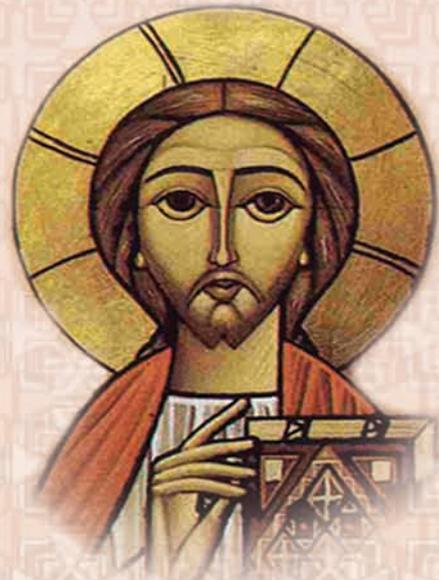


A Patristic Commentary



THE BOOK OF Psalms

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A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY
INTRODUCTION

TO THE BOOK OF PSALMS

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PSALMS

The word "Psalm," simply transliterates a Greek word "psalmoi," which in turn translates the Hebrew "mizmor." The word in the singular meant primarily the twanging with the fingers, playing on a stringed instrument, then it was used to mean the sound of the harp and finally a song sung to the harp¹.

The Hebrew name of this book is "The Book of Praises (Hymns)" (Sepher Tehillim). Whether the mood is elation or sorrow, bewail, ferment or confidence, these songs are intended as anthems to the glory of God. They usher us into the sanctuary where the Lord is enthroned on the praises of His people (Ps. 22: 3).

While the Book of Job provides an answer for the following two questions: Why is there suffering in our lives? and How do we handle pain and suffering? the Book of Psalms answers two questions: How can we worship God in a wicked world? and How do we stay pure while being persecuted? In Job, man is taught to know himself, while in the Psalms he is taught to know the Lord^{1,2} and to be in close contact with Him.

KEY WORDS

The key words to the Psalter are: "trust," "*praise*," "*joy*" and "*mercy*." These words occur hundreds of times throughout the book.

The Psalms teach us how to rejoice by trusting in God, praising Him with words inspired by His Holy Spirit.

THE PSALTER AND THE JOYFUL CHURCH

To understand the role of the book of Psalms in the life of the Church we quote the words of *Mircea Eliade*, [It may be said with truth that the Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of God³]. They discovered that God is the source not only of man's existence but also of His nation's existence. In Egypt, He created a people out of nothing, delivered them from slavery and entered into a covenant relationship with them. Their history had its existence only through a partnership with Him. He accompanied them in the wilderness, entered with them into the promised land and raised up the first pious king as His own anointed one. The people did not keep silent, but they raised hymns of praise, boldly asked questions, and complained when in the depths of distress, for they were chosen to converse with God. The finest examples of such inter action with Him are found in the Psalter⁴.

The Christian Church is a hymn-singing community, born in song. The Christian Gospel brings with it on the scene of history an outburst of hymns and praises to God⁵. The preaching of the Good News (the Gospel) in the apostolic age was not a theological theorem, presented in a cold, detached and impersonal way, but it was received by

¹ J.H. Raven: *Old Testament Introduction*, 1910, p. 256.

² Robert T. Boyd: *Boyd's Bible Handbook*, 1983, 232.

³ *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*. N.Y., 1954, p. 104.

⁴ B. W. Anderson: *Understanding the Old Testament*, 1986, p. 541.

⁵ Ralph P. Martin: *Worship in the Early Church*, 1976, ch. 4.

heart-moving and rapturously joyous experiences (Acts 2: 1-13, 47; 3: 8; 5: 41, 42; 8: 39; 13: 52). The kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14: 17)¹.

In Christ we discover the Church as the icon of heaven and the joyful kingdom of God. God desires His own people to practice joyful living in Him, as a sign of attaining the inner risen life with Christ and as a pledge of participating in heaven itself. The psalms reflect the heavenly side of our existence. According to **St. Gregory of Nyssa** singing psalms [makes us equal to angels in honor], and **St. John Chrysostom** says, [it unites us with them]. **St. Basil the Great** writes, [What can be more joyous to man than to imitate the angels in singing hymns, starting a day by praying, praising, and glorifying the Creator by hymns and songs²]. This joyful life is expressed by the Rabbinical tradition which states that above the couch of David there hung a harp³, so that he ended his day as he had started it by singing in God's praise.

William S. Plumer says, [(The psalms) have been read, repeated, chanted, sung, studied, wept over, rejoiced in, expounded, loved and praised by God's people for thousands of years.] Through the centuries Christians and Jews alike, in their agonies and in their victories, have found a source of spiritual strength and language of praise in the words of the Psalms. Many of the psalms were intended to be sung in the congregational worship in the Temple (Ps. 24; 118; 134; 145). In the early church the Old Testament psalms were recited by people with Christian insight who perceived the forthcoming of Christ and prophesied many details. The first prayers of the Church in the book of Acts were based upon the Psalms (Acts 4: 24-30).

The Holy Bible records many hymns, canticles or psalms which were sung by the people of God or by individuals, such as the Hymn of Lamech (Gen. 4: 23-24); the Hymn of Miriam or Moses the Prophet (Exod. 15); the Hymn of the Well (Num. 21: 17-18); the Hymn of Deborah (Judges 5); the Hymn of Hannah (1 Sam. 2); the Hymn of Jonah (Jonah 2); the Hymn of Hezekiah (Isa. 38: 10-20); the Hymns of Isaiah (25: 1-12; 26: 1-20), the Hymn of the three young men (Dan.), the "Magnificent" of St. Mary the Virgin (Luke 1: 55), the "Benedictus" of Zacharias (Luke 1: 67-79), the "Glorian Excelsis" of the angels (Luke 2: 13, 14), the "Nune Dimittis" of Simeon (Luke 2: 28-32), the hymns of St. Paul (Eph. 5: 14; 1 Tim. 3: 16; Phil. 2: 6-11; Col. 1: 15-20; Heb.1: 3), the hymns of St Peter (1 Pet. 1: 18-21; 2: 21-25; 3: 18- 21), the hymn of the four living creatures (Rev. 4: 8), the hymn of the forty-four presbyters (Rev. 4: 11), the New Song (Rev. 5: 9, 10) etc... Besides these hymns and others mentioned in the Bible, there are two books devoted to the Hymns: the Psalms and the Song of Songs.

❖ Singing psalms is a medicine for healing the soul⁴.

St. Athanasius

❖ Any one possessed of his five senses should blush with shame if he did not begin the day with a psalm, since even the tiniest of birds open and close the day with sweet songs of holy devotion⁵.

¹ Ibid.

² Ep. 3 to Gregory

³ R. E. Prothero: The Psalms in Human Life, 1904, p. 1.

⁴ St. Biso (the disciple of St. She-noute): An Ascetic Treatise. (British Museum Or. 6007).

⁵ R. E. Prothero, p. 14.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ Of other scriptures, most men know nothing. But the Psalms are repeated in private houses, in streets, and market- places, by those who have learned them by heart and feel the soothing power of their divine melodies¹.

Fr. Theodore of Moposuestia

- ❖ The psalms are our poetry, our love- songs, our pastorals, our implements of husbandry.

Paula and Eustochium to Marcella

- ❖ One of the saints says, "Let psalmody be continuous, for when God is named, He causes demons to flee²."

Fr. Martyrius

THE WRITERS

Most of the psalms were inspired by the Holy Spirit to David, the shepherd, soldier, king and prophet. He played upon the harp (1 Sam. 16: 18-23; 2 Sam. 6: 5) and is called "the sweet singer of Israel" (2 Sam. 23: 1). He had unusual gifts as a poet (2 Sam. 1: 19-27; 3: 33etc; 22: 1-51; 23: 1-7), and was a lover of the liturgy (2 Sam. 6: 5, 15etc). He arranged the service of song in the sanctuary (1 Chron. 6: 31; 16: 7; 25: 1; Ezra 3: 10; Neh. 12: 24, 36, 45-46; Amos 6: 5).

Twenty four psalms are ascribed to Asaph, perhaps a title of various chief musicians or choir director in the time of David and Solomon (1 Chron. 16: 4,5; 2 Chron. 5: 12), and to the sons of Korah (a family of official doorkeepers and musicians or Korah's students), as well as to Heman and Ethan. These psalms are properly classed together since their authors were associated with the service of song which David established.

Moses, may have written Ps. 90,100. One or two psalms may have been written by Solomon.

The remaining psalms are anonymous and are called the "orphan Psalms." It is thought that David might have written some of them.

WHY THE PSALTER IS ATTRIBUTED TO DAVID?

Despite the fact that only about 73 (+ Ps. 151 LXX) out of the 150 psalms are attributed explicitly to David, the general trend was to consider that David was the author of the entire Psalter, why?

1. B. Anderson says, [This view undoubtedly reflects the community's conviction, highlighted in I-II Chronicles, that David is the "messiah" (anointed one) - the ideal king with whom the people identified as they came before God in worship, and the prototype of the coming King who would fulfill the hopes of Israel (the Church)³.]

2. During the time of David, Jerusalem became the worshiping center of the new nation, and Solomon contributed further to the centrality of Zion by building a great

¹ Ibid, p. 14.

² Book of Perfection, 59; See St. Nilus, Ep. 1: 239 (PG 79: 169D); and E.Budge, The Wit and Wisdom of the Christian Fathers of Egypt, London 1934, p. 31 (nos. 106, 107).

³ P. 545-546.

temple. So strongly did the people feel the pull to go to Jerusalem to worship the Lord, that they did so not only by offering sacrifices but also by singing psalms to Him as spiritual burnt-offerings. When the exiles returned from Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem, their first thought was to rebuild the temple, to realize their existence as a worshipping community.

Many scholars see that the Psalter received its final shape at the hands of the staff responsible for the second temple, but most of the psalms reflect the official, pre-exilic worship¹.

L. Sabourin states, [If the psalms were originally connected with sacrificial worship, then psalmody is as old as sacrificial worship itself².]

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PSALMS

1. This book was originally the hymn book of God's people. Some psalms were composed for liturgical use in the temple, others for private lives, and at the same time they were used for communal worship. Brett S. Chinese says, [Jewish religious life, both corporate and private, has been shaped from the beginning by the biblical psalms. In the prayer book, the midrashim, and the rituals of the synagogue the all-encompassing presence of the Hebrew Psalter is visible³.]

Some scholars believe that the Psalter was not intended for use in the temple worship, saying that the deep spirituality of this book refutes this idea, as they believe that spirituality is connected only with individualism in worship. We have already dealt with this topic in our book, "Christ in our Eucharist." We said that in the early church communal worship was not separated from personal worship. The believer, wherever he is, in the church or in his private room, practices one kind of worship. He has personal contact with God even in communal worship, and he prays as a member of the holy Church even in his private room. This attitude is biblical, and people have always the same experience. B. W. Anderson says, [One of the great difficulties that stands in the way of understanding the Psalter is modern individualism which assumes that worship is a private affair between an individual and God, and that God is accessible apart from the established means of public worship. Starting from this premise, the first step would be to divide the psalms into those that reflect public worship and those that reflect personal piety. But this contrast between the individual and the communal is completely alien to Israel's covenant faith, according to which the individual is related to God as a member of a community... According to Israel's faith, Yahweh is present - enthroned on the praises of the people - when the congregation worships together in the sanctuary on the occasion of holy days or festivals. The individual praises God with the worshipping community: "O magnify Yahweh with me, and let us exalt His name together" (Psalm 34: 3).], [When the pronouns "I" and "my" are used, as in the well-known Shepherd's psalm (Ps. 23), we must think of the whole community joining to express its faith⁴].

Because the psalms express the experience of God's people in all ages, the Book of Psalms is considered the prayer and praise manual of the Christian Church even today.

¹ Anderson, p. 546.

² Leopold Sabourin: *The Psalms, their origin and meaning*, 1969, v. 1, p. 18

³ B. Childs: *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 1986, p. 508.

⁴ P. 544, 543.

Bishop Weiser says, [From the very beginning of Christianity (1 Cor 14: 15, 26; Eph. 5: 19) right up to the present day public worship has continually created and cultivated a particularly intimate relationship between the worshiping congregation and the psalms. But this does not exhaust the significance of the Psalter for Christian use. Apart from its use in public worship it also serves as a means of individual edification, as the foundation of family worship, as a book of comfort, as a book of prayers, and as a guide to God in times of joy and affliction¹].

2. The Book of Psalms is the book for all who are in need: the sick and the suffering, the poor and the needy, the prisoner and the exiled, the person in danger and the persecuted.

The psalms express the life of prayer as a balance between thanksgiving to God and supplication for God's help. They all voice the inner feelings of the human heart in every age. Every psalm is a direct expression of the soul's consciousness of God, and a mirror in which each man sees the emotions of his soul, and considers it his personal story, mentioning his own perplexing questions and God's answers to them.

Dermot Connolly says, [It is noteworthy that prayer is rooted in the life of God's people and their experience: the troubles and joys of life; their history and liturgy; danger and rescue; sickness, infancy and old age; exile and pilgrimage, loneliness and friendship. Note the bodily references: hands, feet, throat, skin, head, eyes - all subject to abuse and suffering, all used in gestures of prayer².]

3. Great prophetic themes which run throughout this book are quoted in the New Testament. Our Lord Himself says, "all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24: 44).

Messianic psalms give a complete and perfect illustration of David's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. They prophesy Christ's first advent, and embrace His incarnation, suffering, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, setting on the right hand of the Father; His last advent; and His prophetic and priestly offices.

Most of the psalms find their complete expression and meaning in Christ's life and on His lips.

4. Such instruments as cymbals, trumpets, flutes, harps, drums, etc... seem to have been used in the Old Testament. However the Alexandrian Church considers man's throat as the sweetest musical instrument. She uses the cymbals just to accompany the choir voices and the congregation for some moments.

God wants the musical instruments of the heart and mind, on which His Spirit plays. Fr. Martyrius the Syrian says, [You should understand this from the case of the harp or lyre or cymbals when they produce music (1 Cor. 13: 1): does the sweetness of the melody and song come from the harp or the lyre, or does it belong to the person plucking the instrument and singing? You who are endowed with reason, should realize that the Spirit of God is playing on your tongue, and singing His melodies in your mouth³].

