

## The Portrait of the Ideal Political Ruler

*A Meditation on Psalm 100 by Pope John Paul II*



Psalm 100 *A psalm of David.*

*I sing of love and justice; to you, LORD, I sing praise.*

*I follow the way of integrity; when will you come to me?  
I act with integrity of heart within my royal court.*

*I do not allow into my presence anyone who speaks perversely.  
Whoever acts shamefully I hate; no such person can be my  
friend.*

*I shun the devious of heart; the wicked I do not tolerate.*

*Whoever slanders another in secret I reduce to silence.  
Haughty eyes and arrogant hearts I cannot endure.*

*I look to the faithful of the land; they alone can be my  
companions.*

*Those who follow the way of integrity, they alone can enter my  
service.*

*No one who practices deceit can hold a post in my court.  
No one who speaks falsely can be among my advisors.*

*Each morning I clear the wicked from the land,  
and rid the LORD'S city of all evildoers.*

VATICAN CITY, APRIL 30, 2003 ([Zenit.org](http://Zenit.org)) .- Here is a translation of John Paul II's address at today's general audience, which he dedicated to a meditation on Psalm 100(101).

1. Following the two catecheses dedicated to the meaning of the paschal celebrations, we return to our reflection on the Liturgy of Lauds. It proposes Psalm 100(101), which we have just read, for Tuesday of the Fourth Week.

It is a meditation that paints the portrait of the ideal political ruler, who should model his life on the divine governance of the world: right action stemming from perfect integrity and by an energetic commitment against injustice. This text is now proposed as a program of life for the faithful one who begins his day of work and relations with his neighbor. It is a program of "loyalty and justice" (see verse

1), which comprises two important moral lines.

2. The first is called the "way of integrity" and is oriented to exalting the personal choices of life, made "with integrity of heart," that is, with perfect rectitude of conscience (see verse 2).

On one hand, there is a positive reference to the great moral virtues that render the "house" luminous, namely, the family of the righteous one (see verse 2): the wisdom that helps to understand and judge well; innocence which is purity of heart and of life; and, finally, the integrity of conscience that does not tolerate compromise with evil.

On the other hand, the Psalmist introduces a negative commitment. This is the struggle against every form of wickedness and injustice, so as to keep far from one's home and from one's choices every perversion of the moral order (see verses 3-4).

As St. Basil, great Father of the Eastern Church, writes in his work "Baptism," "not even the pleasure of an instant that contaminates thought should disturb him who has grieved with Christ in a death like his" (*Opere Ascetiche* [Ascetic Works], Turin, 1980, p. 548).

3. The second line is developed in the last part of the Psalm (see verses 5-8) and specifies the importance of the typically public and social talents. Also in this case the essential points are listed of a life that intends to reject evil with rigor and firmness.

First of all, the struggle against slander and secret denunciation, a fundamental commitment in a society of oral tradition, which attributed particular relevance to the function of the word in interpersonal relations. The king, who also exercised the function of judge, announces that in this struggle he will employ the most rigorous severity: He will make the slanderer perish (see verse 5). Then every arrogance and haughtiness is rejected; the company and counsel is refused of the one who always proceeds with deceit and lies. Finally, the king states the manner in which he wishes to choose his "companions" (see verse 6), that is, his ministers. He will take care to choose them from among "the faithful of the land." He wishes to surround himself with people of integrity and reject contact with anyone "who practices deceit" (see verse 7).

4. The last verse of the Psalm is particularly energetic. It might create embarrassment for the Christian reader, because it announces an extermination: "Each morning I clear the wicked from the land, and rid the Lord's city of all evildoers" (verse 8). However, it is important to remember one thing: The one who speaks so is not just any individual, but the king, the highest person responsible for justice in the land. With this phrase he expresses in an exaggerated way his implacable commitment to struggle against criminality, an onerous commitment,

shared by all those who have responsibility in public affairs.

Evidently this task of executioner is not the duty of every citizen! Therefore, if individual faithful wish to apply to themselves the phrase of the Psalm, they must do so in an analogical sense, namely, deciding to extirpate every morning from their heart and their conduct the evil plant of corruption and violence, of perversion and wickedness, as well as every form of egoism and injustice.

5. We conclude our meditation by returning to the verse at the beginning of the Psalm: "I sing of loyalty and justice" (verse 1). In his "Comments on the Psalms," Eusebius of Caesarea, an early Christian writer, underlines the primacy of love over the necessary justice: "I will sing of your mercy and justice, showing the way that you act: not to judge first and then have mercy, but first to have mercy and then judge, and emit sentences with clemency and mercy.

"For this reason I myself, exercising mercy and judgment toward my neighbor, dare to draw near to sing and psalmodize to you. Aware, therefore, that one must act like this, I keep my life immaculate and innocent, convinced that in this way you will be pleased with my psalmodizing through good works" (PG 23, 1241).

[At the end of the audience, the Holy Father gave the following summary in English:]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Psalm 100 presents the figure of an ideal political ruler who models his actions on God's just governance of the world. The ruler's personal life is marked by moral integrity, while his public activity reflects a resolute commitment to combating every form of injustice in society. As the Church sings this Psalm in her Morning Prayer, she applies it to individual believers, who are called to govern their lives in justice and mercy, uprooting evil from their hearts and working for the growth of a society which embodies God's own justice, mercy and goodness.

. Upon all of you I invoke God's abundant blessings of joy and peace.