



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 13 March 2002*

*Psalm 76[77]*

***God renews the saving wonders of his love***

1. By including Psalm 76[77] that we have just proclaimed in the morning Lauds, the liturgy wants to remind us that the beginning of a new day is not always bright. Just as dark days dawn when the sky is covered with clouds threatening a storm, so our life knows days that are filled with sorrows and fears. This is why already at daybreak our prayer becomes a lament, a supplication, a plea for help.

Our Psalm is precisely a plea that rises to God with insistence, deeply motivated by trust, indeed, by the certainty that he will intervene. In fact, for the Psalmist the Lord is not an impassive emperor relegated to his shining heavens and indifferent to our affairs. From this impression that sometimes grips us arise questions so bitter that could bring about a crisis of faith: "Is God denying his love and his election? Has he forgotten the past when he sustained us and made us happy?". As we will see, such questions are swept away by renewed trust in God, our Redeemer and our Saviour.

2. So let us follow the way this prayer develops as it begins in a dramatic tone, in anguish, and then gradually opens to serenity and hope. First of all, we have before us the lamentation on the sad present and the silence of God (cf. vv. 2-11). A cry for help is raised to a seemingly mute heaven, imploring hands are lifted, the heart misses a beat through sorrow. In the sleepless night of tears and prayers, a song "returns to the heart", as is said in verse 7, a sorrowful refrain continually re-echoes in the depths of the soul.

When pain reaches its limit and one wishes that the cup of suffering be removed (cf. Mt 26,39), words explode and become an agonizing question, as we said earlier (cf. Ps 76[77],8-11). This loud cry questions the mystery of God and of his silence.

3. The Psalmist wonders why the Lord is ever rejecting him, why he has changed his appearance and action, forgetting his love, his promise of salvation and his tender mercy. "The right hand of the Most High" that accomplished the saving wonders of the Exodus, now seems paralyzed (cf. v. 11). It is a real "torment" that brings into crisis the faith of the person praying.

Were this true, God would be unrecognizable, he would become a cruel being or a presence like that of idols that cannot save because they are incapable of it, indifferent and powerless. These verses of the first part of Psalm 76 [77] contain the whole drama of faith in the time of trial and of God's silence.

4. But there are reasons for hope. This is what emerges from the second part of the plea (cf. vv. 12-21), similar to a hymn that is intended to propose again the courageous confirmation of faith, even on the dark day of pain. The psalmist sings of the salvation of the past, that had its epiphany of light in the creation and in the liberation from the slavery of Egypt. The bitter present is illuminated by the saving experience of the past, a seed sown in history: it is not dead but only buried, and will spring up again (cf. Jn 12,24).

The Psalmist then has recourse to an important biblical concept, that of the "memorial" which is not merely a vague, consoling memory, but the certainty of divine action that is unailing: "I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; yes, your wonders of old I will remember" (Ps 76[77],12). To profess faith in the works of salvation of the past leads to faith in what the Lord is constantly doing, hence also in the present: "Your way, O God, *is* holy.... You *are* the God who works wonders" (vv. 14-15). Thus the present that seemed without a way out and without light, is illuminated by faith in God and open to hope.

5. To sustain this faith the Psalmist cites what is probably a more ancient hymn, perhaps chanted in the liturgy of the Temple of Zion (cf. vv. 17-20). It is a deafening theophany in which the Lord bursts into the scene of history, overwhelming nature and in particular, the waters, a symbol of chaos, evil and suffering. Very beautiful is the image of God's path on the waters, sign of his triumph over negative forces: "Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters, yet your footprints were unseen" (v. 20). And we are reminded of Christ walking on the waters, an eloquent symbol of his victory over evil (cf. Jn 6,16-20).

Recalling at the end that God guided his people "like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Ps 76[77],21), the Psalm leads implicitly to a certainty: God will return to lead us to salvation. His powerful and invisible hand will be with us through the visible hand of the pastors and guides he has established. The Psalm, that begins with a cry of distress, ends by awakening sentiments of

faith and hope in the great shepherd of our souls (cf. Heb 13,20; I Pt 2,25).

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I warmly welcome the Latin students of the Katedralskolan in Skara, Sweden, and the students of the Egmont Hojskollen in Denmark. I thank the Choir from Phoenix for their praise of God in song. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from England, Japan and the United States, I cordially invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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I cordially welcome the group representing the Religious Leaders of the three monotheistic religions present in the Holy Land, who gathered recently in Alexandria and issued the *First Alexandria Declaration of the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land*. We are all saddened by the daily instances of violence and death in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Our mission as men and women of religion impels us to pray for peace, to proclaim peace and to do everything in our power to help bring an end to the bloodshed.

I reiterate the firm determination of the Catholic Church to work for a just peace. May Almighty God bless your efforts to foster reconciliation and trust between all the beloved people of the Holy Land.

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