5. Many scholars state that the psalms were often sung by the professional choir and a very elaborate orchestra, while the people just sang the Amen and made occasional responses. In the early Coptic Church, however (even today in some monasteries) all the

¹ Artur Weiser: The Psalms, 1962, p. 19.

² Book of Praises, p. 19.

³ Book of Perfection, 79.

congregation were divided into two choirs: northern and southern, to participate in singing the strophes of the psalms and hymns respectively.

6. Many obscure words mentioned in the Psalms, like "selah" which appears seventy- three times , indicate either directions to the musicians or to the time to which the psalm was to be sung. Some scholars state that "selah" is probably derived from the Hebrew root "selah" meaning to lift up or to raise, so that the music or the voice rises at the indicated points, or perhaps the congregation rises or lifts up its hands, head or eyes as an act of worship.

7. The psalms as poetry are full of poetic devices, such as:

a. Simile: comparison of unlike things, using the words "as" or "like" (1: 3, 4; 11: 1; 19: 5).

b. Metaphor: use of a word denoting one kind of object or idea in place of another to suggest a likeness between them, without using the words "as" or "like" (27: 1; 18: 2).

c. Hyperbole: extravagant exaggeration for effect(6: 6).

d. Personification: applying human traits to inanimate objects (19: 1; 35: 10).

e. Apostrophe: addressing inanimate things (114: 5).

f. Synecdoche: figure of speech in which a part stands for the whole or the whole for a part (Ps.91: 5).

William Plumer says that the poetry of the Psalms is formed, not like that of modern languages, by the response of answering syllables, but by the response of answering thoughts.

LITERARY FORMS

The Psalms may be classified according to their subject, message or their style. The main types of psalms in the Psalter are as follows: laments or supplications, thanksgivings and hymns of praises?

❖ I shall show you the different occasions for prayer. There is petition, thanksgiving and praise. In petition one asks mercy for one's sin, in thanksgiving you give thanks to your Father who is in heaven, while in praise you praise Him for His works. At a time when you are in trouble, offer up petition, and when you are well supplied with good things, you should give thanks to the Giver, and when your mind rejoices, offer up praise. Make all these prayers of yours with discernment to God¹.

Fr. Aphrahat

❖ Supplication is offered by one who needs something ...; Prayer is offered in conjunction with praise of God by one who asks in a more solemn manner for greater things; Intercession is the request to God... made by one who has greater confidence; and Thanksgiving is the prayer with acknowledgment to God for the favors received from God...².

Origen

Scholars set other categories. Many of the psalms have features of more than one of the following categories:

¹Demonstration 4, On Prayer, 17. See The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life, Cistercian Publications Inc, Michigan, 1987, p. 22.

² On Prayer, chapter 14: 2.

1. Instructive Psalms

a. "Instructive Psalms" refer to the didactic, edifying, and theological psalms. It is hard to separate the last two as both portray heavenly wisdom and theology. In fact, they both under line the life we should attain as children of God, to be in His own image and likeness.

All believers, especially leaders, are in need of wisdom. Carroll Stuhlmueller says: concludes, "They came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom"). As in other countries, finishing schools for noble youth must have existed in the royal capital and in the postexilic age the synagogues must have served as places both of worship and of instruction. The clearest reference to such schools occurs in (Si. 51: 23), "Draw near to me, you who are untaught, and lodge in my school." ...

Wisdom literature seeks the harmonious, stable order of life. It stands against chaos and violence. While the hymns, especially those that derive their motivation (thought) from God's creative action over the universe, portray Yahweh as supreme victor over the angry sea and the roaring storms of the winter season (Ps. 29; 89: 9-13), wisdom finds itself in the presence of the Creator "like a master workman...daily his delight, rejoicing before him always" (Prov. 8: 30). Despite this attitude of being reflective and "rational," nonetheless wisdom always implies ultimate mystery, secretly in God's control. In Prov. 8: 22-31 wisdom rests with the Lord before creation; the same is found to be the case in Sirach chap. 24. The same aspect of mystery will show up sapient aspects of Ps. 139, "Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, thou knows it altogether... Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it¹"].

Origen says, [Since they (the psalms) are prayers truly composed and spoken by the Spirit, they are full of teachings of the wisdom of God, so that one can say of what is taught in them, "who is wise, and he shall understand these things? and prudent, and he shall know these things?" (Osee 14: 9)²].

According to **St. Hippolytus of Rome, David** gave the Jews a new style of psalmody to praise God, throughout he teaches that many doctrines went beyond the Law of Moses. He also says, [The book of Psalms contains new doctrine after the Law of Moses; and after the writing of Moses, it is the second book of doctrine³].

St Basil declared, while commenting on Ps. 1, [The Book of Psalms contains a complete theology].

b. Wisdom, theology and worship were inseparable; the synagogue was responsible to teach the people not only wisdom but also worship.

c. Some of these psalms are called "Torah psalms," meditating upon and delighting in the Torah (Ps. 1; 19; 119). One of the striking things about these psalms is the theme that the study of the Torah makes one wise and blessed. This idea is expressed above all, in Psalm 1, the psalm which now introduces the whole Psalter.

d. The Psalter answers frankly many questions that arise in the minds of human beings.

e. The principal teachings which are mentioned in the Psalter are:

¹ Old Testament Message: Psalms 1, Delaware 1985, P. 40-41.

² On Prayer 2: 5.

³ St. Hipp.: On the Psalms

* God: The psalmists' interests are centered on God, especially in the thanksgiving psalms. At the center of every psalm is the presence of the Lord (God of the Church)¹, among His own holy people and within the heart of the pious believer. The psalmist speaks to God rather than of God. They reveal Him through the unceasing dialogue with Him. They praise God as both Creator and Saviour, and they pray that He will deliver, protect, and sustain His people, and righteous persons who are members of His Church. They glorify the place where God reveals Himself and dwells among His people (Psalms of Zion), and exalt the instruments of God's revelation (Psalms of Torah).

Through praying and chanting hymns we acknowledge God as the Lord of the Church, or the holy people, as we call Him: the God of Israel [the Church is the New Israel] (68: 8), the Holy One of Israel (71: 22) and the God of Jacob (75: 9). At the same time He is acknowledged by the believer personally as he calls Him: my Glory, the Lifter of my head (3: 3), my Shield (3: 3; 59: 11), my Rock, my Fortress, my Deliverance, my God, my Strength, the Horn of my salvation, my High Tower (18: 2), my Shepherd (23: 1), my Light, my salvation (27: 10), my Strong Rock (31: 2), my Helper (54: 4), my Refuge (91: 2) and my goodness (144: 2).

* Man: The Psalter presents man from two complementary aspects:

a. His life here is depicted under various metaphors. It is no more than a span (39: 6), a grass (103: 15, 16), a shadow (144: 4; 109: 23), a locust (109: 23), a dream, and a puff of wind. Human life is full of labor and sorrow (90: 10), and the future on earth is obscure (39: 7). At the same time, in the Psalter, man attains the blessed and joyful life. In the laments, man is viewed as miserable and helpless, but through his utter dependence on God he attains deliverance from evil. In this way, the psalms create an atmosphere of joy and consolation even in time of trouble.

b. In the Psalter God appears concerned with men alone (Ps. 8), especially His own people, and every member of them personally. He created man as a master of creation (8: 6), and redeemed him to be holy and to become a god and a son of the Most High (82: 6). God is glorified by man's honor and glory.

Acknowledging the reality of our own selves the vanity of our human life and God's gifts to us incites us not to be proud but to be humble. Thus we become close to God (138: 6), and are able to say: "He raises up the needy from the earth; and lifts up the poor out of the dunghill, that He may place him with the princes, even with the princes of His people" (113: 7, 8). "Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to Your name give glory" (115: 1).

The Psalms emphasize the oneness of man. The joy of his spirit sustains his body.

* Godly and ungodly men are depicted: (1; 5; 7; 9-12; 14; 15; 17; 24; 25; 32; 34; 36; 37; 50; 52; 53; 58; 73; 75; 84; 91; 92; 94; 112; 121; 125; 127; 128; 133). In the Torah psalms the sharp contrast between the righteous and the wicked, the wise and the foolish, is neat and simple.

* God's Law (19; 119): The psalms emphasize the importance of living by the standards of the divine Law and point out the blessed consequences of obedience and the dire results of disobedience².

¹ See The Collegeville Bible Commentary, Liturgical Press, 1989, p. 754.

² Edward p. Blair: The Illustrated Bible Handbook, 1975, p. 150

Two psalms are more particularly devoted to the praise of the divine Law (19 and 119). They declare the commandments of God not as a burden but as a source of life, sweetness, satisfaction, wealth, illumination and joy. Psalm 119 is like a litany or a hymn of love, suitable for spiritual believers of the New Covenant as well as for those of the Old.

* Duties of rulers (82; 101).

2. Devotional Psalms

These psalms are expressive of:

* Penitence: these breath deep contrition for sin committed. Some of them are "community laments", as expressions of national sorrow and which were called forth by a sense of the nation's sin, others are "personal laments." The Penitential psalms are 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143. Psalm 51, composed in the typical pattern of the lament is an exquisite illustration.

Possidius, the biographer of St. Augustine says, [The seven Penitential Psalms were, by his orders, written out, and placed where he could see them from his bed. These he looked at and read in his days of sickness, weeping often and sore.] So, with his eyes fixed on the Psalms, St. Augustine passed to his rest¹.

* Severe trouble (4; 5; 11; 28; 41; 55; 59; 64; 70; 109; 120; 140; 141; 143).

* Desire for help (7; 17; 26; 35; 44; 60; 74; 79; 80; 83; 89; 94; 102; 129; 139).

3. Hymns of Praise and Psalms of Thanksgiving (private or communal)

(33, 95, 100, 117, 145, 148, 149, 150).

Some scholars separate the hymns of praise from the thanksgiving psalms. They see that the hymns of praise are very simple in their structure, a call to worship, often with the addressee named; for example, "Praise the Lord, all you nations" (Ps. 117: 1); while the thanksgiving psalms are closely allied to laments; in essence they are the shout of or salvation from the hands of the wicked.

R. J. Clifford says, [The term "thanks giving" is somewhat misleading, for in the Bible to "give thanks" does not mean to say "thank you" but to speak publicly about the salvation that has occurred. The audience then recognizes the hand of Yahweh and gives praise².

The hymn of praise is a song which extols God's greatness manifest in deeds of creation (Psalms of creation) and history. Psalms of this type generally begin with an imperative call to worship; then comes a section which gives the ground for praise, often introduced by "for" (ki); and sometimes they conclude with a renewed summons to praise, thus echoing the note sounded at the start. The structure of the hymns of praise can be seen plainly in Psalm 117, the shortest psalm of the Psalter³.

Not only the one sacred people as a whole has to praise God but also every member of this community: priests, levities, laymen and even babes participate in praising God. The heavenly creatures and also the irrational creation praise Him. All the universe attains joy through praising God.

¹ R. E. Prothero, p. 18.

² The Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 755.

³ See Anderson, p.

Such psalms center on life and joy (100: 2). We attain joy in His name (10: 3), who is the source of sweetness to our hearts and lips (100: 5). The Lord is a living God who offers to His people not only life but a new redeemed life marked by dignity, compassion and appreciation. The psalm is consequently the most natural response to God the Creator and Savior.

Through singing hymns of praise, the believer joyfully desires to offer himself as a living sacrifice to his beloved God. St. Paul says, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable sacrifice" (Rom. 12: 1). The psalmist has the same idea as he says, "Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle" (27: 6). "I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving" (116: 17). "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (141: 2).

❖ I consider prayers and praise to God are alone the perfect and acceptable sacrifices offered to God, if they are presented by solemn persons¹.

St. Justine

The most important psalms used for private thanksgiving are Ps. 18; 30; 32; 34; 41; 66; 92; 116; 118; 138).

4. Messianic Psalms

For the early Christians, it was Christ who was exalted in every psalm. He is portrayed or prophesied in the Messianic psalms. Next to Isaiah, the Psalter is the most expressive of the Messianic prophecies and message in the Old Testament. The meaning of many psalms remained obscure until the life of our Lord Jesus Christ gave the key to them. The light of the covenant, to be fulfilled in the coming Messiah, here shines with an extra brilliance². R.T. Boyd says, [In the Gospels we find that He went to pray; in the Psalms we have His prayer. The Gospels tell of His crucifixion; the Psalms give us insight to His heart while being crucified. The Gospels tell us that He went back to be with His Father in heaven; the Psalms show us Christ seated in the heavens with the Father³.]

Many early Fathers of the Church consider the majority of the psalms as Messianic. David, who wrote many of the psalms is considered a prophet because many of the psalms contain prophecies about the Messiah. Some of the Jews deny David the title of prophet; but in (Acts 2: 30) St. Peter expressly calls him a prophet.

The Messianic psalms portray our Lord in four general aspects:

- a. the suffering Messiah;
- b. the reigning King; the Son of Man –
- c. the Son of David;
- d. and the Son of God - very God⁴.

The following Messianic psalms are so important that we here give some captions:

Ps. 2. The King rejected, established, and reigning.

Ps. 8: Man as lord of creation through the Messiah, the Son of Man.

¹ Dial., 117 (cf. Apology 1: 13).

² W. S. Deal: Baker's Pictorial Introduction to the Bible, 1967, 147.

³ Boyd's Bible Handbook, p. 230-231.

⁴ Ibid 231

Ps. 16: Christ's resurrection from the dead.
 Ps. 22 and 69: Christ's sufferings and crucifixion.
 Ps. 23: The Good Shepherd's care for His sheep.
 Ps. 24: The Chief Shepherd as King of Glory.
 Ps. 40: The obedient Christ.
 Ps. 45: Christ's royal bride and eternal throne.
 Ps. 68: 18 The ascension of Christ.
 Ps. 72: Glory and eternity of Christ's reign.
 Ps. 80: The immense hope and longing for the Messiah (80: 1-3; 89: 46, 49).
 Ps. 89: Confirmation of the endless David dynasty.
 Ps. 97: The reigning King.
 Ps. 101: Christ's righteous rule.
 Ps. 110: Eternal King and Priest - Christ's official titles.
 Ps. 118: The exaltation of the rejected Stone.
 Ps. 132: The eternal Inheritor of David's throne.

