "It is your Providence, O Father, that steers its course, because you have given it a path in the sea, and a safe way through the waves, showing that you can save from every danger, so that even if a man lacks skill, he may put to sea" (Wis 14:3-4).

In a psalm we find another image of the sea, ploughed by ships and teeming with animals large and small, which recalls the nourishment that God provides for all living things: "These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things" (Ps 104:27-28).

2. The image of the ship in the middle of the sea well describes our situation before our providential Father. He, as Jesus says, "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:45). However, in the light of this message of the Father's providential love, we naturally wonder how suffering can be explained. And it is necessary to recognize that the problem of suffering is an enigma which perplexes human reason. Divine Revelation helps us understand that it is not willed by God, since it entered the world because of human sin (cf. Gn 3:16-19). "Almighty God ..., because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good

to emerge from evil itself" (St Augustine, *Enchiridion de fide, spe et caritate*, 11, 3: PL 40, 236). In this regard, the reassuring words that Joseph spoke to his brothers, who had sold him and later depended on his power, are significant: "It was not you who sent me here but God.... As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gn 45:8; 50:20).

God's plans do not coincide with those of man; they are infinitely better, but often incomprehensible to the human mind. The Book of Proverbs says: "A man's steps are ordered by the Lord; how then can man understand his way?" (Prv 20:24). In the New Testament, Paul will announce this consoling principle: "In everything God works for good with those who love him" (Rom 8:28).

3. What should be our attitude to God's providential and far-sighted action? We certainly should not wait passively for what he sends us, but cooperate with him in bringing to completion the work he has begun in us. We must be eager to seek first the things of heaven. These must come first, as Jesus said: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt 6:33). Other matters must not be the object of excessive concern, because our heavenly Father knows our needs; this is what Jesus teaches us when he asks his disciples for "childlike abandonment to the providence of our heavenly Father who takes care of his children's smallest needs" (CCC, n. 305): "Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind. For all the nations of the world seek these things; and your Father knows that you need them" (Lk 12:29f.).

We are therefore called to cooperate with God in an attitude of great trust. Jesus teaches us to ask the heavenly Father for our daily bread (cf. Mt 6:11; Lk 11:3). If we receive it with gratitude, we will also spontaneously remember that nothing belongs to us, and that we must be ready to give: "Give to everyone who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again" (Lk 6:30).

4. The certainty that God loves us makes us trust in his fatherly providence even in life's most difficult moments. This complete trust in God, the providential Father, even in the midst of adversity, is admirably expressed by St Teresa of Jesus: "Let nothing trouble you; let nothing frighten you. Everything passes. God never changes. Patience obtains all. Whoever has God wants for nothing. God alone is enough" (Poems, 30).

Scripture offers us an eloquent example of total trust in God when it tells how Abraham reached the decision to sacrifice his son Isaac. In reality, God did not want the death of the son, but the faith of the father. And Abraham demonstrates it completely, for when Isaac asks him where the lamb is for the burnt offering, he dares to answer: "God will provide" (Gn 22:8). And then he immediately experiences the benevolent Providence of God, who saves the young boy and rewards his faith, filling him with blessings.

Such texts must be interpreted, then, in the light of Revelation as a whole, which reaches its fullness in Jesus Christ. He teaches us to place great confidence in God even in the most difficult moments: nailed to the Cross, Jesus abandons himself totally to the Father: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). With this attitude he raises to a sublime level what Job had summed up in his famous words: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Jb 1:21). Even what is humanly a misfortune can be part of that great plan of infinite love in which the Father provides for our salvation.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I warmly welcome the many English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present, especially those from England, Denmark, Tanzania, Japan and the United States of America. Upon you and your families, I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

After greeting the various language groups, the Holy Father said:

We would now like to offer a special prayer to the Father of Mercy to grant the gift of peace which Kosovo and Europe, in particular, so greatly need today.