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Meditative Moment by Abp Henryk J. Muszyński
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A meditation on Psalm XXX

I have willfully accepted the suggestion of Debbie Weismann the President of ICCJ, who has proposed a reflection on the Psalm XXX as a starting point for our Christian-Jewish dialogue. This Psalm seems to be very appropriate for the purposes of our meeting.

Psalm XXX is an individual thanksgiving prayer for recovery from a sickness and rescue from the death. In the same time this Psalm has a clear cultic association with the Hanukkah Feast, the Dedication of the Temple in 164 BC during the Maccabean times. According to the Rabbinical Tradition “this Psalm is reserved for occasion of innovation; be it the new first-fruit, or newly dedicated Temple. It is both a prayer for success...and a confident declaration of eternal thanksgiving,

HASHEM, my God, I will offer You thanks forever (v.13)¹.

Thanks the relation to the Hanukkah Feast this individual Psalm receives a clear social dimension as well. That is why it seems to be proper for actual historical situation, which we are confronting with in Poland. Coming out of the shadows of World War II and the Communist Regime, the Church or Churches and the Jewish Communities in Poland are experiencing a survival from profoundness of the Sheol and death to a new life.

That is our common motive: *to praise and exalt our Lord,
for He has lifted us out of the depth
and did not let our enemies gloat over us (v.1).*

Here in Poland, which for millions of victims became the land of Shoah, in close vicinity of Auschwitz - a visible symbol of extermination of European Jews, and in the same time a place of

¹ N. SCHERMAN – M. ZLOTOWITZ (ed.), *Tehillim. A new Translation with Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, (Brooklin New York 1995) 357.

martyrdom of many Poles and members of other nations, the following words of the Psalm sounds more tragically than on any other place on the world:

To you, O LORD I called; to the LORD I cried for mercy (v.8)

Hear, O LORD and be merciful to me: O my LORD, help me (v.10).

In the terrible days of extermination and death, when many victims cried out, begged to be saved from death, beseeched the LORD for help, the Lord did not hear the cry of the afflicted and kept silent.

But the supplication for help is not the last word of the afflicted Psalmist, he is aware that God has no admiration in death. Like the Prophets in the past, the Psalmist is arguing with God and asks:

What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down to the pit?

Will the dust praise You? Will it proclaim Your faithfulness? (v. 9)

Likewise King Hezekiah, who had been seriously ill, said to God:

For it is not the nether world that gives You thanks,

nor death that praises You ...

The living, the living /man / give You thanks (Is 38:18-19).

As living persons and communities we have to give justice to the Psalmist. His approach constantly oscillates between the terrible memory of the horrific experiences and joy of liberation and hope. The danger that he had left behind him is death and grave, the memory of the terrible past sufferings is still vivid, the tears in his eyes have been only just been wiped away, but he never gave up a hope of better reality.

The source of this attitude is the confidence in God, the Lord of heaven and earth. The Psalmist turns to the Lord repeatedly, at least eight times, exalting His glory and inviting other faithful to join him in praising and giving thanks to the Lord. So if we want to follow the example of the Psalmist, we cannot give up our efforts in building a new and better world among - and around us.

Pope John Paul II in his comment to the Psalm XXX, which is the object of our reflection, says: "The Psalm shows us we must never let ourselves be ensnared by the dark confusion of despair when it seems that everything is already lost. Nor, of course, is here any need to fall into illusion that we can save ourselves with our own resources. Indeed the Psalmist is tempted by pride and self-sufficiency, he is attesting:

I said to myself in my good fortune:

Nothing will ever disturb me (v. 7).

We need also to have the courage to draw the right consequences from the negative experiences of the past. Cardinal J. Ratzinger reminded:

"Perhaps it is precisely, because of the immense tragedy of Shoah, that a new vision of the relationship between the Church and Israel, between Christians and Jews has been born. A sincere willingness to overcome every kind of anti Judaism, and to initiate a constructive dialogue based on knowledge of each other and on reconciliation"².

The confidence and hope should be stronger than any depth of Sheol experienced in the past. The Psalmist gives us a motif for such an approach, saying:

For His (God`s) anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime

² J. RATZINGER, *The Heritage of Abraham: The Gift of Christmas*, L'Osservatore Romano, 29.12.2000.

weeping may remain for night, but rejoicing comes in the morning (v.5).

“Yet as sure as the light of the morning returns after darkness of the night, so sure will joy and conform return in a short time, to the people of God; for the covenant of grace is as firm as the covenant of the day”³ - writes Matthew Henry.

It happens of course that God hides His face for a moment; but if *God hides His face* from His own children and suspend for a while His favors, also *the prayer becomes dismayed (v.7)*, but because His grace and mercy is everlasting,

very soon He turned the wailing into dancing

and instead of sackcloth He closed him with joy (v.11).

“Now the dawn of a new day has broken; death has given way to prospects of a life that continue” - explains John Paul II (Commentary to Ps 30). So we Christians recognize in the benevolent and merciful hidden face of God, the face of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the Christian Tradition has interpreted this Psalm as an Easter hymn. A great monastic writer of the IV century John Cassian writes: *Christ gives thanks to the Father for His glorious Resurrection (ibid).*

Following the example of the Psalmist and Pope John Paul II, in different times, social, religious and political conditions, Jews and Christians, Christians and Jews, each in the sense of his own religious Tradition, as a sign of our common faith in the *Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who for us Christian is the God of Jesus Christ*, we repeat together:

May my heart sing to you and not be silent.

O LORD my God, I will praise and give You thanks for ever (v.12).

Amen.

³ Commentary on Ps 30, King James Version of the Bible.