



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday 4 December 2002

Psalm 50[51]

Take not your Holy Spirit from me

Brothers and Sisters,

1. Every week the *Liturgy of Lauds* repeats Psalm 50[51], the famous *Miserere*. We have already reflected on sections of it on other occasions. Now also, we will reflect in a particular way on a section of this grandiose plea for forgiveness: verses 12-16.

First of all, it is important to note that in the original Hebrew the word "spirit" is repeated three times, invoked of God as a gift and received by the human creature who has repented of his sin: "Renew in me a steadfast spirit.... Do not deprive me of your holy spirit.... Sustain in me a generous spirit" (vv. 12.13.14). One could say, taking recourse to a liturgical term, that it is an "epiclesis", that is, a triple invocation of the Spirit who, as in creation hovered over the waters (cf. Gn 1,2), now penetrates the soul of the faithful, infusing it with new life and raising it from the kingdom of sin to the heaven of grace.

2. The Church Fathers, in the "spirit" invoked by the Psalmist, see the effective presence of the Holy Spirit. Thus, St Ambrose is convinced that it is about the Holy Spirit, who is one "who was active in the prophets, was breathed upon the Apostles and was joined with the Father and the Son in the sacrament of Baptism" (*Lo Spirito Santo* I, 4, 55: SAEMO 16, p. 95; *The Holy Spirit* in St Ambrose, *Theological and Dogmatic Works*, CUA Press, reprinted 1977). The same conviction is expressed by other Fathers, such as Didymus the Blind of Alexandria, Egypt, and Basil of Caesarea in their respective treatises on the Holy Spirit (Didymus the Blind, *Lo Spirito Santo*, Rome 1990, p. 59; Basil of Caesarea, *Lo Spirito Santo*, X, 24, Rome 1993).

Again, St Ambrose, observing that the Psalmist speaks of the joy that invades the soul once it has received the generous and powerful Spirit of God, comments: "Joy and delight are fruits of the Spirit and really the sovereign Spirit is the one on whom we are founded. Thus whoever is brought to life by the sovereign Spirit is not subject to slavery, is not enslaved by sin, is not indecisive, does not wander here and there, is not uncertain in his choices, but standing on the rock, he is firm with feet that do not waver" (*Apologia del profeta David a Teodosio Augusto*, 15,72 [Defence of the Prophet David for the Emperor Theodosius]: SAEMO 5, 129).

3. With this triple mention of the "spirit", after describing in the preceding verses the dark prison of guilt, Psalm 50[51] opens onto the bright realm of grace. It is an important turning point, comparable to a new creation. As in the beginning God breathed his spirit into matter and created the human person (cf. Gn 2,7), so now the same divine Spirit recreates (cf. Ps. 50[51],12), renews, transfigures and transforms the repentant sinner, embraces him again (cf. v. 13) making him share in the joy of salvation (cf. v. 14). Now the human being, animated by the divine Spirit, sets out on the path of justice and love, as is said in another Psalm: "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good spirit guide me on a level path!" (cf. Ps 142[143],10).

4. Having experienced this inner rebirth, the person praying becomes a witness; he promises God to "teach the erring your ways" of good (Ps 50[51], 15), so that, like the Prodigal Son, they may be able to return to the house of the Father. In the same way, St Augustine, after experiencing the dark paths of sin, in his *Confessions* felt the need to witness to the freedom and the joy of salvation.

Whoever has experienced God's merciful love, becomes a passionate witness of it, especially in dialogue with those who are still caught in the nets of sin. Let us think of the person of Paul, dazzled by Christ on the road to Damascus, who became an untiring missionary of divine grace.

5. For one last time, the person praying looks at his dark past and cries out to God: "Free me from blood guilt, O God, my saving God (cf. NAB version of v. 16). The "blood", to which he refers is variously interpreted in Scripture. Here on the lips of King David, it refers to the killing of Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, the woman who was the object of the king's passion. In a more general sense, the invocation indicates the desire for purification from evil, violence and hatred always present in the human heart with dark and malicious force. Now the lips of the faithful person, purified from sin, sing praise to the Lord.

In fact, the passage of Psalm 50[51] which we have just commented on ends with the promise to proclaim the "justice" of God. The term "justice" in this context, as so often in biblical language, does not actually indicate God's punitive action of evil by God, but rather indicates the sinner's rehabilitation, since God reveals his justice by making sinners just (cf. Rom 3,26). God derives no pleasure from the death of the wicked, but only that he give up his behaviour and live (cf. Ez 18,23).

To the English-speaking

I welcome the members of the Japanese Buddhist group Rissho Kosei Kai. My greeting also goes to the student groups from Denmark and the United States. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience I cordially invoke God's blessings of joy and peace.

To the Polish-speaking

I greet the pilgrims from Poland and from other countries. In particular I greet Cardinal Franciszek, the bishops and organizers of my pilgrimage to Poland last August. Once again I thank them all for their involvement in that exceptional event, rich in spiritual content, which is engraved on my heart.

Then together we meditated the mystery of Divine Mercy. In today's catechesis too, we have reflected on this mystery, meditating on the words of the Psalm "Miserere". We know it well in Franciszek Karpinski's beautiful translation.

To young people, the sick and newly weds

I greet the *young people* present here. I urge you, dear young people, frequently to nourish yourselves with the bread of life that Christ offers us every day in the celebration of the Eucharist. With affection I address you, dear *sick people*, and I invite you to turn your gaze to the One who in this season of Advent, we await as Saviour, conscious that if we offer our sufferings to him, we will also share in his glory.

Finally, I recommend to you, dear *newly weds*, to revive in your relationship as couple the atmosphere of the family of Nazareth, through the frequent recitation of the Rosary.

Appeal for peace and social harmony in Venezuela

In the face of the news from Venezuela, I ask the God of all consolation, so that, in the beloved country, at this difficult time in its history, peace and social harmony may prevail, involving everyone in a dialogue that will be good for the country, so that it may attain genuine justice, founded on truth and solidarity.