According to **St. Augustine** Christ, who unites the Church as His own Body, is the heart of the psalms. He says, [Our Lord Jesus Christ speaks sometimes of Himself, in His own person, as our Head, sometimes in the person of His body, that is to say, our selves and His Church, but He speaks as one single person so as to make us understand that head and body form one integral being and cannot be dissociated; like the nuptial union of which it is said: they shall be two in one flesh. If in this we recognize two persons in one flesh, we must similarly recognize Christ and His Church in one single voice¹.]

Michael Gasnier shows that the early Christians not only saw Christ exalted in the psalms, but also placed the psalms' prayer on His lips addressing His Father, to praise Him, to supplicate Him, to ask pardon for the sins of mankind; consequently we pray with Him and unite our voices to His². It is He who sanctifies our lips, using them to prolong His acceptable prayer all through His body, i.e, the church.

5. Historical Psalms (78; 105; 106; 136).

These psalms relate the history of mankind which is recorded in more detail in the books of the Bible that run from Genesis to Joshua, as the basis for hymns of praise. The history of the people of God is recited as a motive for maintaining or restoring fidelity to God.

Remembering our church history and our personal history supplies us with material for praising God. Through history we have a better idea of who we are, what our identity is, and how God deals with us, and what His own identity is. The real significance of history is not to relate an accurate history of events but it is a way of seeing ourselves and a way of seeing God.

6. Liturgical psalms (15; 24; 50; 75; 118; 20; 21; 135).

Gunkel used this term to indicate psalms in which different literary types are brought together and expressed in choral style in Temple service. Sabourin says that there are psalms that obviously presuppose, and are made for liturgical worship, and even

¹ Enarrat. In Psalm 40.

² The Psalms, School of Spirituality, Challoner Publishing, London. 1962, p. 119.

others which were made for private occasions yet they were used by the congregation. The most striking examples of the liturgical psalms are the so-called entrance or gate liturgies (called "Torah liturgy" by Gunkel): 15; 24 (cf. Isa. 33: 14-16).

Some of the liturgical ones are made for a festal procession, such as Ps. 24; 68; 118; 132. They can only be understood in connection with a vision of the procession itself and its different acts and scenes.

In other psalms there are allusions to what can only be understood as acts of worship:

Intention to worship (5: 7),

To fulfill vows (7: 18; 22: 26; 50: 14; 56: 13; 61: 6-9; 65: 2; 66:13f; 76: 12; 116: 14, 18).

To offer sacrifices (27: 6; 54: 8; 66: 15; 96: 8;116: 17),

To sing praises in a vast assembly (22: 23etc; 35: 18; 40: 11; 68: 27; 89: 6; 111: 1; 150: 1),

To walk around the altar (26: 5; 43: 4),

To join in a procession (42: 5; 68: 25f; 118: 19-27),

To offer prayers as evening sacrifice (141: 2),

To undergo purification ceremonies (51: 9),

To receive or pronounce blessings (in most psalms).

The frequent allusions to Jerusalem, to the temple, to the sanctuary, to God's mountain, to His abode, to His footstool and to the holy feasts indicate that, in one way or another, a great number of the psalms originated in relationship with the liturgy.

7. Enthronement psalms (29; 47; 93; 95-99).

These psalms are connected with the so-called Zion psalms, which are based on the conviction that Zion, the city which enshrines the temple, is the place of Jehovah's presence in the midst of the people.

At the new year festival the procession bearing the ark approaches the temple, and the people pour out their praise of God's sovereignty, being the King.

These psalms show that the heart of the Old Testament hymn is the "self-revelation" of God on His Throne. His majesty is manifested above the sacred Ark as His own throne (the cherubim). He is also enthroned on the praises of His people. God whose glory fills the Holy of Holies in the temple is also to recall Isaiah's vision - enthroned on "high and lifted up" as cosmic King and Creator. God is the supreme Warrior-King who will overcome all who oppose His universal rule.

8. Royal Psalms:

This classification is based on content, not on literary characteristics. Actually they can be laments or thanksgivings, but all are royal in that they commemorate some event that has its setting in the king's experience: a coronation, a royal wedding, a victory for the king's army, or the like. They anticipate Christ as King who reigns over the hearts of believers, accepts them as His own heavenly bride who participates in His glory and grants them victory over wickedness (e.g. 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144). God promises an eternal reign for the dynasty of David and the King in these psalms rules for ever, His empire is world-wide, peace and justice mark His reign, etc...

The Davidic king is the chosen agent of the Lord, whose palace is a bulwark against threatening foes (Ps. 8: 2). He has promised to maintain the Davidic throne in the face of all foes arrayed against the Anointed One (Ps. 24-6).

Who is the king that the psalms refer to?

a. God the Father, who is the King of all the universe as He is the Creator of it (93: 1, 2), and He reigns by love over His own people. His royal palace is heaven itself, His House is in Jerusalem, and in the heart of a believer. His kingdom is universal (47; 67; 100; 117 and 87).

b. The Messiah: The Warrior King who grants His believers victory (2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132 and 144). He reigns through the cross, destroying the kingdom of darkness (Col. 2: 14), attracting men to heaven. As a King, He grants His believers the grace of His Royal Spirit? (Rev. 1: 6), bestowing upon them His own righteousness, holiness, characteristics and joy.

c. David the king and his ancestors, who represent the holy community, God Himself and the Messiah.

d. Believers: As members of the body of Jesus Christ, the King of kings, they receive authority in their inner life to rule over sin and the evil spirits, and thus they live as kings.

To be acquainted with the royal psalms, read our interpretation of psalm 2.

9. Psalms of Ascents or Degrees

The little collection of psalms comprising Psalms 120-134, each of which is titled "a song of ascent," appears to have been a handbook used by pilgrims who went up to Jerusalem for the great festivals. To be familiar with these psalms refer to our interpretation of ps.120.

10. The Hallel Psalms

The Hallel Psalms (113-118) were sung at the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, Pentecost, Dedication and the new moons.

11. Occasion psalms

In the Hebrew version, only Ps. 92 is assigned to a special day (Sabbath). In the Septuagint, however, other psalms are assigned to one of the days of the week:

Ps. 24 (1st. day, i.e., Sunday)

Ps. 48 (2nd. day, i.e., Monday).

Ps.94 (3rd. day i.e., Tuesday)

Ps. 93 (6th., day i.e., Friday).

The Vulgate assigns Ps. 81 to the fifth day and the Mishna assigns Ps. 82 to the third day. Psalm 30 was intended for the dedication of the Temple; Psalm 100 for offering thanks.

12. Supplication or Lament Psalms

This form of psalms is the most popular. The psalmists cry to God in their own need, or they intercede for another's need (e.g. 86), because of personal or communal suffering and distress. Although "theoretical atheism" was unknown in the Old Testament period, the people were afflicted from time to time with the feeling that the Lord had abandoned them and this is a form of practical atheism.

* The psalms of private supplication were motivated by personal distress, such as:

I. Premature death: The Jews regarded it as a punishment for sin (Ps. 54: 24). Shoal, the abode of the dead is located beneath the earth (Ps. 21: 29; 68: 15f), and sometimes referred to as the "pit." It is considered a place of silence (Ps.114: 17), of darkness and forgetfulness (Ps.87: 12). There is no praise of God (Ps.6: 6; 87: 10-13); the dead are cut off from fellowship with God (Ps. 87: 5).

II. Sickness (Ps. 37: 3,4; 40: 5; 68;27; 101: 11). Friends and relatives regard illness as the chastisement of a hidden fault (Ps. 37: 12).

III.False accusations: They are often indicated by metaphors, such as hunters (Ps. 7: 16; 34: 7; 56: 7; 63: 6; 139: 6); robbers (16: 9-12; 55: 7); lions (7: 3; 16: 12; 56: 5); dogs (58: 15); and snakes (57: 5,6.).

*Collective Supplication or community lament: A good example is Psalm 44. These psalms are the prayers of the whole congregation on the occasion of national calamities, like war, a defeat in battle, a draught, a bad harvest, a pestilence, or an invasion of locusts. On the appointed day the people would assemble in the temple to do penance in sackcloth and ashes. Joel describes a ceremony of this kind (Joel 1: 13f.; 2: 15-17).

The two classes of lament psalms - personal and communal - have different structures:

The structure of the personal lament is: Invocation to the Lord, asking for help; description of the need; petition for deliverance; explaining why it will surely be granted; confession of trust in the Lord, and vow of thanksgiving).

The structure of the collective lament is: recollection of the past mercies of the Lord; confession of trust in the Lord (de spite the crisis, the psalmist maintains a hope that the Lord will act); description of the need; plea of innocence (or a confession of guilt); emphases of confidence or trust in God (it was considered the priest's part, not the petitioner's¹.)

Each lament is a drama enacted by the psalmist, the Lord and the evil one.

13. Alphabetic (acrostic) Psalms

According to structure the most interesting class of Psalms is the Alphabetic or acrostic group. These psalms employ some arrangement based on the Hebrew alphabet (9; 10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145).

14. Hallelujah Psalms

These psalms employ the term "Hallelujah" meaning "Praise Jah [Jehovah]", probably in order to indicate their use in public worship (e.g. 105; 106; 111-113; 115; 117; 135; 146-150.).

15. Elohistic Psalms

Some psalms employ the name "Elohim" for God (e.g. 42-83). Others use the name Jehovah. Some psalms use more than one name for God, as in psalm 19.

It was believed that a person's self was concentrated in his or her name (cf. Exod. 3: 13f.; Judges 13: 17). The name would give meaning and bestow full existence to its bearer (cf. Gen. 2: 19, 23). To know some body's name was to gain power from him, "O God, by Your name save me, and by Your might defend my cause" (Ps. 54: 3). The divine

¹ J. Mckenzie: Dictionary of the bible, p. 705; Collegeville Bible Commentary, p. 755.

name possesses a special miraculous power. The phrase "name of the Lord" occurs about 100 times in 67 different psalms.

Irving L. Benson in his book "The Psalms" says¹, [In studying the different psalms it is always interesting to observe how God is identified, whether by name, attribute or action ascribed to Him. Four names of God are prominent in the Psalms: El (Elohim), Adonai, Jehovah and Shaddai. The frequency of each name in the five divisions of the Psalms is tabulated in the accompanying chart.

HEBREW NAME	Division 1	Division 2	Division 3	Division 4	Division 5
El	67	207	85	32	41
Adonai	13	19	15	2	12
Jehovah	277	31	43	101	226
Shaddai		1	1	1	

The Old Testament contains a number of names and compound names for God which reveal Him in some aspect of His character and dealings with mankind.

* "El" or "Elohim" means "mighty, strong, prominent. For instant, in Numbers 23: 22 God is spoken of as the "El" who brought His people out of Egypt. (See also Gen. 17: 1; 35: 11). Nathan J. Stone says, [The name Elohim, however, contains the idea of creative and governing power, of omnipotence and sovereignty. This is clearly indicated by the fact that from (Genesis 1: 1) to (2: 4) the word "Elohim" alone is used, and that thirty-five times².]

* "Jehovah": This word is derived from the Hebrew verb "havah," which means "to be," or "being." This word is almost exactly like the Hebrew verb "chavah," "to live," or "life." We must think of Jehovah as the Being who is absolutely self-existent, the One who in Himself possesses essential life, permanent existence, One who always exists, is eternal and unchangeable (Ps. 102: 27).

Stone says, [The Hebrew may say "the" Elohim, the true God, in opposition to all false gods, but he never says "the" Jehovah, for Jehovah is the name of the true God only..., for there is no other Jehovah. He speaks of the living God, but never of the living Jehovah, for he cannot conceive of Jehovah as other than living... As Jehovah, He is specially the God of revelation to creatures who can apprehend and appreciate the Infinite - the becoming One... The name Jehovah has still further significance for us in that it reveals God as a God of moral and spiritual attributes... Whereas the term Elohim assumes a love toward all creation and creatures as the work of His hands, the name Jehovah reveals this love as conditioned upon moral and spiritual at tributes. In this

¹ 1987, p. 48.

² Names of God, Moody Press, 1944, p. 9.

connection it is significant that the name Jehovah, as we have already noted, does not appear till Genesis 2: 4].

God is the Lord (Jehovah) of His people because of His great redemption of them. He reveals Himself to them as His own saints, as the God of righteousness and holiness. In other words, if Elohim means "might" with a focus on God's concern for all His creation, then Jehovah means the presence of God among His people thereby saving and sanctifying them as His holy people since He alone is Holy.

* "El-Shaddai": This name appears first in connection with Abraham in Genesis 17: 1,2. It is derived from two words; "El" means might, power, omnipotence, transcendence, the name connected with Creation; and "Shaddai" is connected with the word "breast," and signifies one who nourishes, supplies, satisfies. Therefore the title means "One mighty to nourish, satisfy, supply." Or it means that the Almighty is self-sufficient and all bountiful, the source of all blessings, fullness and fruitfulness.

* "Adonai": It means "owner," claiming God's mastership or lordship.

In other words we can say that "Elohim" relates to God the Mighty, "Jehovah" God of righteousness, holiness, love and redemption, "Elshaddai" the Almighty One who is beneficent and a bountiful Bestower of powers, gifts, blessings and fruitfulness; "Adonai" the Lord over all peoples, whether they will it or not.

16. The Imprecatory Psalms

More than twenty psalms (35; 58; 59; 69; 70; 109; 137; 139; 140) call down curses upon the ungodly, why?

I. *J. H. Raven* says that the expressions are not individual but communal and official. The psalmist desires the punishment of those who wasted the people of God, the visible kingdom of God and hence are God's enemies (Ps. 139: 21-22). David is not vindictive toward his personal enemies but exhibits a remarkable for giving spirit as that evident in his attitude towards Saul and his house (1 Sam. 24; 26: 5-12; 2 Sam. 1: 17; 2: 5; 9). In these psalms, however, he prays God to punish His enemies rather than doing so himself.

II. They call for divine justice, rather than human vengeance on the unjust and insolent who reject divine love.

III. God hates sin but loves sinners. There is no sharp distinction in the Hebrew mind between a sinner and his sin (Babylonia = pride; Pharaoh = injustice; Edom = bloodshed, etc...)

IV. The psalmist - as a prophet - feels that his enemies are not against him personally but they are God's enemy. Prophetically he foretells that they do not deserve to live.

