



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 26 January 2000*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters*,<sup>1</sup> "How greatly to be desired are all his works, and how sparkling they are to see!... He has made nothing incomplete.... Who can have enough of beholding his glory? Though we speak much we cannot reach the end, and the sum of our words is: "He is the all'. Where shall we find strength to praise him? He is greater than all his works..." (*Sir* 42: 22, 24-25; 43: 27-28). With these words full of wonder, Sirach, a biblical sage, contemplated the splendour of creation and sang God's praises. It is a tiny piece of the thread of contemplation and meditation which runs throughout Sacred Scripture, from the first lines of Genesis when creatures, summoned by the powerful Word of the Creator, spring from the silence of nothingness.

"God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light" (*Gn* 1: 3). In this part of the first account of creation the Word of God is already seen in action; John will say of him: "In the beginning was the Word ... the Word was God ... all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (*Jn* 1: 1-3). Paul will emphasize in the hymn in the Letter to the Colossians that "in him [Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (*Col* 1: 16-17). But at the very first moment of creation the Spirit also seems to be foreshadowed: "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (*Gn* 1: 2). The glory of the Trinity - we can say with Christian tradition - is resplendent in creation.<sup>2</sup> We can see in the light of Revelation how the creative act is appropriated in the first place to the "Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (*Jas* 1: 17). He shines resplendently over the whole horizon, as the Psalmist sings: "O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth! You have exalted your majesty above the heavens" (*Ps* 8: 2). God "has made the world firm, not to be moved" (*Ps* 96: 10), and as he faces nothingness, symbolized by the chaotic waters which lift up their voice, the Creator arises, giving firmness and safety: "The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice, the floods lift up their roaring. Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty" (*Ps* 93: 3-4).<sup>3</sup> In Sacred Scripture creation is also often linked to the divine Word which breaks in and acts: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.... He spoke,

and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.... He sends forth his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly" (*Ps* 33: 6, 9; 147: 15). In the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament it is divine Wisdom personified that brings forth the universe, carrying out the plan God has in mind (cf. *Prv* 8: 22-31). It has been said that in God's Word and Wisdom John and Paul saw the foretelling of the action of Christ "from whom are all things and for whom we exist" (1 *Cor* 8: 6), because it is "through [Christ] also [that God] created the world" (*Heb* 1: 2).<sup>4</sup> At other times Scripture stresses the role of God's Spirit in the act of creation: "When you send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth" (*Ps* 104: 30). The same Spirit is symbolically described as the breath of God's mouth. He gives life and consciousness to man (cf. *Gn* 2: 7), and brings him back to life in the resurrection, as the prophet Ezekiel announces in an evocative passage where the Spirit is at work breathing life into dry bones (cf. 37: 1-14). This same breath subdues the waters of the sea at Israel's exodus from Egypt (cf. *Ex* 15: 8, 10). Again the Spirit regenerates the human creature, as Jesus will say in his night-time conversation with Nicodemus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (*Jn* 3: 5-6).

5. So, in beholding the glory of the Trinity in creation, man must contemplate, sing and rediscover wonder. In contemporary society people become indifferent "not for lack of wonders, but for lack of wonder" (*G. K. Chesterton*). For the believer, to contemplate creation is also to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice, as the "Psalm of the sun" suggests: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (*Ps* 19: 1-5). Nature thus becomes a gospel which speaks to us of God: "from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator" (*Wis* 13: 5). Paul teaches us that "ever since the creation of the world his [God's] invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (*Rom* 1: 20). But this capacity for contemplation and knowledge, this discovery of a transcendent presence in created things must lead us also to rediscover our kinship with the earth, to which we have been linked since our own creation (cf. *Gn* 2: 7). This is precisely the goal which the Old Testament wished for the Hebrew Jubilee, when the land was at rest and man ate what the fields spontaneously gave him (cf. *Lv* 25: 11-12). If nature is not violated and degraded, it once again becomes man's sister. \* \* \* *To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, the Holy Father said: I extend a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, in particular to the group from Saint Denis Parish in Hanover, New Hampshire, and to the Chapman University Choir from Orange, California. I wish to assure the pilgrims from Seton Hall University that I have prayed for the dead and the injured in last week's tragic fire at the University. Upon you all I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. © Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana*