



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Psalm 96 [97]

The Glory of the Lord, Judge of the world

1. The light, joy and peace that fill the community of the disciples of Christ at Easter and that spread throughout creation, pervade our gathering that is taking place during the joyful days of the Octave of Easter. In these days it is Christ's triumph over evil and death that we celebrate. With His Death and Resurrection the Kingdom of justice and love that God desires is definitively established.

Today we will focus on the Kingdom of God in our catechesis given over to a reflection on Psalm 96 [97]. The Psalm begins with the solemn announcement: "*The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad*", and is defined as a celebration of the divine King, the Lord of the cosmos and of history. We could say that this is an "Easter" Psalm.

We know the importance that Jesus attached to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God in his preaching. It is not just the creature's recognition of his dependence on his Creator; it is also the conviction that within history there is at work a plan, a design, a strategy of harmony and good desired by God. The Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus have brought this to fulfillment.

2. Let us now read through the Psalm that the liturgy presents for our celebration of Lauds. Immediately after the acclamation to the Lord as King that rings out like a trumpet blast, a great divine epiphany unfolds before the person at prayer. Resorting to the use of quotations, allusions to other passages of the psalms or of the prophets, especially Isaiah, the psalmist describes the

coming of the great King onto the world scene who appears surrounded by a series of cosmic ministers or attendants: clouds, thick darkness, fire, lightning.

Alongside of them, another series of attendants personifies his action in history: justice, right and glory. Their entry onto the scene makes all creation quake. The earth rejoices everywhere, including the islands, considered the most remote region (cf. Ps 96 [97],1). Flashes of light light up the whole world and an earthquake makes the world tremble (cf. v. 4). The mountains, that, according to biblical cosmology, incarnate the most ancient and solid reality, melt like wax (cf. v. 5), as the Prophet Micah sang: "Behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place ... and the mountains will melt under him and the valleys will be cleft, like wax before the fire" (Mi 1,3-4). Angels fill the heavens with songs of praise that exalt justice, the work of salvation brought about by the Lord for the just. Finally, all humanity contemplates the revelation of the divine glory, the mysterious reality of God (cf. Ps 96 [97],6), while the "enemies", the wicked and the unjust, give way before the irresistible power of the judgement of the Lord (cf. v. 3).

3. After the theophany of the Lord of the universe, the Psalm describes two kinds of reaction to the great King and his entry into history. On the one hand, idolaters and idols topple to the ground shamed and defeated; on the other, the faithful, who have gathered in Zion for the liturgical celebration in honour of the Lord, joyfully raise a hymn of praise. The scene of the "worshippers of idols" (cf. v. 7-9) is essential; the idols bow down before the one God and their followers are covered with shame. The just exult in the divine judgement that does away with lies and false piety, sources of moral misery and slavery. They intone a profession of clear faith: "For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods" (v. 9).

4. Against the picture showing the victory over the idols and their worshippers there is set the portrayal of what could be called, the splendid day of the faithful (v. 10-12). Indeed a light that dawns for the just person is described (cf. v. 11): it is the rising of a dawn of joy, festivity and hope, because - as is well known - light is a symbol of God (cf. I Jn 1,5).

The Prophet Malachi declared, "For you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays" (Mi 3,20). Light and happiness go together: "Joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!" (Ps 96 [97],11-12).

The Kingdom of God is a source of peace and serenity that overpowers the empire of darkness. A Jewish community in the time of Jesus sang: "Godlessness draws back before justice, just as darkness shrinks from light; godlessness will vanish forever and justice, like the sun, will be shown to be the beginning of the order of the world" (*Libro dei misteri di Qumran [Book of the Mysteries of Qumran]*: 1Q 27, I, 5-7).

5. However, before we leave Psalm 96 [97], it is important that we rediscover, along with the face of the Lord the King, the profile of the faithful. Seven features are described, the sign of perfection

and fullness. Those who await the coming of the great divine King hate evil, love the Lord, are the *hasîdîm*, the faithful (cf. v. 10), who walk in the path of justice, are upright of heart (cf. v. 11), rejoice in the works of God and give thanks to the holy name of the Lord (cf. v. 12). Let us ask the Lord to make these spiritual features shine in our faces.

The Holy Father then addressed the faithful in French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Hungarian, Croatian and Italian, with a special word for the young people, the sick and the newly-wed. To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors he said:

I offer a warm welcome to the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn in pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi. I also thank the many Choirs present for their praise of God in song. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, especially those from England, Ireland, Japan and the United States, I cordially invoke the grace and peace of the Risen Lord.