



## **VATICAN - "AVE MARIA" by Mgr Luciano Alimandi - Only God frees us from fear**

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "Fear is a natural dimension of life. From childhood we experience forms of fear which prove to be imaginary and later disappear; others emerge which have precise roots in reality: these must be faced and overcome with human commitment and trust in God. But there is also a deeper form of fear, of an existential form, which at times borders on anguish: this fear is born from a sense of emptiness, connected with a certain type of culture permeated by diffused nihilism, both theoretic and practical. With regard to the ample and diversified panorama of human fears, the Word of God is clear: he who 'fears God' need never fear. Fear of the Lord which the Scriptures call 'the root of true wisdom, coincides with faith in Him, with holy respect for His authority over life and the world. Not to 'fear God' is the same as putting ourselves in His place, thinking we are the master of good and evil, life and death. Whereas instead those who fear God experience the same security as a child in its mother's arms (cfr Ps 130,2): he who fears the Lord is calm even in the midst of the tempest, because God, as Jesus revealed Him to us, is the loving Father of mercy and goodness. Those who love God need never fear ..." (Benedict XVI, Angelus del 22 June 2008).

With these words the Holy Father commented last Sunday's Gospel which opened with Jesus' words: "Do not be afraid"! A call which the Church has repeated through time and especially at the turn of the Millennium through the voice of John Paul II who made it a principal theme of his pontificate: "Do not be afraid, open wide your doors to Christ!" (John Paul II, homily 22 October 1978).

Benedict XVI, recalling these words during the homily of the Mass for the inauguration of the Pontificate, on 25 April 2005, said: "And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen." (Benedict XVI, 24 April 2005).

Divine Providence continually reminds us through the Supreme Shepherds, to dispel all fear from our life by trusting totally in God because our times are marked by much fear "of an existential form" which grips man in the depth of his being. Ever more frequently in recent decades the Church has denounced a "culture of death", life without sense, which can produce only fear and anguish. The dynamic of fear is clear: it normally enters at the emotional, superficial level of the senses, the level of the irrational, to gradually descend into the "heart" of the person, and the mind to deform thought and vision of life, and so paralyse the living power God places in every heart. This stops man from loving others and fills him with fear: fear of neighbour, colleagues at work, office manager, confreres,... fear of everyone and everything: past, present and future. It can go as deep as to make a person fear his own shadow.

Fear is a despot: not content with a part it takes over the whole person. This is the Kingdom of Evil which tirelessly fights the Kingdom of Goodness, that is, the Kingdom of God. It is marked by "existential fear", which becomes a regime of life. We might say that hell is the place where fear reigns; power at the extreme level when a person cannot love others he can only hate everyone. So we understand the absolute necessity for we who are redeemed to welcome with open arms the Presence of Jesus, his sanctifying grace which alone can free us from evil. "deliver us from evil", as we pray at the end of the Our Father. The Church strives to announce to the entire world the Word of God, the antidote to all fear. The Word of God has the power to do what it says. No other word can do this, only the Word of God. This is why we can speak of the healing or therapeutic power of the Word of God, as we read in the Psalms.

How comforting it is to pray the psalms with total trust! We can say there is a psalm for every 'existential' fear. Jesus loved the psalms and prayed them. Even his last words on the Cross, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23, 46), are inspired by psalm 30: "the psalm of the afflicted man who expects to be saved and thanks

God who is about to save him: 'I entrust myself into your hands: Lord, faithful God (Ps 31,6). Jesus, lucid in his agony, remembers and stammers even a few verses of the psalm recited so often during his life' (John Paul II, general audience 7 December 1988).

If we learn to recite the Psalms we will see the serenity they bring to every day life. Faced with the inevitable fears which life brings, we will draw strength and comfort from the spiritual hymns and canticles contained in the Book of Psalms. For priests and lay persons the prayer of the Psalms is an antidote against a thousand fears, it teaches us to put our life in the hands of God and always acknowledge, even in darkness, the light of His Love for each and every one of us: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ..Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever (psalm 23). (Agenzia Fides 25/6/2008)