17. Psalms of Zion (THE CHURCH)

Entering Canaan - in the psalms - is a sign of God's providence towards His people, for He fulfilled His promise to them. David made Jerusalem his capital then he transported the ark to it. After wards Solomon built the temple there. Many psalms are devoted to Zion as the city of God and the spiritual capital of mankind, the Temple is God's House, and the Ark His representative.

During the great feasts many people used to visit the holy city. They had to recite special psalms as a part of a sacred ceremony.

The events that touched the city, the temple and the Ark such as the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib had special meaning in the life of the people.

18. Psalms of Creation

There are some psalms that are songs of praise to God, Creator of the universe. These hymns extol the greatness of the Lord, His goodness, and His majesty. The psalmists wonder at the awesome power of God. They give thanks for man's place in the divine order. (e.g. 8; 19; 33; 104¹).

NUMBERING OF THE PSALMS

Some psalms contain two or more songs, while others are broken up into two or more songs. This is the cause of the difference between the Hebrew text and the Septuagint one. In the Septuagint, psalms 9 and 10 as well as psalms 114 and 115 are merged in one psalm, whereas psalms 116 and 147 are split up into two separate psalms.

HEBREW	SEPTUAGINT
1-8	1-8
9-10	9
11-113	10-112
114-115	113
116	114-115
117-146	116-145
147	146-147
148-150	148-150
-	151

THE PSALTER AND THE HOLY SCRIPTURES²

St Athanasius calls the Psalter "an epitome of the whole Scriptures;" and St. Jerome calls it "The Bible within the Bible." **St. Augustine** says, "What is there that may not be learned in the Psalms?!" St Basil the Great states that the Psalter is "the common treasure of all good precepts...the voice of the church... a compendium of all theology." **St. Ambrose**, "The law instructs, history informs, prophecy predicts, correction censures, and morals exhort. In the book of Psalms you find the fruit of all these, as well as a remedy for the salvation of the soul. The Psalter deserves to be called, the praise of God, the glory of man, the voice of the church, and the most beneficial confession of faith." Therefore, some call it "The little Bible," while others call it "a microcosm of the whole Old Testament."

It is a fact that the great themes of the Old Testament are recapitulated in the psalms under the form of prayer. This is also true of the main events of the history of

¹ Reader' Digest: Mysteries of the Bible, p. 20).

² ² William S. Plumer: psalms, A critical and Expository Commentary with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks, 1978, p. 7; L. Sabourin: The Psalms, v. 1, p. 2.

salvation, from the creation to the exodus, from the conquest to the restoration, when the messianic hope matured for the definitive establishment of God's kingdom.

The best commentary on the psalms is the Bible itself, not excluding the New Testament, in which so much that is obscure is seen in a new light.

THE PSALTER AND THE PENTATEUCH

William Plumer says, [The very first remark of Hilary in his Prologue to the Psalms is that "the Book of Psalms is one and not five." He here refers to the fact that some of the Jews divided the Psalms into five books, corresponding to the five books of Moses... Such a division is a mere human invention, deriving no authority from God, and not even founded on the nature of the contents of these wondrous songs. In Luke 20: 42 and in Acts 1: 20, we read of "The Book of Psalms," but nowhere do we read of "The Books of Psalms."]

According to many scholars, the Psalter itself, in the Hebrew text, gives evidence of a fivefold division starting respectively with Ps. 1; 42; 73; 90; 107 probably in imitation of the Pentateuch (Five books of Moses), each of which ends with a doxology (41: 14; 72: 19; 89: 52; 106: 48 and 150: 6.)

The first section - similar to Genesis - reveals God's relationship with man personally. The second - similar to Exodus- declares God's eagerness to redeem the believers as His own people. The third - similar to Leviticus - shows the dwelling of the Holy One among His own People to sanctify them as His own Sanctuary. The fourth - similar to Numbers - declares God's providence towards His Church in the wilderness of this world to lead them to the New Promised Land through suffering. The fifth - similar to Deuteronomy - reveals the Law or the Word of God as the source of our spiritual healing, holiness, satisfaction, and glorification.

DIVISION	1	2	3	4	5
SIMILAR	Gen	Exod.	Lev.	Num.	Deut.
SUBJECT	Man and salvation	Man and Church New	New Temple	New Earth	Word of God
RELAT WITH GOD	. Personal	Communal	dwells	bleses	Self-giving
	David	David and Korah	Asaph Mainly ous	Anonym	Asaph Mainly
STAGE By COLLECTI ON	David	During reign of Hezekiah & Joshia			Ezra and Nehemiah

Many scholars find the close relation ship between the five books of Moses and the Psalter through their studies of the ancient Jewish order of worship. For example, A. Guilding says, [The name "triennial cycle" is given to the early Palestinian system of reading through the whole of the Pentateuch once on the consecutive sabbaths of three lunar years. The Pentateuch was divided for this purpose into more than 150 sections, known as "sedarim." In course of time there grew up the habit of adding a second lesson

from the Prophets, known as a "haphtarah" or "concluding passage." It seems possible also that the Psalms were recited over a three- year period: the number of Psalms corresponds to the number of sabbaths in three lunar years, and the arrangement of the Psalter seems to have been influenced by liturgical consideration¹].

DIVISION 1: MAN AND SALVATION

1. Man's blessedness (1).
2. Man's fall (2-8).
3. Man's enmity culminating in the Antichrist (9-15).
4. Man's restoration through the Messiah (16- 41).

DIVISION 2: THE CHURCH AND SALVATION

1. Israel's ruin (42-49).
2. Israel's Redeemer (50-60).
3. Israel's redemption (61-72).

DIVISION 3: THE NEW TEMPLE

The Sanctuary is referred to in nearly every chapter, and is viewed from its ruin to its establishment in fullness and blessing.

1. The Sanctuary in Relation to Man (73-83).
2. The Sanctuary in Relation to the Lord (84-89).

DIVISION 4: THE NEW EARTH

1. The Gentiles - lost and called (90).
 2. The Gentiles called to the new lan (91-104).
 3. The Gentiles anticipate the new land (100-105).
 4. The Gentiles celebrate the new land (100- 105).
- Conclusion: the new land and rest.

DIVISION 5: THE WORD OF GOD

1. Experiencing the power of the word (107- 118).
2. Preaching the word (119).
3. Expectations concerning the effect of the word (120-150)².

TERMS INDICATING THE NATURE OF THE PSALMS

"*Shir*" or "sir" (30 times, i.e., "song") is generally accompanied by music. Some consider that this term indicates a song that depends on the voice more than on the music itself.

"*mizmor*" (57 times)ie. "psalm," probably means a song accompanied with stringed instruments.

"*maskil*" (13 times): perhaps meaning "a didactic poem" (Ps. 32; 47; 78), but it is also found with those that are not didactic. Another possible is to denote "an artistic poem," i.e., one executed with art (Ps 47: 8 ,1chro30: 21).

"*mikhtam*," (6 times) occurring in Ps. (16 and 56-60), may allude to a hidden (Katam) or hidden meaning. It is also translated as a "golden (*ketem*) poem," or "a golden jewel." Efforts have been made to interpret it as a penitential psalm³ to express remorse.

"*siggayon*" (in Ps. 7: 1): the name seems akin to Assyrian "shegu," a complaint or a penitential psalm.

¹ The Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship, Oxford, 1960, p. 6.

² Boyd's Bible Handbook, p. 231-232.

³ The Jerome Biblical Commentary, 1970, p. 570.

"tehillah," a song of praise, occurs only once (Ps. 145). But the same word in the masculine plural is used to describe the whole collection of psalms.

LITURGICAL RUBRICS

The rubric "for remembrance" (Ps. 38, 70; cf. Si. 50: 16) would refer to the *azkarah* or portion of the meal-offering which was anointed with oil and burned (cf. Lev. 2: 2etc). The note "for thanksgiving" in Ps 100 probably refers to the sacrifice of thanksgiving (Lev. 7: 12; 22: 29)¹.

MUSICAL ANNOTATIONS

Their interpretation is not easy, because we know very little about ancient Israelite music. Broadly speaking these headings belong to two groups.

A first category of headings refers to the instruments which are to accompany the voices: "with stringed instruments" (Ps. 4; 6; 54; 55; 61; 67; 76) and "with wind instruments" (flute? Ps. 5). "Upon the Gittith" (8; 81; 84) can indicate a kind of harp (from Gath?) or a tune ("the woman of Gath"). "al hassminit" (6; 12; upon the eighth" and "al alamt" (46; "according to Virgins") might mean "with soprano voices" and "with bass voices," respectively (1 Chron. 15: 20); but the former more probably means "with the eight stringed-harp".

A second category of rubrics probably allude to popular songs to which the psalms were to be sung: "Do not destroy" (57; 58; 59; 75; cf. Is. 65: 8), "The hind of the dawn" (22), "According to Muth Labben" (9), "the death of the son," perhaps an Egyptian harp), "According to Mahalath" (53, 8: "for the illness"?). "According to Lilies" (45; 69), "The law is a lily" (60), "The law is lilies" (80) could refer to a popular song extolling the Law.

An obscure term "selah" is often inserted in the body of a psalm at the end of a verse: occurs 71 times in 39 psalms, all of which are in the first three books (Ps. 3- 89), except for two (Ps. 140 and 143). It occurs in the singing, while the people prostrate in prayer. Other authors, however, hold that it indicates a "raising" of the voices or a musical interlude².

NOTES

1. If we want to understand a psalm we must try to discover what condition or event lies behind it.

2. It is worthy to note that the psalms are expressions of holy feelings, which can be understood only by those who practice a saintly life.

The best qualification for studying any portion of God's word is the influence of the Holy Spirit abiding in us, warming our cold hearts, giving us humbleness of mind, and right affections³.

❖ Form your spirit by the affection of the psalm...

If the psalm breathes the spirit of prayer, then you pray;

if it is filled with groaning, groan also yourself;

if it is gladsome, then rejoice also; if it encourages hope, hope in God;

if it calls to godly fear, then tremble yourself before the divine majesty for all things herein contained are mirrors to reflect our own real characters... Let the heart do what

¹Sabourin, p. 11.

²L. Sabourin p. 12.

³William S. Plumer: Psalms, Pennsylvania, 1987, p. 5, 6.

the words of the psalms signify¹.

St. Augustine

- ❖ In order to enjoy this treasure, it is necessary that we recite the psalms with the same spirit in which they were composed, and accommodate them unto ourselves in the same manner as if every one of us had composed them, or as if the psalmist had directed them purposely for our use; not satisfying ourselves that they had their whole completion in or by the prophet, but discerning every one of us our own parts still to be performed and acted over in the psalmist's words, by exciting in ourselves the same affections which we discern to have been in David, or in others at that time, loving when he loves, fearing when he fears, hoping when he hopes, praising God when he praises, weeping for our own or others'sins when he weeps..., delighting and rejoicing in the beauty of the Messiah, and of the Church His spouse... Finally, where he as a master teaches, exhorts, reprehends, and directs the just man, each of us must suppose the psalmist speaking to him and must answer him in such due manner as the instruction of such a master exacts⁵⁴².

St. John Cassian

The titles of the psalms are as old as the psalms themselves, which help us in understanding them. St. Jerome says, [The titles of the psalms are the keys, opening the door to a right understanding of them.]

2. Sometimes in a single psalm the psalmist addresses a stanza to God, while another to the community or to his companions. Some times stanzas are addressed to the heavenly creatures, to irrational creation, wicked persons, the devil or to the psalmist's own soul.

Some of the psalms involve a dialogue between the singer and the community and these involve teachings, testimonies, or invitations to the community to join the psalmist in praising or thanking God.

3. The psalmist is honest and open. If he is happy he says so; if angry or fearful he says so. If he is angry with God he says that too (Ps. 44, 74). He does not pretend to be better than he is.

4. Some scholars state that there is a foreign influence on the Psalter, especially from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, because of some mutual expressions used in the Psalter and the respective ancient religious literature.

R. E. Murphy says, [As in all questions of comparative literature, one should not be misled by mere similarities. The (use of the) same words does not always mean the same things, because they are colored by the particular culture or religious milieu in which they are used. The distinctive differences between Israelite, Egyptian , and Mesopotamian religions should not be glossed over because of a common fund of vocabulary and thought patterns. There are bound to be basic similarities in man's encounter with divinity³].

¹ Ibid. 6.

² Ibid.

³ The Jerome biblical comm.. p. 571.

Concerning Egypt, Sabourin says, [True Egyptians knew one God, almighty, provident, and judge. In Egypt also, the scribes exhorted their disciples to be "upright of heart" (Ps. 7: 11) for the sake of God, hidden and near. They seem to have had a certain knowledge of values related to interior life: the presence of the divine spirit in the heart of the just, the craving for God, submission to this will, the meaning of silence. Widely spread henotheism did, however, coexist with the polytheist cult, while in Israel opposition to idolatry never failed... In Oriental paganism sin was viewed primarily as a physical stain, to be eliminated by magic rites. Evil spirits were expelled with incantations, and omens were believed to reveal the future. Complicated myths accounted for the origin and order or disorder of the physical world and a system of nature rites was believed to assure national prosperity. In contrast, the Psalms picture sin as a violation of the moral order. Only repentance can erase it; idolatry and paganism are condemned, magic is not even mentioned]¹.

Concerning Babylon, the words of A. Falkenstein and W. von Soden are worth quoting: [The Psalms are much freer in form and more varied in structure. There are decisive differences which stem from the excessive ties the Babylonians had with tradition, and from Israel's unconditioned faith in one God... In summary we can perhaps say that even the most beautiful Babylonian prayers, despite many related ideas, do not come up to the Psalms in any way, because it was not given to their poets to dedicate themselves completely and without any reservation to the God whose will they believed they knew; they could therefore often proclaim important truths, but not the truth²].

¹ P. 50-51.¹

² Summerische und akkadische Hymnen und Gebete, Zurich, 1953, p. 56; Jerome Bin. Comm. P. 571-2.

* قام بترجمة المقدمة الأب الراهب برنابا.

THE PSALMS AND THE COPTIC LITURGIES

1. The Canonical Hours (Agbia):

St. Paul says, "When you come together, every one of you has a psalm..." 1 Cor. 14: 26.

In the early church, Christians used to pray (or rather to sing) psalms not only in the church or while they were worshiping God in their private rooms, but even as they walked in the street, went about their work and while they bathed. They acknowledged that the psalms, inspired by the Holy Spirit, have the power to lift up the heart and to keep the mind involved joyfully in heaven. An American scholar says, "Praying a psalm a day keeps worry away."

