



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

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Canticle in chapter 26 of the Book of Isaiah

"My peace I give to you, my peace I leave you"

1. In the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, over a broad span of time various voices converge, all of them under the name and inspiration of this great witness of the Word of God, who lived in the 8th century B.C.

Within this long scroll of prophecies, which Jesus also opened and read in the synagogue of his village Nazareth (cf. *Lk* 4,17-19), is a series of chapters, from 24 to 27, generally known by scholars as "the great apocalypse of Isaiah". A second and minor apocalypse can be found in chapters 34-35. In pages that are often passionate and packed with symbols a powerful, poetic description is given of the divine judgement of history that exalts the expectation of salvation on the part of the just.

2. Often, as happens in the Apocalypse of John, two opposing cities are contrasted with each other: the rebellious city, incarnated in some of the historical cities of the time, and the holy city where the faithful gather.

The Canticle we have just heard proclaimed, which is taken from the 26th chapter of Isaiah is the joyful celebration of the city of salvation. It stands strong and glorious, for the Lord himself laid its foundations and fortified it, making it a safe and peaceful dwelling-place (cf. v. 1). He now opens wide the gates to welcome the people of the just (cf. v. 2), who seem to repeat the Psalmist's words when, standing before the Temple of Zion, he exclaims: "Open to me the gates of justice, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the just shall enter through it (*Ps* 117 [118],19-20).

3. There is one fundamental prerequisite for those who enter the city of salvation: "firm purpose ... trust in you ... trust" (cf. *Is* 26,3-4). It is faith in God, a solid faith based on Him who is the "everlasting rock" (v. 4).

Confidence, already expressed in the etymological root of the Hebrew word "amen", sums up the profession of faith in the Lord, who - as King David sang - is "my strength, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer; my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (*Ps* 17[18], 2-3; cf. *II Sm* 22,2-3).

The gift that God offers to the faithful is peace (cf. *Is* 26,3), *the messianic gift* par excellence, the synthesis of life in justice, freedom and the joy of communion.

4. This gift is forcefully confirmed in the last verse of the Canticle of Isaiah. "O Lord, you will ordain peace for us, you have wrought for us all our works" (v. 12). This is the verse that attracted the attention of the Fathers of the Church: in that promise of peace they glimpsed the words of Christ that would resound centuries later: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn 14,27).

In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, St Cyril of Alexandria reminds us that in giving us peace, Jesus gives us his Spirit. He does not, therefore, leave us orphans, but through his Spirit remains with us. St Cyril comments: The prophet "prays for the gift of the divine Spirit, through whom we have been readmitted to friendship with God the Father who were previously far from him because of the sin that held sway in us". His commentary then becomes a prayer: "Grant us peace, O Lord. Then we will acknowledge that we have all things, and we will realize that those lack nothing who have received the fullness of Christ. Indeed, it is the fullness of every good that God dwells in us through the Spirit (cf. Col 1,19)" (*Commento al Vangelo di Giovanni*, vol. III, Rome 1994, p. 165).

5. Let us give a last look at Isaiah's text. It presents a reflection on the "way of the just" (v. 7) and a declaration of adherence to the just decisions of God (cf. vv. 8-9). The dominant image is that of the way, a classical biblical image, already used by Hosea, a prophet who lived just before Isaiah: "whoever is wise, let him understand these things ... for the ways of the Lord are right and the just walk in them, but sinners stumble in them" (Hos 14,9-10).

The Canticle of Isaiah contains another theme that is also eloquent, also in its liturgical use in the *Office of Lauds*. Indeed, the dawn is mentioned, that is awaited after a night spent seeking God: "My soul yearns for you in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks you" (v. 9).

At daybreak, when work begins and the hum of daily life can already be heard in the city streets, the faithful must once again be resolved to walk "in the path of your judgements, O Lord" (v. 8), hoping in him and in his Word, our only source of peace.

Now the words of the Psalmist come to his lips, who has professed his faith since dawn: "O God, you are my God, for you I long, my soul thirsts for you ... your merciful love is better than life" (Ps 62[63],2.4). His soul refreshed, he can face the new day.

I cordially welcome the new seminarians of the Pontifical Beda College. May your studies for the priesthood in Rome deepen your love of Christ and your commitment to be faithful and holy ministers of the Gospel. I also greet the Anglican Pastors taking part in a course offered by the Anglican Centre. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, especially those from England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, Taiwan and the United States I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am pleased to welcome the priests from various nations, enrolled at the Pontifical Colleges of St Peter Apostle, St Paul Apostle and St Anselm in Rome for the completion of their studies.

Today's feast of the Guardian Angels invites us to think of these heavenly protectors whom God, in his loving providence, set beside each person.

Dear young people, let the Angels guide you, so that you will faithfully put God's commandments into practice in your life. *Dear sick people*, helped by your Guardian Angels, join your sufferings with those of Christ for the spiritual renewal of all society. Lastly, *dear newly-weds*, have frequent recourse to your Guardian Angels to make your family a place of mutual understanding and growing unity in Christ.