



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 1 December 2004

First part of Psalm 72[71]

Justice shall flourish

1. The Liturgy of Vespers, on whose psalms and canticles we are systematically commenting, presents in two parts one of the Psalms dearest to Jewish and Christian tradition: Psalm 72[71], a royal hymn on which the Fathers of the Church meditated, reinterpreting it in a Messianic key.

We have just heard the first great movement of this solemn prayer (cf. vv. 1-11). It opens with an intense, choral entreaty to God to grant the sovereign the gift that is fundamental to good government: justice. It is expressed above all in dealing with the poor, who instead are usually oppressed by the authority.

You will note the special insistence with which the Psalm emphasizes the moral commitment to ruling the people in accordance with justice and law: "O God, give your judgment to the king, to a king's son your justice, that he may judge your people in justice and your poor in right judgment" (vv. 1-2, 4).

Just as the Lord rules the world with justice (cf. Ps 36[35]: 7), so the king, who in the ancient biblical conception is his visible representative on earth, must conform to the action of his God.

2. If the rights of the poor are violated, this is not only the perpetration of a politically incorrect and morally evil act. In the perspective of the Bible this is also an act against God, a religious crime, for the Lord is the custodian and defender of the poor and the oppressed, of widows and of orphans (cf. Ps 68[67]: 6), that is, of those who have no human protectors.

It is easy to perceive how, after the collapse of the monarchy of Judah (sixth century B.C.), tradition replaced the frequently disappointing figure of the Davidic king with the glorious, shining features of the Messiah, in keeping with the prophetic hope which Isaiah expressed: "with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide aright for the land's afflicted" (Is 11: 4); or, according to Jeremiah's announcement: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land" (Jer 23: 5).

3. After this lively and passionate entreaty for the gift of justice, the Psalm's horizon broadens to take in the royal, Messianic kingdom as it evolves through the two coordinates of time and space. Moreover, its endurance in history is exalted (cf. Ps 72[71]: 5, 7). The vivid images have a cosmic stamp: indeed, the passage of the days is measured by the sun and the moon, and the seasons by rain and abundance.

Hence, it is a fruitful and serene kingdom that always supports those values of capital importance: justice and peace (cf. v. 7). These are the signs of the Messiah's entry into our history. The comments of the Fathers of the Church who see in this King-Messiah the face of Christ, the eternal and universal king, are illuminating.

4. Thus, St Cyril of Alexandria observes in his *Explanatio in Psalmos* that the judgment God gives to the king is the one mentioned by St Paul: "according to his purpose... to unite all things in [Christ]" (Eph 1: 10). Indeed, "in his days justice will flourish and peace abound", as if to say, "in the days of Christ, through faith, justice will spring up for us and, as we turn to God, peace will abound". Moreover, it is precisely we who are the "wretched" and the "children of the poor" whom this king rescues and saves: and if first of all he "calls the holy Apostles 'wretched' because they were poor in spirit, he has consequently saved us as 'sons and daughters of the poor', justifying us and making us holy in the faith through the Holy Spirit" (cf. PG LXIX, 1180).

5. On the one hand, the Psalmist also outlines the space into which fits the royal justice and peace of the Messiah-King (cf. Ps 72[71]: 8-11). A universal dimension comes into play here, which extends from the Red Sea or from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, from the Euphrates, the great "River" of the East, to the very ends of the earth (cf. v. 8), also called to mind by mentioning Tarshish and the islands, the most remote western territories according to ancient biblical geography (cf. v. 8). This gaze sweeps across the whole map of the world as it was then known, which included Arabs and nomads, the kings of remote States and even enemies, in a universal embrace of which the Psalms (cf. Ps 47[46]: 10; 87[86]: 1-7) and prophets (cf. Is 2: 1-5; 60: 1-22; Mal 1: 11) frequently sing.

The ideal seal to set on this vision can thus be expressed precisely by the words of the Prophet Zechariah, which the Gospel was to apply to Christ: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; he is just.... I will banish the chariot

from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be broken, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth" (Zec 9: 9-10; cf. Mt 21: 5).

To English-speaking pilgrims

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience. I greet in particular the groups from Australia, the Philippines and the United States of America. I cordially invoke upon you in this Advent Season joy, hope and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. Have a happy stay in Rome!

To special groups

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick people* and the *newly-weds*.

I invite you all, dear friends, to look at Jesus, the Son of God, whom we wait for in this season of Advent as our Saviour. May he sustain you at every moment of your lives!