Practicing the Canonical Hour prayers (Hymns), or at least some of them every day helps us to attain our fellowship with our Christ:

The Prime [the morning prayer] = The resurrection of Christ.

The Terce [9 a.m.] = The descent of the Holy Spirit¹.

The Sext [12 noon] = The crucifixion.

The None [3 p.m.] = The death of Christ.

The Vespers [the evening prayer] = the burial of Christ.

The Compline [before sleeping] = the end of our life².

Midnight (Vigilae) = Waiting the last advent of Christ.

2. The Readings of the Eucharistic Liturgies

Studying the psalms which are recited or sung before the gospels of every vesper, matin and through the Liturgy of the Word reveals the church plan of every liturgy and the line of thought all over the year. We will mention an example but will postpone a full study to be made in another article:

1. The readings of the Feast of Elnayrouz (the feast of the new Coptic year) start with the following verse from the psalms: "Praise the Lord with a new song." It is the church's advice and graduation in the new year. She asks her children to be absorbed all the year in praising the Lord for all His wonders, participating in angelic work. Singing new songs does not mean just composing new hymns but also practicing unceasing renewal in our inner life, so that we may enjoy a newness even in singing and praising the Lord.

PSALMS AND THE CONSECRATION OF THE ALTAR

Reciting psalms by the bishop himself is prominent in the rite of consecrating the altar. On this joyous occasion, the order of these psalms reveals our concept of Church life that flows through the divine altar, i.e., through the self-sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Ps. 23 (22) {The sacramental Psalm}: The bishop starts the rite by reciting this psalm loudly to declare that the altar is the sacramental pasture, through which we meet

¹ St. Basil the Great: *The Long Rules*, Q.37

² . *Ibid*

our Good Shepherd, in whom we abide by participating in His sacrificial body and blood. This psalm speaks about baptism, charism and Eucharist as the Shepherd's divine gifts to His rational sheep.

2. Ps. 24 (23): All mankind are invited to be sanctified through the church of Christ, who opens the gates of heaven to all to participate in her Groom's glory through the New Testament altar.

3. Ps. 26 (25): Sanctity is the beauty of the altar of righteousness.

4. Ps. 27 (26): The altar is the source of spiritual power.

5. Ps. 84 (83): The altar is the source of gladness.

6. Ps. 93 (92): The altar is the throne of God and the beauty of His glory.

The psalm that precedes the gospel declares the sacrifice of righteousness as a burnt-offering expressing our love to God (Ps. 51 [50]).

After anointing the altar by charism, the bishop sings three psalms to declare that the dwelling-place of God is beloved; his soul longs for the Living God who is our Refuge.

After the procession around the altar, the bishop, as the representative of all believers, sings:

"O Lord, I love Your house and the dwelling-place of Your glory, to hear the voice of praise and to tell Your wonders."

PSALM 1 - PSALM 10

1991

FR. TADROS Y. MALATY
St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church
Sporting - Alexandria
Egypt

CHAPTER ONE

MAN AND SALVATION

PS. 1 - PS. 41

PS 1 - PS 41

MAN AND SALVATION

In His love for man, God starts His holy Book by speaking about the creation. All things have been created for His beloved man. He wishes to set man as master or even as king over the earth investing him with sovereignty. Man is God's representative, bearing His image and traits and leading a blessed and joyous life. He finds his fullness in God who has provided his every need. The Bible ends with the Book of Revelation which depicts man living in heavenly Jerusalem where God abides with His people (Rev. 21: 3). There, man shares divine glory and joins the angels' praises to the Almighty. The Book of Psalms is written in the same spirit; it is a miniature Bible. It starts by depicting man blessed by the word of God when active within his heart (Ps. 1: 2). At the end of the Book of Psalms we find man enjoying an angelic life filled with joyous praise and celebrating his salvation.

In this section (Ps.1-41) we have a collection of psalms that speak of the state of man: his blessedness, fall, and recovery. It resembles the Book of Genesis:

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Man's blessedness | Ps.1. |
| 2. Man's fall from his high position | Ps. 2-8. |
| 3. Man's enmity with God | Ps. 9-15. |
| 4. Man's restoration by the glorious work of the Redeemer | Pss. 16-41. |

Here, our Lord appears as the Good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep [a picture of Calvary, Ps. 22]; keeps them [God's sacramental pastorship, Ps. 23] and rewards them in His glory [Ps. 24].

It is interesting that in this first section almost all of the psalms are prefixed with the words "le David", which means "to David" or "belonging to David." This collection is undoubtedly the oldest, and probably goes back to the liturgical usage of the pre-exilic temple in Jerusalem¹.

¹ B. Anderson: *Understanding the Old Testament*, 1986, p. 545.

PSALM 1

THE BLESSED MAN

INTRODUCTORY PSALM

It is not without reason that the Psalter starts by declaring the blessedness of the godly, and their inner happiness. For the psalms have not been composed to be studied like literary works, but to be sung joyfully in Spirit. They are the love story of the Creator and the creation, which cannot be experienced except by the blessed life, or the new joyful life in Christ. They have been composed to be sung by the heart which is sanctified by the Holy Spirit as a sanctuary, a dwelling place of God and a heavenly kingdom of joy.

Some have suggested that Solomon is the author, who has written Psalm one as a suitable introduction to the whole Psalter. This psalm, standing at the entrance to the Psalter seems to be a signpost, and gives clear guidance regarding the way in which believers should conduct their lives. Presumably the author of this psalm deliberately assigned first place to this psalm in order to call worshipers to obedience to God's will and to trust in His Holy Providence.

WISDOM PSALMS

This psalm is classified as a wisdom psalm, full of practical and godly wisdom¹; it depicts and contrasts dramatically the "two ways," the two fundamental options for human beings². It outlines the lot of the good and of the wicked,(whose lives are viewed as either God-fearing or abandoning His Word). The Lord is our inner satisfaction and joy who secures the stability of our life. Anything which is done contrary to God or away from His Word is bound to perish. The most terrible fate for a man is to be abandoned by God.

In wisdom poetry there exists a general tendency to insist on a practical wisdom of life: a religious basis is given for the practice of virtues³. It is impossible to separate this practical life from one of deep faith.

The wisdom psalms [1, 37, 49, 73, 91, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133, 139] do not follow a strict literary pattern.

In this psalm, The psalmist invites believers to join those who revere and obey the Lord, those who want to be very close to Him, thus avoiding those who rebel against Him.

The psalm begins with "aleph," the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, "Ashre" (blessed); its final word "tobet," starts with the last letter of the alphabet, "taw." The letters aleph and taw symbolize all the letters and words in between. Psalm 1 thereby seems to embrace the entire Psalter, as well as the whole Bible⁴.

THE KEY WORDS:

1. "**Blessed**" or "**beatitude**" (ashre): It is closely connected with the right way of living in one's daily life. It occurs 45 times in the Hebrew text, of which 26 times occur in the Psalms and 12 occurrences in the wisdom literature. It differs from the priestly blessing (berakah), said to counteract any curse.

¹ Artur Weiser: *The Psalms*, 1962, p. 109.

² *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, p. 756.

³ Leopold Sabourin: *The Psalms, their origin and meaning*, 1969, Vol. 2, p. 258.

⁴ C. Stuhlmüller, p. 61

The blessed person fears the Lord (Ps. 112:1; Prov. 28:14; 20:7), cares for the poor (Ps. 41:1; Prov. 14:21) and follows the Lord's instructions (Prov. 29:18).

- ❖ [God] made man in order to share His own blessedness, and He perfected a rational animal, alive and conscious, in order to utilize His benefits in eternity¹.

St. Hilary of Poitiers

- ❖ [God is the source of our inner blessedness:]

Since therefore those who are scourged are more blessed than the scourgers, and those in tribulation among us more than those who are free from it outside the Christian pale; and those who are sad are more blessed than those in pleasure; what further source of tribulation shall we have? On this account we shall call no man happy, save him only who lives according to God. For **"blessed," it is said, "is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly [1].**

Blessed is he whom You chasten and teach him out of Your Law,(ps94: 12)

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, (ps119: 1)

Blessed are all they who trust in Him, (ps2: 12)

Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord, (ps33: 12)

Blessed is he whom his soul condemns not, (sirah14: 2)

Blessed is the man that fears the Lord, (ps112: 1)

Blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the humble; blessed are the meek; blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (Matt. 5: 3-10).

For what is required of us is, that in every thing we do or suffer, the fear of God should be the foundation².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ It is indeed a sign of the utmost blessedness and of singular goodness both continually to learn and to teach that love by which we cling to the Lord, so that meditation on Him may, as the Psalmist says, occupy all the days and nights of our life, and may support our soul, which insatiably hungers and thirsts after righteousness by continually chewing the cud of this heavenly food³.

Abbot Chaeremon

2. **"The way"**: A common biblical term for "manner of living," or moral conduct as a result of man's participation with God or conversely turning his back to Him. It occurs 66 times in the Psalter, 16 times in Ps. 119, frequently also in the wisdom literature. It comes into popular use with the later prophets. Our Lord Jesus Christ presents Himself as the "Way" (John 14:6). Through Him we enter the heavenly kingdom, and without Him there is nothing but vice and death.

What are the two ways? Or what is the way of the just, and that of the wicked? **St. Jerome** says: [If Christ is the way of the just, then Satan is the way of the wicked⁴]. In other words, what distinguishes believers is their union with God's word, i.e., Jesus Christ. The "way" does not merely contest ethics, but of being members in

¹ On Ps. 2, p. 15.

² Concerning the Statues, 18: 10.

³ Cassian, Conf. 11: 15.

⁴ In Ps. Hom. 55.

the body of Christ or rejecting Him. Either we live by the Spirit of God, or by the evil spirit.

OUTLINE

1. The contrast of two ways [1-2].
2. The way of the godly [3].
3. The way of the wicked [4-5].
4. The concluding judgment on the two ways [6].

1. THE WAY OF THE GODLY

This psalm offers a main theological principle, i.e. "man's freedom." Man has the choice to embrace the godly way or the ungodly way, to revere the Lord or even to rebel against Him.

The psalmist reveals the qualities of a godly man, marked by a blessed nature and characterized by these aspects:

- a. a negative aspect: does no evil [1].
- b. a positive aspect: clings to God's word [2, 3].
- c. an opposing instance: since we often clarify a point by stressing its opposite [4-6].

1. Negatively

we should not think evil, nor persevere in sin or teach evil, for the psalmist marks the progression of the ungodly person: walking, standing and sitting with the unrighteous, saying:

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the company of the scornful" [1].

a. **Fr. Abu-El-Farag Abdellah Ibn-El-Tayab** says that the psalmist distinguishes between ungodliness, sinning, and scorning. Ungodliness devotes physical evilness due to lust, adultery and fornication. Sinning arises from separation from God, and idolatry or atheism. While scorning springs from one's attitude towards others and appears in the form of gossip, insults, and contempt. Blessedness, on the other hand, is marked by a sanctified existence and a proper view of one's own life, of a strong relationship with God and with one's fellowmen.

b. Some have interpreted "who walks in the counsel of the ungodly" to mean "thinking evil." As for "standing in the way of sinners," this indicates intending to enter and to work with them. Finally "sitting in the seat of the scornful" has been interpreted as "responding eagerly to the wiles and teachings of the wicked." It is as though the progression to wickedness consists of three stages: thinking, doing, and teaching.

c. The psalmist denotes three successive steps in a career of evil:

I. Walking in the counsel of the ungodly means adoption of the principles of the evil-doers as a rule of life, by letting oneself be guided by their advice. A godly person avoids the evil by utterly renouncing the companionship of the wicked, so that he will not be led by them.

The godly sees evil-doers round about him; the world is full of them; they walk on every side. He loves them but not their ways and evils. He prays for them and wisely deals with them, avoiding their evil ways. He hates sin but not the sinners.

II. Standing in the way of sinners as if they were starting a journey with them, means conforming to their example, by persisting in the practices of notorious offenses.

III. Finally the worst sin is that of taking a seat in the meeting of the scoffers, associating with those who openly mock at sacred things.

- ❖ It is difficult for one not to sin. John, the Evangelist, says: In fact, as anyone who denies that he has sinned is a liar (cf. 1 John 1:8). If therefore, we all sin, what do the words mean, "*nor has stood in the way of sinners*" The Scriptures do not say "blessed is the man who has not sinned," but rather, blessed is the man who has not persevered in sin.

St. Jerome

- ❖ We must study the gradation: "*walked, stood, and sat*" [1]. Man walked in effect when he turned his back on God; he stood when he took pleasure in sin; he sat when, hardened in his own pride, he was incapable of retracing his steps unless He who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the chair of pestilence, came to deliver him.

St. Augustine

d. The state of blessedness is granted by God to those anxious to attain the light and avoid the darkness of sin. **The scholar, Daniel El-Salhy**, says: [Let those who desire the blessedness granted by the Holy Spirit to draw near and hear: to whom has David assigned this blessedness? Drawing near to godly blessedness draws us away from the darkness of sin...those who knew the Hebrew language at David's time claimed that this psalm was written on the occasion of Saul's contact with the witch at Endor. He asked her to call to life the spirit of Samuel the prophet, so that the psalmist depicts how Saul left the straight way and walked after the wicked one, how he lied, cheated, and oppressed his people, he forsook the seat of righteousness and sat on the chair of the witch. The spirit of David was therefore stirred to write this psalm to depict the state of the king of Israel and to chastise him indirectly]. Daniel, the scholar also says that Adam is the one who fell from a state of blessedness to a state of wickedness, thus comparing him with Israel's first king, Saul. He says: [Adam became the follower of the snake, just as Saul became the slave of false priesthood, the first beguiled by Eve, the latter by the witch. Thus the first fell out of paradise being banished by God, while the latter was deviled union with the saints after erring from the way of God's people.]

e. Since the scholar Daniel conceives blessedness as a gift of the Holy Spirit, granted to those who desire it, then the word "blessed" can be considered as one of the titles of Christ. St. Paul accordingly says: "who is the blessed and only Potentate, the king of kings, and Lord of lords," (2 Tim.6:15). Blessedness is the work of the Holy Spirit in us as we are united with the Blessed, who is our head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

See the wicked in the temporary pleasure of sin, which attracted no happiness no fill will be a mirage in their lives but the believers are united with Christ ones find happiness and blessed not in things but also in the time transient Union the lord Jesus Christ

f. Why has the psalmist used the singular: "Blessed is the man"?

