



# The Holy See

---

JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 1 March 2000*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. With great joy I was able to go on [pilgrimage to Egypt](#) last week in the footsteps of Moses. The high point of this extraordinary experience occurred at the foot of Mount Sinai, the Holy Mountain: holy because it was here that God revealed himself to his servant, Moses, and told him his Name; holy, too, because it was here that God gave his people the gift of his Law, the Ten Commandments; holy, lastly, because by their constant presence believers have made Mount Sinai a place of prayer.

I am grateful to God for allowing me to pray in the place where he introduced Moses to a clearer knowledge of his mystery by speaking to him from the burning bush and offering him and the chosen people the law of the Covenant, the law of life and freedom for every person. God made himself the foundation and guarantor of this Covenant.

2. As I had the opportunity to [say last Saturday](#), the Ten Commandments disclose to us the only authentically human future, and this is because they are not the arbitrary imposition of a tyrannical God. Yahweh wrote them in stone, but above all he inscribed them in every human heart as the universal moral law, valid and current in every time and place. This law prevents egoism, hatred, falsehood and contempt from destroying the human person. By constantly recalling the divine Covenant, the Ten Commandments emphasize that the Lord is our only God, and that any other divinity is false and ultimately enslaves the human being, leading him to degrade his human dignity.

*"Hear, O Israel.... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and*

*with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them ... to your children" (Dt 6: 4-7).* These words, which devout Jews repeat each day, also echo in the heart of every Christian. "Hear! These words which I command you shall be upon your heart!". We cannot think of being faithful to God if we do not observe his Law. Being faithful to God, moreover, means also being faithful to ourselves, to our true nature and to our deepest and irrepressible aspirations.

3. I am grateful to Archbishop Damianos, the Hegumen of St Catherine's Monastery, and to his monks for the very cordial welcome they gave me. The Archbishop, who waited for me at the monastery entrance, spoke to me of the precious "biblical relics" preserved there: Jethro's Well and, especially, the roots of the "burning bush", before which I knelt, recalling the words in which God revealed the mystery of his being to Moses: "I am who I am". I was also able to admire the marvellous works of art that the prayer and contemplation of the monks have produced down the centuries.

Before the Liturgy of the Word, Archbishop Damianos recalled that Mount Horeb rose right above us with the summit of Sinai, the peak of the Decalogue, the place where God spoke to Moses "in fire and darkness". For centuries in these surroundings a community of monks have pursued the ideal of Christian perfection in "continual contemplation of nature and tireless control of the senses", availing themselves of the traditional means of spiritual dialogue and asceticism. At the end of the meeting the Archbishop kindly accompanied me to the airport with some of his monks.

4. I gladly take this opportunity to express my thanks once again to President Mubarak, to the Egyptian authorities and to everyone who helped to make this journey possible. Egypt is the cradle of a most ancient civilization. The Christian faith arrived there in apostolic times, especially with St Mark, a disciple of Peter and Paul and the founder of the Church of Alexandria.

During the pilgrimage I had talks with His Holiness Patriarch Shenouda III, head of the Orthodox Coptic Church, and with Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar and religious leader of the Muslim community. I express my gratitude to them and also to His Beatitude Stephanos II Ghattas, Patriarch of Catholic Copts, and the other Archbishops and Bishops there.

I renew my greeting to the small but fervent Catholic community, whom I met at the solemn celebration of Holy Mass in Cairo, in which all of Egypt's Catholic Churches took part: Coptic, Latin, Maronite, Greek, Armenian, Syrian and Chaldean. Gathered round the Lord's Table we celebrated our common faith and entrusted to God the zeal for life and apostolic activity of our Egyptian brothers and sisters, who with great sacrifice and generosity give proof of their fidelity to the Gospel in the country where the Holy Family found refuge 2,000 years ago.

I cherish fond memories of the significant meeting with representatives and faithful of the non-Catholic Churches and Ecclesial Communities in Egypt. May the ecumenical progress which has

been made in the 20th century by the grace of the Holy Spirit undergo further development that will bring us ever closer to the goal of full unity, for which the Lord Jesus ardently prayed.

5. Today Mount Sinai reminds me of another mountain which, God willing, I will have the joy of visiting at the end of this month: the Mount of the Beatitudes in Galilee. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said he did not come to abolish the old Law but to perfect it (cf. *Mt* 5: 17). In fact, since the Word of God became incarnate and died on the Cross for us, the Ten Commandments make themselves heard through his voice. He roots them, through the new life of grace, in the hearts of those who believe in him. Thus Jesus' disciples do not feel oppressed by a multitude of prescriptions, but, spurred by the power of love, see God's Commandments as a law of freedom: the freedom to love through the internal action of the Spirit.

The Beatitudes are the evangelical completion of the Law of Sinai. The Covenant made then with the Hebrew people finds its fulfilment in the new and eternal Covenant established in Christ's Blood. Christ is the New Law, and in him salvation is offered to all nations.

I entrust to Jesus Christ the next stage of my Jubilee Pilgrimage, which will be the Holy Land. I ask everyone to accompany me with prayer, especially as I spiritually prepare for this important event.

\* \* \*

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

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's audience, especially those from England, Ireland, Norway, Finland, the Faeroe Islands, Japan and the United States. Upon you and your families, I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

© Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana