



The Holy See

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GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Jubilee commitment to freedom and justice

1. The voice of the prophets - like that of Isaiah which we have just heard - echoes again and again to remind us that we must commit ourselves to liberating the oppressed and to working for justice. Without this commitment, our worship of God is not pleasing to him. It is an intense call, sometimes expressed in paradoxical tones, as when Hosea delivers this divine oracle also cited by Jesus (cf. *Mt* 9: 13; 12: 7): "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings" (6: 6).

With stinging intensity the prophet Amos also presents God, who turns his gaze elsewhere and accepts no rites, feasts, fasts, music or prayers, when outside the sanctuary the righteous are sold for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and the head of the poor is trampled like dust (cf. 2: 6-7). Therefore the invitation is given without hesitation: "But let justice roll down like the waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5: 24). Speaking in God's name, then, the prophets reject worship that is isolated from life, liturgy that is separated from justice, prayer that is detached from daily involvement, faith that is devoid of works.

2. Isaiah's cry: "Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (1: 16-17), is echoed in the teaching of Christ, who tells us: "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (*Mt* 5: 23-24). At the close of every human life and at the end of the history of humanity, God's judgement will be concerned precisely with love, the practice of justice and aid to the poor (cf. *Mt* 25: 31-46). Faced with a community torn apart by divisions and injustices, as the

one at Corinth was, Paul goes so far as to demand the suspension of Eucharistic participation, inviting Christians first to examine their own conscience, in order not to be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord (cf. 1 *Cor* 11: 27-29).

3. For Christians, the service of love, consistently connected with faith and the liturgy (cf. *Jas* 2: 14-17), the commitment to justice, the struggle against any oppression and the protection of personal dignity are not the expressions of a philanthropy motivated solely by membership in the human family. They are, instead, choices and acts which have a deeply religious spirit, and are true and proper sacrifices pleasing to God, as the Letter to the Hebrews says (cf. 13: 16). St John Chrysostom's admonition is particularly trenchant: "Would you honour the Body of Christ? Do not despise his nakedness; do not honour him here in church clothed in silk vestments and then pass him by unclothed and frozen outside" (*In Matthaem hom.*, 50, 3).

4. Precisely because "in the modern world the sense of justice has been reawakening on a vast scale ... the Church shares with the people of our time this profound and ardent desire for a life that is just in every aspect, nor does she fail to examine the various aspects of the sort of justice that the life of people and society demands. This is confirmed by the field of Catholic social doctrine, greatly developed in the course of the last century" (*Dives in misericordia*, n. 12). This commitment to reflection and action must receive an extraordinary impetus from the Jubilee itself. In its biblical context, it was a celebration of solidarity: when the trumpet of the jubilee year sounded, everyone returned "to his property and ... to his family", as the official text of the Jubilee says (*Lv* 25: 10).

5. First of all, land alienated because of various economic or family circumstances was restored to its former owners. Thus the jubilee year allowed everyone to return to an ideal starting-point through the bold and courageous work of distributive justice. Here we see what could be called the "utopian" dimension, which is proposed as a practical remedy to the consolidation of privileges and dishonesty: it is an attempt to spur society towards a higher ideal of solidarity, generosity and fraternity. The restitution of lost land could be expressed in modern historical terms, as I have often suggested, by cancelling outright, or at least reducing, the international debt of the poorer countries (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 51).

6. The other jubilee task consisted in allowing every slave to return in freedom to his family (cf. *Lv* 25: 39-41). Poverty had reduced him to the humiliation of slavery; now he is given the chance to build his own future in freedom, within his own family. This is why the prophet Ezekiel calls the jubilee year the "year of liberty", that is, of redemption (cf. *Ez* 46: 17). And another book of the Bible, Deuteronomy, looks to a society of justice, freedom and solidarity in these words: "There will be no poor among you.... If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren ... you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand" (15: 4, 7).

We too must aim at this goal of solidarity: "Solidarity of the poor among themselves, solidarity with

the poor to which the rich are called, solidarity among the workers and with the workers" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, n. 89). Lived in this way, the Jubilee that has just ended will continue to bear abundant fruits of justice, freedom and love.

I warmly welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from Denmark, Australia and the United States of America. May your visit be a time of special grace, as you retrace the footsteps of the martyrs and saints who are commemorated in this City. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of Jesus Christ our Saviour.