I. Probably because those who walk in the way of the Lord are very few, or because the psalmist wishes to stress their union in the spirit of love and faith. Thus they are considered one person, as St. Paul says: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism. one God and Father of all..." (Eph. 4:5, 6).

II. Some fathers, as well as **St. Augustine**, believe that the one blessed here is Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who carries the Church as the holy body of the Holy Head, granting her a blessed life.

It is worthy to note that the psalmist blesses those who oppose evil and resist it. This confirms that blessedness is granted to those who resist sin. **St Augustine** stresses that a youth who resists sin and evil thoughts does not do so out of childishness, and in fact attains a greater reward than a child who keeps pure due to his age. A youth therefore attains a crown for his love and resistance. His struggle against sin arises out of a mature purity. In contrast, a child's purity arises out of his weakness.

III. **Positively** :

Since Jesus Christ - the Word of God Incarnate - is the Way, then we have to be bible-centered. God's Law that leads man in the right way is contrasted with the way of human seducers. His word supports us in our fight against evil and satisfies our need, hence our joy and pleasure.

This psalm is among the Torah Psalms: 1, 19, 119 which express such a state¹.

The psalmist pronounces a blessing on the godly man who meditates on the Law day and night. He attains delight in it, for it achieves an interior peace and satisfaction in the Lord. He does not regard the Law as an irksome burden but as a joyous way of participation with God. L. Sabourin says, [It is the God revealing law that Jesus has come not to abolish but to fulfill (Matt. 5:17). The Psalmist sees it as the expression of divine will, affording guidance under God's providential rule.] This psalm is among the Torah Psalms: 1, 19, 119 which express such a state!

Origen says that the Church or the soul finding sweetness in the Word of God meditates continuously on the Law of God, chewing as it were the cud thereof like a clean animal (Lev. 11:1-4)².

❖ Meditation on the Law does not simply consist of reading, but of doing. Just as the apostle says in another place, "Whether you eat or drink, or do anything else, do all for the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10 :13)³.

St. Jerome

❖ Let us consider all things secondary to hearing the word of God and to deem no season unseasonable ...; let every season belong to it⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ Let each of us seek how to build within him a dwelling place for God! Let him carry within himself the altar with the commandments so that he will meditate by day and night [2].

Let his very thoughts be an altar where God's word is preserved, as the prophet says: "blessed is he who keeps the word in his heart and obeys it."

May he bear in his heart manna, ie. the sweet knowledge of God's word.

May he have Aaron's rod, i.e., accurate and pure understanding of the holy teaching⁵.

St. Jerome

¹ Childs: *Introduction to the O. T. as Scriptures*, p. 513.

² *Comm. on Songs* 3: 5.

³ *In Ps. Hom. 1.*

⁴ *In John hom. 18: 4.*

⁵ *An Exod. Hom. 9: 4.*

- ❖ Meditation on the divine words is like a trumpet arousing your souls to battle, lest perchance you sleep while your adversary is awake. Therefore, let us meditate on the law of the Lord, not only during the day, but also at night, as the Lord says in the Gospel: "Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation" Matt. (26: 41)¹.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

- ❖ "He will meditate by day and night," is to be understood either as without ceasing; or "by day" in joy, "by night" in tribulations. For it said, "Abraham saw my day, and was glad" (John 8: 56), "my reins also have instructed me, even in the night" (Ps.16: 7).

St. Augustine

If the book of Psalms is the book of heavenly songs, then we cannot enter heaven without the written word of God made incarnate. The Holy Word alone can open our inward eye and through His Holy Spirit can we enjoy seeing and sharing heavenly life, while being still alive in this world. We attain the Holy Word as a promise to enjoy perfect union with Him on the Day of Judgment.

The early church found her paradise in the written word of God and in the Word Incarnate. Thus she lived a heavenly life, fully blessed and satiated.

THE FRUITFUL TREE AND THE CHAFF:

A symbol of the blessedness of the righteous is the fruitful tree, that withstands the buffeting of the winds, and flourishes.

It blesses man, animals and birds with its unfailing fruit and shade (Jer. 17:8). As a result of meditating on the Law of the Lord, we bring forth fruit (John 15:8), and our fruit will be lasting (John 15:16). But we can't be fruitful or prosperous without the waters of the Holy Spirit, who grants us the power to endure the hardships of life [3].

- ❖ The person who has his will in harmony with God's law and cares for it day and night becomes a flourishing tree fed by streams of water, yielding its fruit in due season (Matt. 21:41) How happy is that orchard whose fruit resembles the Bridegroom's beauty. For He is the true light, true life, and true righteousness, and all the rest, as Wisdom says (Prov. 1:3). When a person achieves these qualities by good works, he looks into the cluster of his own conscience and sees the Bridegroom there and mirrors the light of truth by his own pure life².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ We must struggle with all our strength to free ourselves from the preoccupations of the world and from mundane activities, and even, if it is possible, leave behind us the useless talk of our companions, and devote ourselves to God's word and "meditate on His law day and night" [2], so that our conversion might be wholehearted and we might be able to look upon Moses' unveiled face³.

Origen

Fr. Martyrius quotes the words of **st. Gregory the Theologian**: [We should remember God even more than our breathing⁴], saying that meditating on the law of

¹ *Serm. 116: 2.*

² *Comm. on Canticle, Serm. 3.*

³ *On Lev., hom. 6: 1.*

⁴ *Oration 27: 4 (PG 36: 16 B-C and 20 B).*

the Lord is the way to attain this remembrance. He says, [We ought to open our mouths at all times to God, and breathe in the breath of His grace that nourishes our souls with the recollection of Him... Let us do this, meditating continuously on the things of God, and by means of the Lord's law, let our will be grafted on to Him¹].

According to **St. Jerome**, the tree here is a figure of our Lord Jesus Christ and also of us. He says that there is one river that comes forth from the throne of God and one tree alongside the river (Rev. 22: 1-3; 4: 2). This river is the Holy Bible, which has two banks, the Old Testament and the New Testament.

- ❖ During the year, this Tree (Christ) yields twelve fruits, one for each month (Rev. 22: 2), for we are unable to receive the fruits except through the apostles².

St. Jerome

- ❖ Now through the redemption wrought by the Tree of Life, that is, by the Lord's passion, we shall ourselves be like the tree of life; and all that is in us will be eternal and we will have for eternity a sense of blessedness. For they shall prosper in all they do, being no longer uncertain by reason of change nor by nature infirm, when incorruption will swallow up corruption, and eternity will swallow up weakness, and the form of God will swallow up the form of earthly flesh³.

St. Hilary of Poitiers

- ❖ The fruit of the cross is a glorious resurrection. This fruit of the wood is truly planted "*near running water*," for baptism is always joined to the cross. However, this wood produced "its fruit in due season," at the Lord's resurrection⁴.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

The godly man looks like a productive tree, for he practices the joyous and unshakable trust in God, and to him He is everything. The psalmist says, " And whatever he does shall prosper." In other words he succeeds not only in his spiritual life but also in all the aspects of life, for prosperity and success are the characteristics of the true blessed life.

- ❖ Be eager, therefore, to be firmly set in the decrees of the Lord and the apostles so that "in whatever you do you may prosper" [3] in flesh and spirit, in faith and love, in the Son and the Father and in the Spirit, at the beginning and at the end⁵.

St. Ignatius of Antioch

The wicked are used here by way of contrast. As a result of the Fall we find it very hard to appreciate goodness in itself; we must contrast it with badness to see it properly⁶.

In sharp contrast are the wicked, "chaff" carried by the lightest wind [3, 4], and its removal brings about cleansing by extracting what is utterly useless. Thus, the way of the wicked will perish, and his life is meaningless and worthless, for a life lived apart from God is just as empty as the chaff.

¹ *Book of Perfection*, 60.

² *Hom. 1*.

³ *On Ps. 1: 18 (13)*.

⁴ *Serm. 112: 3*.

⁵ *Letter to the Magnesians, 13*.

⁶ *Scripture Union: The Psalms, p. 4*.

The image of the winnowing of the chaff which is frequently used is an illustration of God's judgment (Hos. 13:3; Zeph. 2:2; Isa. 29:5; Ps. 35:5; Matt. 3:12)¹.

- ❖ For even as chaff lies exposed to the gusts of wind, and is easily caught up and swept along, so is also the sinner driven about by every temptation; for whilst he is at war with himself, and bears the warfare about with him, what hope of safety does he possess; betrayed as he is at home, and carrying with him that conscience, which is a constant enemy? Such, however is not the nature of the righteous man².

St. John Chrysostom

Here we must distinguish between the wicked who insist on living in sin and the sinner who is struggling against sin, trusting in the Savior. St. Augustine says, [Every wicked man is a sinner, but not every sinner is a wicked man.]

"So the ungodly will not rise at the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous" [5].

The wicked will not be able to rise to defend themselves as in a court of law, when the judgment comes³. On the last day they will see God in awe looking at them with fiery eyes. As for God's children, they will see Him as the bridegroom coming to carry them to His heavenly glory!

GOD KNOWS THE GODLY

"The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly is doomed" [6].

The Lord's knowledge is not simply intellectual apprehension but an active sharing (Amos 3:2).

- ❖ God knew that Adam was in the garden and He was well aware of what had happened, but because Adam had sinned, God knew him not. And God said, "Adam, where are you?"... Because Abraham had such great faith in sacrificing his own son, on that account God first began to know him (Gen. 22:12). Why have we said all this? Because it is written, "For the Lord knows the way of the just." Let us put it in another way: The Way, the Life, and the Truth is Christ (John 14:6); let us walk, therefore, in Christ and then God the Father will know our way⁴.

St. Jerome

- ❖ I do not see you, who are evil in my light, in the righteousness that I know²⁸!

St. Augustine

God knows the godly man [6], for the latter knows God [2]. It is said that God knows goodness, meaning that He loves it and honors it. But evil is unworthy of God's knowledge. According to **St. Augustine**, [With God, knowledge partakes of being; to be unknown is to cease to exist. "I am who I am," says the Lord; and, "He who is has sent me" (Exod. 3:14).]

Many of the Fathers of the Church state that the godly man here is our Lord Jesus Christ, who became Man to grant us Himself as our righteousness. In Him we attain the new blessed nature through the water of baptism.

¹ Weiser, p. 107.

² *Concerning the Statues*, 8: 4.

³ *Nelson: A New Catholic Comm. On Holy scripture*, p/ 443

⁴ *Hom. 1.*

❖ He (Christ) came indeed in the way of sinners, by being born as sinners are; but He "stood" not therein, for that the enticements of the world held Him not

St. Augustine

ADAM, THE BLESSED MAN

As this section of the Psalter (1- 41) corresponds to the book of Genesis which starts with the creation of the first man, Adam, in his blessed nature, so now the Prophet David starts the Psalter with the blessed "Second Man", for in Him we have been renewed and united as if we are one blessed man, or "one heavenly bride".

According to the Talmud, the three Hebrew letters of Adam's name represent the initials of three persons: Adam, David and the Messiah¹. Adam began, David prophesied and the Messiah (the Second Adam and the Son of David) realized the blessed life.

ADAM:

- a. Adam = the blessed nature is lost.
- d. David = the blessed nature is promised in Christ.
- m. Messiah = the blessed nature obtained.

NOTE

Psalm one is recited or sung in the "Morning Prayer" every day while we are commemorating the resurrection of Christ. Thus, before we start our daily life we ask our Risen Lord to grant us blessed life as a life blessed by divine grace.

¹ See Rabbi Avrohom Feuer *tehillim, Psalms - A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmud, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Messorah Public. Ltd 1985, p. 51.)

A PRAYER

❖ O True Word,
grant me a reflection on Your love day and night;
in prosper and in tribulation!

❖ Carry me, O Way, within You,
that I may attain Your righteousness!

❖ O Crucified One,
who changed the wood into a tree of life,
make me a fruitful tree,
planted beside the flowing waters of Your Holy Spirit.

PSALM 2

LIVE AS A KING

Live as a king!

Psalm 1 presents the royal way of the righteous. This is the way which unites us with God's word night and day. Thus we are able to enjoy a blessed life and avoid the destroying way of the wicked. In Psalm 2, the psalmist presents the Messiah, "the prevailing Lord," as being the narrow but holy way. Through Him, we enter the spiritual battle of the cross and become kings according to Rev.1: 6 "He has made us kings and priests." (rev1: 6)

ROYAL PSALMS

The most important Royal psalms are (Ps. 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144).

Leopold Sabourin states, [The traditional view which held that David wrote most of the psalms was inclined to increase considerably the number of "royal psalms." When the Davidic authorship was reappraised the opposite tendency came to the fore. Mowinckel tells us what happened next: "But in its earlier phase modern scientific study of the psalms tended to deny the presence of any royal figure in the psalms... Where we do meet a royal figure, as in the so called "Messianic" psalms, this figure was interpreted as a personification of the people of Israel. Gunkel was the first to reinterpret the royal psalms with an actual royal figure and place this interpretation on a firm scientific foundation."¹]

We can find in these psalms many aspects:

1. Psalms of the community: The relationship between God and man in the Old and the New Testaments is based essentially on two integral attitudes: the communal and the personal. In the Old Testament the king was the representative of the whole community, therefore the covenant between God and him and between God and the people is one and the same thing. The importance of the king in this light explains why the psalms have been composed in his honor². In these psalms "I" and "we" realize the same role, for the worshiper who utters them is the king who represents the whole or the community who is not separated from the king.

2. Psalms of Christ: The Old Testament shows Jehovah as the true King of His people (Exod. 15: 18; 1 Sam 8: 7, 21). Therefore the king's throne in Jerusalem was called the "throne of the Lord" (1 Chor. 29: 23) or "the throne of the kingdom of the Lord" (1 Chor. 28: 5). The king who represents the whole congregation represents the Lord also, therefore he was called the "Messiah of the Lord," a figure of the Christ who is the King of kings, the Mediator between the Father and the people. He who is one with His Father in essence received the church as His own body, interceding on her behalf by His precious and sacrificial blood. This concept explains why the royal psalms are seen to be specifically concern the Messiah, king and Savior of mankind.

