



ADVENT: A CRY OF HOPE OF THE CHURCH AND OF THE JUST

VATICAN CITY, 29 NOV 2008 (VIS) - In the Vatican Basilica at 5 p.m. today, Benedict XVI presided at first Vespers for the First Sunday of Advent.

"Advent is, par excellence, the spiritual season of hope", said the Pope in his homily. "During that time the entire Church is called to become hope, for herself and for the world. ... All the people of God resume their journey, attracted by this mystery: that our God is the 'God Who comes' and calls us to come out and meet Him, ... first and foremost in that universal form of hope and expectation which is prayer".

The Pope indicated the Psalms as the most exalted form of prayer, and quoted Psalm 141: "I call upon You, O Lord; come quickly to me". This, he said, "is the cry of a person who senses great danger. But it is also the cry of the Church among the many perils that surround her and threaten her sanctity, that irreprehensible integrity of which the Apostle Paul speaks and which must be conserved for the coming of the Lord.

"In this invocation resounds the cry of all the just, of all those who wish to resist evil and the enticements of iniquitous wellbeing, of pleasures offensive to human dignity and to the condition of the poor", the Holy Father added. "At the beginning of Advent, the liturgy of the Church once again makes this cry her own and raises it to God 'as incense' ... which is a symbol of prayer, of the effusions of people's hearts towards God".

"In the cry of the mystical Body we recognise the voice of the Head, the Son of God Who has taken our trials and temptations upon Himself to give us the grace of His victory". In praying the Psalms, "the Church relives the grace of this compassion, of this 'coming' of the Son of God into human anguish until touching its very depths. The cry of hope of Advent expresses, then, ... all the gravity of our condition, our extreme need for salvation. Which is to say that we await the Lord not as some beautiful decoration to a world already saved, but as the only way of liberation from mortal danger".

Referring again to Psalms 141 and 142, which form part of today's liturgy, Benedict XVI pointed out that "they guard us from any temptation to evade and flee reality, they protect us from a false hope which could perhaps seek to enter Advent and so make us proceed towards Christmas forgetting the drama of our individual and community existence".

The Holy Father concluded by saying that "a reliable hope, one that does not deceive, cannot but be a 'Paschal' hope, as we are reminded ... by the canticle of the Letter to the Philippians with which we praise the Christ incarnate, crucified and risen, universal Lord".