¹ *The Psalms, their origin and meaning. Vol. 2, p. 209-210.*

² *Ibid, p. 209.*

3. Psalms of the inner life: Christ came to establish His kingdom within us (Luke 17: 21), granting us the grace of spiritual kingship as a gift of His Holy Spirit. In Christ - the King of kings- we became kings (Rev. 1: 6).

THE MESSIANIC KING

Ps. 1 begins and Ps. 2 ends with a "beatitude." The blessed nature the psalmist hopes for in Ps. 1 can be realized only through the Universal Messianic King who is revealed in Ps. 2. For in our Lord Jesus Christ believers from all nations are renewed and sanctified by His Holy Spirit. This psalm is frequently quoted in the New Testament, where it is applied to Christ as the King, the great Son of David and God's Anointed (Acts 4: 25ff; 13: 33; Heb. 1: 5; 5: 5¹.)

Jewish and Christian traditions alike consider Ps. 2 as Messianic, like Ps. 110, which seems to follow and depend on it ². Arno C. Gaebelein states: [The Messianic interpretation among the Jews was the only interpretation up to the tenth and eleventh century. Then, to contradict the Christian exposition, the Jews limited the meaning of the psalm to David³.]

This psalm reveals our Savior; by prophesying through David's kingdom, the kingdom of the Messiah, the Son of David, and that is the primary intention and scope of the psalm.⁴

St. John Chrysostom distinguishes between two divine kingdoms saying,[The scriptures acknowledge two kingdoms of God, the one by appropriation, the other by creation. Thus, He is King over all, both Greeks and Jews and devils and His adversaries, as they are all His creation. But He is also King over the faithful and those willing to be His subjects, thereby making them His own. This is the kingdom which is said also to have a beginning according to His words in the second psalm: "Ask of Me, and I shall give You the heathen for Your inheritance" [8]. Relevant to this also, He Himself said to His disciples, "All authority has been given unto Me by My Father" (Matt. 28: 18)⁵.]

The Messiah (Christ) entered into a continuous spiritual battle against Satan, to prepare the royal way for our victory. He accepted to be rejected on our behalf. This rejection (1-3; Acts 4: 25-28) continues throughout the ages and culminates in the abysmal apostate of the great tribulation. We are not a party in the battle, but we have to be hidden in one of the two parties. If we are hidden in Christ we will be rejected for His Name's sake, but surely we will conquer, and God will judge the Christ- rejecting world. That has denied Him.

A CORONATION PSALM

This royal psalm is called "a coronation psalm," perhaps as it was composed for the coronation of David as king. It was evoked by the promise of 2 Sam. 7: 8-16, and has probably been used at the coronation of David's successors, not to hail them as the Messiah, but to remind them of the one they symbolize.

¹ *The NIV Study Bible, 1985, p. 787.*

² *Sabourin, Vol. 2, p. 213.*

³ *Arno C. Gaebelein: The Book of Psalms, 1982, p. 21.*

⁴ *Matthew Henery, Psalm II.*

⁵ *In Cor. Hom. 39: 11.*

Carroll Stummueller says, [While Psalm 1 comes from the **sapiential** movement with a more humanistic outlook, Psalm 2 originated in a more political setting, related to the coronation ceremony of new kings at Jerusalem temple and the royal palace. Because royalty protected the sapiential movement - King Solomon became the wise person per excellence (cf. 1 Kings 4: 29- 34)¹ - the combination of the sapiential Psalm 1 and the royal Psalm 2 as a prologue to the Psalter is not surprising.]

Ps 2 declares how the pagan kings are against the new anointed and coronated king who is a symbol of the Messianic King.

Some scholars see this psalm as a coronation psalm sung in the following order:

* Verses 1-2 were sung by the temple choir about the rebellion of the pagan kings against God's rule as exercised through His anointed king.

* Verse 3: A special choral group speaks in the name of these kings.

* Verses 4-6: The heavenly setting, mirrored in the temple, for the coronation ritual (Divine derision). This stanza voices God's reaction to the kings' rebellion. The mere words of God suffice to terrify pagan kings.

* Verses 7-9: The enthronement, spoken by a prophet in the name of the Lord (Divine decree). This stanza shows the king's confidence based on God's word.

* Verses 10-12: A call to universal submission addressed to the kings.

WHO IS THIS KING ?

1. The Anointed One:

"The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and His Anointed" [2].

Many royal psalms are concerned with the sacred office of the king; here specially shown as chosen by God.

The king's anointing was a sacred act (1 Sam. 10: 1); the king was "the Lord's anointed" applied to both Saul and David². The revolt against the anointed king is also against God. This is the same thing: the hatred of the world against the church and her saintly children is against Christ Himself, as He said to Saul (Acts 9: 5.)

The English word "Messiah" comes from the Hebrew word "Mashiah" for "anointed one," and the English word "Christ" from the Greek word Christos for "anointed one." He is anointed to represent us in the spiritual battle, granting us His own victory (1 John 2: 13). In Him we also become the anointed ones (through the Chrism), members of His holy Body, children of God, and victims of love on behalf of others.

He means by the kings and rulers the wicked leaders who had separate interests, but at the moment of the crucifixion they were united against Christ. Not only the mighty but also the mob and the people, were united and cried, "crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Our Lord says: They have hated both Me and My Father (John 15: 24). They hated Him and His Father saying, "Let us break Their bonds asunder, and cast away Their yoke from us" [3]. They refused to be under their government, and could not endure their yoke of love and holiness, saying, "We will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19: 14).

The wicked hate us also as we are the anointed ones. Our Lord says, "For if they do these things to the green wood, what will be done to the dry?" (Luke 23: 31).

¹ C. Stuhmueller, p. 62.

² Nelson: A New Catholic Comm. On Holy Sripture, p. 444.

2. The Heavenly enthroned One [2, 4]:

The agitation and rebellion on earth [1] are confronted with the picture of the sublime peace that reigns in heaven. The helpless kings of the earth are contrasted with the superior might of God who is the King of heaven¹. In Him we attain the heavenly life and the pledge of eternal life.

❖ *"He who dwells in the heavens shall laugh at them" [4]*

If by "heaven" we understand holy souls, God (who dwells in His saints), foreknows what is to come, and "shall laugh at them, and shall hold them in derision."

St. Augustine

He is in the heaven, out of the reach of all their impotent menaces and attempts. There He has prepared His throne for judgment; therefore the attempts of the enemies are easily ridiculed. He laughs at them as a company of fools. He shall hold them in derision, and therefore His Church, the virgin and the daughter of Zion, has despised them (Isa. 37: 22). She is built upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her (Matt. 16: 18).

St. Cyril of Alexandria says that He who dwells in the heaven shall laugh at them, because the Lord indeed, being the Son, and Heir since He is in essence one with the Father and enjoys the authority of God the Father, having become Man, called those who believe in Him unto communion and participation of His heavenly kingdom and of His eternal glories. But the wicked in their pride, refused, thinking that they could reign without Him.²

This prophecy has been fulfilled when the Jews rejected our Lord. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Christ Himself declares, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matt. 23: 38). And His parables declare the same thing when He says, "What shall the Lord of that vineyard do to those husbandmen? He shall miserably destroy those wicked men", (Matt. 21: 40,41)³.]

3. The King

In Christ the True King, we become kings (Rev. 1: 6), and have authority over our emotions, senses, bodies, minds etc...

Christ as a King reigns over our hearts not through authority but through love, so that we also as spiritual kings must gain others through the openness of our hearts to all mankind.

4. The Only-Begotten Son [7]

"You are My Son, today I have begotten You." St. Paul quotes this verse (Heb. 1: 5) to prove that Christ has a more excellent name than the angels, being the Only-begotten Son of God not by adoption but by inheritance, and having the same nature with the Father.

¹ Weiser, p. 112.

² Comm. On Luke, hom. 134.

³ In Joan, hom, 53.

- ❖ The Father says, "I have begotten;" He does not say, "I have created." And the Son doesn't call God His Creator in the eternity of His divine Generation, but Father¹.

The word "today" and not "yesterday," refers to that which was spoken of the assumption of our flesh to the eternity of the divine generation².

St. Ambrose

- ❖ The Father shows Him to be His own proper and only Son, saying, "You are My Son," [7] and "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3: 17). Accordingly, the angels ministered unto Him, as being one beyond themselves, and they worshiped Him, not as being greater in glory, but as being someone beyond all the creatures, and beyond themselves, and alone the Father's proper Son according to essence³.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

In Him we become children of God. It is worthy to note that many pagan peoples believed that their kings were begotten by the deity. The Old Testament rejected the idea of the physical divine sonship of the king as incompatible with its spiritual notion of God (Ps. 89: 26f.; 2 Sam. 7: 14; 1 Chor. 28: 6).

5. The High-Priest

The Messiah is the King, The Son of God and the High-priest, who has the authority to enter heaven and intercede for the whole nation offering His self-sacrifice. The psalmist refers to Christ as the Advocate of believers [8], after mentioning His kingdom and His sonship to the Father. This intercession is the hope of the world (John 17: 20).

- ❖ "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance" [8]. This has at once a temporal sense with reference to the Manhood which He took upon Himself, who offered Himself in a Sacrifice which replaces all other sacrifices, who also makes intercession for us...

St. Augustine

6. The Saviour of the world [10]

In Him we become members of the universal Church, at the same time we feel the responsibility of witnessing to Him before the world.

THE RAGED PEOPLE AND KINGS

When, in the great empires of the ancient Orient, the mighty ruler died, then all nations were in a state of extreme agitation. At such times, the nations which had been brought into bondage screamed and the yearning for freedom was aroused. It was often the primary and the most urgent task of a new king on his accession to the throne to consolidate and establish afresh the power of his great empire⁴. The psalmist expresses his surprise that the nations and their kings did the same on the occasion of the enthronement of the Messianic King on the cross, for He establishes His spiritual

¹ *Of the Christian Faith*, 5: 10 (122).

² *Ibid*, 5: 1 (24).

³ *Four Discourses against the Arians*, 2: 23.

⁴ *Weiser*, p. 109.

kingdom to liberate them from the tyrant king. That tyrant king is the devil, who has long had an usurped kingdom and exercised dominion to such a degree that he has been called the prince of the power of the very air (Eph. 2: 2), we breathe in and the god of this world where (2 Cor. 4: 4) we live. Satan knows very well that as Christ's kingdom rises he falls aground. Our Lord says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10: 18).

❖ Power was granted unto Satan (Luke 22: 53) and the Jews to rise up against Christ: but they dug for themselves the pitfall of destruction. For He indeed saved, by means of His passion, all those under heaven, and rose the third day, having trampled under foot the empire of death. But they brought down upon their own heads inevitable condemnation in company with that traitorous disciple. Let them hear, therefore, the Holy Spirit, who says through the voice of the Psalmist, "Why have the heathen raged, and the nations meditated vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ ...[1] These wretched beings then involved themselves in the crime of murdering their Lord; but we praise Him as our Savior and Deliverer our Lord Jesus Christ¹.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

The Jews in their imagination, and in their plotting to act unjustly against the Lord, forgot that they were bringing wrath upon themselves. Therefore does the Word lament for them, saying, "Why do the people exalt themselves and the nations imagine vain things? [1]. For vain indeed was the imagination of the Jews, meditating death against Life, and devising unreasonable things against the Word of the Father².

The imagination of the Jews, and of those who are like them, was vain, since the result was not such as they contemplated, but turned out adverse to themselves; and at both of them He that sits in the heaven shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision [4]. Hence, when our Savior was led to death, He restrained the women who followed Him weeping, saying, "Weep not for Me" (Luke 22: 28); meaning to show that the Lord's death is an event, not of sorrow but of joy, and that He Who dies for us is alive³.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

❖ "Why do the heathens rage, and the people imagine vain things?" [1]... It is said "Why?" as if it were said, in vain. For what they wished, namely, Christ's destruction, they accomplished not; for this is spoken of our Lord's persecutors, of whom also mention is made in the Acts of the Apostles.

St. Augustine

This is the position of the wicked who rejected Him as the spiritual King, but for us His dominion is joyful and His yoke is very sweet.

❖ If we humbly lower our neck to receive the yoke of Christ, it will carry us rather than be carried by us; for though the yoke of the world always presses a man down, Christ's yoke is wont to lift him up. Now since every man is either raised up by carrying Christ

¹ *Comm.. On Luke hom 148.*

² *Paschal letters, 11: 5.*

³ *Ibid, 11: 14.*

or pressed down to lower things by bearing the yoke of the world, each one should examine his own conscience¹.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

Our Savior, who destroyed demons as evil kings, enthrones His believers as spiritual kings. **St. Augustine** says, [O you who are now kings, since you are able, on the one hand, to govern whatever is base and sensual in yourselves, and, on the other, to fight, not as beating the air, to chastise your bodies and bring them into subjection (1 Cor. 9: 26, 27)... Now that I am hence forth enthroned as king, be not sad].

It is worthy to note that the anger or the wrath of the Lord is not a revenge for Himself, but it is an expression of God's righteousness that cannot accept sin or evil.

THE NEED FOR DISCIPLINE [10-13]

Weiser says that the psalm reverts to its starting-point by addressing the rulers of the earth, exhorting and warning them. They must humble themselves before the Almighty God and must serve Him with fear and trembling. The phrase "kiss His feet" is applied to God in a truly human fashion and is probably derived from the custom of kissing the feet of the king as an act of homage, a custom which is well known to us from Babylonian and Egyptian documents.

Rabbi Ibn-Ezra understands this phrase "kiss His feet" as indicating the Messiah².

After warning the rulers and nations who rage against God and His Christ, David mentions discipline as a method of correction, as he says, "Embrace correction and discipline, lest the Lord be angry, and you perish through leaving the right way."

❖ To be chastised of the Lord, and instructed, is deliverance from death³.

St. Clement of Alexandria

❖ Discipline is the safeguard of hope, the bond of faith, the guide of the way of salvation, the stimulus and nourishment of good dispositions. Discipline is the teacher of virtue that causes us to abide always in Christ, and to live continually for God, and to attain the heavenly promises and divine rewards. To follow her is wholesome, and to turn away from her and neglect her is deadly⁴.

St. Cyprian

❖ Discipline is a kind of protection and defense against all that might harm us.

❖ We must not think of the Lord's anger [5] as implying any disturbance of mind. Rather it is the power whereby He asserts His rights in all justice, since every creature is subject to His service⁵.

St. Augustine

"SERVE THE LORD WITH FEAR AND REJOICE IN HIM WITH TREMBLING" [11]

¹ *Sermon 107: 4.*

² *Nelson, p. 444.*

³ *Paed. 1: 7.*

⁴ *Treatise 2: 1.*

⁵ *Disc. On Ps. 2.*

In worshipping God we should have our hearts filled with a holy awe of God, but at the same time borne up with a joyful confidence in Him. Consequently, the early Fathers see a kind of integration between the holy fear of God and spiritual joy. For worship and spiritual discipline create not only a kind of fear and awe but also an inner joy.

Concerning fear of God we quote the following statements:

- ❖ Let us see what sort of person a saint ought to be: gentle, meek, sorrowful, mournful, and contrite. A man then who jests in his dealings is no saint. For where filthiness is, there also is jesting; and where unseasonable laughter is, there also is jesting. Hearken to what the prophet says, "Serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice with trembling" [11]. Jestings renders the soul soft and indolent. It excites the soul unduly, and often it teems with acts of violence, and creates wars¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ When you repeat a psalm, consider whose words are repeated and delight yourself more with true contrition of soul, than with the pleasantness of a trilling voice. For God sets a higher value on the tears of one thus praising him, than on the beauty of his voice; as the prophet says, "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling." Now, where there is fear and trembling, there is no lifting up of the voice, but humility of mind with lamentation and tears².

Pseudo- Sulpitius Severus

- ❖ Though it is a great thing to serve God, and it is said, "Serve the Lord in fear" and it is a great thing for you to be called My servant (Isa. 49: 6);... yet it is said to the apostles, " I no longer call you servants, for the servant knows not what his Lord does..." (John 15: 15). You see then that there are different stages of perfection, and that we are called by the Lord to walk from high things to still higher ones in such a way that he who has become blessed and perfect in the fear of God, moves as it is written "from strength to strength" (Ps. 84: 7)³.

Abbot Chaeremon

- ❖ It is appropriate that we stand before God with a wakeful and attentive mind, combining a sense of awe and trembling with the spiritual fervor of joy and deep love (Rom. 12: 11-12).⁴

Fr. Marturius

- ❖ If you remember the Judge only when you are in difficulties as One who inspires fear and who is incorruptibly honest, then you have not as yet learned to "serve the Lord in fear and to rejoice in him with trembling"⁵.

Fr. Evagrius Ponticus

- ❖ There is exultation, that we may give thanks; trembling, lest we fall⁶.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

¹ *In Eph. Hom. 17.*

² *Letter 2: 19.*

³ *Cassian, Conf. 11: 12.*

⁴ *Book of Perfection, 2.*

⁵ *Chapters on Prayer, 143.*

⁶ *Sermon, 134: 3.*

The author of the Book of Steps, written in the fourth century says, [When someone has been delivered from servitude to death, he serves the Lord in joy, and not in sorrow¹].

THE RISEN CHRIST

According to Coptic tradition, we sing this psalm in the Morning Prayer, as a psalm of the Risen King. C. Stuhmueller says, [Jesus fulfills the psalm by becoming king, not at his birth from the Davidic line, acquired through his foster-father Joseph (Matt. 1: 16-17; Luke 1: 32), but rather through his resurrection from the dead, enthronement at God's right hand and sending of the Spirit (Acts 4: 25-26; 13: 33; Heb.1: 5; 5: 5).]

This psalm is concluded by the words, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" [12].

❖ Trust is more than faith. For when we believe that the Son of God is our Teacher, we trust that His teaching is true².

St. Clement of Alexandria

¹ *Discourse 18: On the Tears of Prayer, 1.*

² *Stromata, 5: 13.*

PSALM 3

GOD IS MY SAVIOR

This psalm is a personal lament, through it the believer expresses every morning what he expects of sufferings and troubles, due to the unceasing battle of salvation. Moreover, the tone changes into a song of salvation that fills the soul with joy and peace. This arises from an inner vision of the resurrection of Christ which reflects upon us the spirit of victory even over death, and grants us participation in the divine glory, and bestows upon us unceasing divine blessings.

In other words this psalm is both a bitter lament and a joyful song at the same time. It is a military song that we recite during our spiritual battle and a hymn of victory for the teeth of the wicked is broken, so that we consider them ridiculous while God is glorified and His people are blessed.

This psalm touches the personal life of David and offers a prophecy concerning the person of Christ, the son of David. It touches the life of every one of us in his personal relationship with his Savior, and also touches the life of the holy community as a whole. The psalm begins in the singular but ends in the plural: "Your blessing is upon your people."

IT'S POSITION

Psalms 1 and 2 are considered as an introduction to the whole Psalter. In Ps. 1 the psalmist declares that nobody can sing hymns joyfully and praise God without attaining "blessedness"(Ps1: 1). In Ps. 2 the psalmist shows that this blessedness is granted to us by the Messiah-King against whom the evil one and his followers are rebellious, and not due to our own merit.

Having considered the first two psalms as an introduction, Psalms 3 and 4 represent the entrance to the collection of the psalms, the former is a morning psalm, and the latter is an evening one (4: 8). Every morning the pious believer sings this hymn as he remembers that he has to suffer but he never loses his inner peace and joy. He looks to the resurrection of Christ that occurred early in the morning and that opens up to him the gates of the kingdom of God. In other words, he is not confused since he attains the new risen life, waiting every morning for His Crucified and Risen Christ to come quickly.

PERSONAL LAMENT

Psalms 3, 4 and 5 as personal laments were composed as David the Prophet fled from his son Absalom (2 Sam. 15: 8). In Ps. 3 David declares that the battle was not personal between himself and his son, but between God and the devil. In Ps. 4 he sees that righteousness as a source of victory is not his own but God's own righteousness. God Himself is his righteousness. Finally, in Ps. 5 he turns his attention to Ahithophel, the wicked advisor to Absalom who is comparable to the antichrist.

Psalm 3 is a personal lament. The psalmist feels personally helpless, totally alone before a converging multitude of hostile people. At the same time, this psalm is so communal, for what affects the personal life of a member has its effect upon the whole community. However, this psalm can be applied to any sad situation, especially when the sufferer feels abandoned and betrayed, hemmed in by hostile people.

Some scholars argue that the author must be a king (like David), imperiled as he is by so many adversaries [2], by "myriads of people" [7]. Others modify this theory and think that it is an individual Israelite who uses phrases that may have been originally part of royal laments¹.

St. Augustine states that this psalm is set by David on behalf of the Messiah, the Son of David. He says, [The words of this psalm... lead us to believe that we must apply them to the Person of Christ. For they are more in keeping with our Lord's passion and resurrection than with the account which history gives of David's flight before the face of his own rebellious son.]

It is interesting to note that this lament psalm has been used in the ancient ritual of exorcism against evil spirits, for the Church sees that her authority over evil and evil spirits is based upon the resurrection of Christ.

OUTLINE

1. An appeal to the Lord [1-2].
2. Confidence in the resurrection [3-6].
3. A second cry for help [7].
4. Salvation belongs to the Lord [8].

The main thought of this psalm is that we attain divine salvation through the resurrection of our Christ in spite of the multitude of adversaries that assail us.

CHRIST, THE PERSECUTED ONE

1. *"O Lord, how many are those who trouble me!"* [1]. David, being now driven out from his place, from the royal city, from the holy ark of the covenant, and from his people by his rebellious son Absalom, who formed a conspiracy against him, to take away, not his crown only but his life (1 Sam. 15) complains to God His refuge. In his flight, he goes up the Mount of Olives, in great grief, he weeps greatly, with his head covered, and marching bare-footed. He weeps, prays and sings this lament. Tribulations could not drive him from God, on the contrary this drives him to the shadow of the resurrection of Christ, the Son of David correlated to suffering and crucifixion.

Truly David was suffering for his sin committed with Uriah; and God threatened to raise up against him someone out of his house (2 Sam. 12: 11), yet he did not cast away his trust in his God. Even his grief was changed into joy as he believes in the redeeming work of God.

It is not only a great number of enemies, who have risen against the psalmist, but his friends, too [2], have turned their backs on him. He is left alone to endure the trial and through his faith he believed that God never forsakes him. Forsaken by the multitude of enemies and friends, he clings the more firmly to his God².

Tertullian sees that Christ, the Son of David, speaks here to His Father, on our behalf, for in our suffering we feel lonely and helpless. He says, [Hear the Son's utterances respecting the Father: "O Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!" [1]. Almost all the psalms which prophesy of the person of Christ, represent the Son as conversing with the Father - that is, represent Christ as speaking to God³.] Christ had

¹ *The Jerome Biblical Comm.*, p/ 576.

² *See Weiser*, p. 117.

³ *Against Praxeas*, 11.

many enemies: the wicked leaders of the Jews, a great multitude and even one of His disciples participate in His crucifixion.

2. David notices that those enemies are malicious, they aim to trouble him, for they blasphemously considered upon God as unable to relieve him: "His danger is so great that God cannot help him. They endeavored to shake his confidence in God and drive him to despair¹."

❖ *"Many say to my soul, There is no salvation for him in his God"* [2]... To this end are those speeches, "Let Him come down from the cross, if He be the Son of God;" and again, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." (Matt. 27:42)...

St. Augustine

This is the most serious attack that the enemy directs against us, I mean that we lose our trust in God our Savior, which destroys us with despair. Therefore **St. John Chrysostom** wrote to his fallen friend Theodore, who loved a Jewish woman called Hermoine, and broke his vow of virginity and his life in Christ, to show that by despair he strikes the face of his Savior even more than by his adultery, for despair is a sin of atheism... it is a denial of the redeeming work of God.

However great our sin, we have to trust in God our Savior, Bestower of forgiveness. If we lose our hope, all sins enter in our life through despair as **St. Philoxinus** says.

Absalom's rebellion against David was a chastisement for the father's sin. David's sin could remove his glory and make him worthy of death (2 Sam. 12:7), but his son's rebellion could not do that.

3. *"I laid down to rest and slept; I awaked"* [5]. Many lie down and cannot sleep, due to pain of body, or anguish of mind, or the continual alarms of fear. Many lie down and sleep, and never awake again, they sleep the sleep of death, as the first-born of the Egyptians (Exod. 12:29).

❖ It may be appropriately remarked, that it is expressly said, 'I,' to signify that of His own Will Christ underwent death, according to the verse, "therefore does My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man takes it from Me; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:17, 18).

St. Augustine

❖ *"O Lord, how many are those who trouble me?"* [1]. It is obvious that unless they had disbelieved in His resurrection, they would never have put Him to death. Their taunts witness to this fact: "If He be the Son of God, let Him now come down from the cross"; and, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save" (Matt. 27:42)..

St. Augustine

St. Augustine states that this psalm witnesses to both the risen Person of Christ and His Church, which is His own Body (1 Cor. 12:27). It is the psalm of every one of us, who participates in the suffering of our Christ. We should feel joyful even while we suffer, since the power and joy of the resurrection works in us as a daily experience. Thus we attain the fellowship with God.

¹ Matthew Henry, Psalm III.

THE LORD IS MY SAVIOR

Through the shadow of suffering David the king acknowledges, by the spirit of prophecy, the power of the resurrection of Christ, therefore suffering becomes not a source of losing his trust in God, but a confirmation of the redeeming work of God, and of discovering God as his Shield, Glory and Lifter of his head. He feels that although he is a runaway he enjoys the divine presence as if he were in Zion, attaining the power of the victorious life over death.

1. The enemies try to shake David's trust in God since He's unable to relieve him; but he's driven to God as his shield, his glory and the lifter up of his head [3]:

a. God as his shield [3]: Absalom had the crowds with him, but the rejected, outcast and fugitive king David had God as his protector and the shield which saves him from any kind of danger. He is his encourager and victory. He says, "***But You, O Lord, are a shield for me***" [3]. Let them say what they will, but he is sure that his God would never desert him. He has experienced dealing with Him, (God is his own, protects him as his Lord and protector.)

❖ The work (of God) is that we conquer and that we attain victory over the enemy in the great battle¹.

St. Cyprian

b. God as his glory [3]: David was now in disgrace, the crown had fallen from his head, his son was rebellious, the people were against him; but he has God for his own inner glory and honor (Isa. 60:19).

c. The psalmist is convinced that God, his inner glory [3], will "lift up his head" with joy, out of his troubles, i.e., will restore his honor before his enemies (Satan and his angels), men and the heavenly creatures. The Lord alone can grant him victory and salvation, thus causing him to rejoice.

2. David was driven out from the holy city, and from the ark on the holy mountain, but God who dwells there fills all the earth and can hear the voice of David's heart wherever he is. The enemies could not form a gulf between the communication of God's grace and His man, David, who says, "He answers me from His holy mountain" [4]. By faith David receives answers of peace from the holy mountain in spite of his banishment. In (psalm 2: 6) we see Christ is set King upon the holy hill Zion, and it is through Him, whom the Father hears always, that our prayers are heard.

The reference to the Lord's holy hill [4], the place of the Lord's sanctuary, the earthly counterpart of His heavenly room² is a clear call to bring every human problem into the Lord's sacred presence.

3. Absalom is a symbol of Satan who incites the nations (Jews and Gentiles) against the Son of David in the battle of Calvary. Therefore, this psalm is recited by the bishop or the priest on Good Friday, during the rite of the burial of Christ, saying, "***I lay down and slept***" [5], looking at Christ's death and resurrection as sleep and awakening. Satan believed that he had destroyed Christ and had got rid of Him upon His crucifixion. He did not realize that Christ's death was merely a slumber which is followed by an awaking. Our Christ uttered strong cries in His sufferings, and was heard for He is the

¹ Ep. 76: 5.

² NIV Study Bible, p. 788.

obedient Son, by whom the Father is pleased. Therefore, though He laid down in the tomb, and slept the sleep of death, yet He was awake the third day in incorruption.

The Psalmist starts with the scene of the arena of the battle, but immediately his sight is concentrated on the Lord, the Source of victory, peace and salvation, and on His blessing on God's people. It is a divine battle through which victory over the unseen enemy is sure, God's salvation is obtained, and God's people are blessed [8].

This psalm has been called "a Morning Psalm" for David declares that he used to sleep in perfect peace even while being pursued because of his confidence in the Lord. We pray this psalm in the morning, complaining to our Savior that there is a multitude of vices and lusts attacking our minds in the law of sin. These mock our souls but we hope in Him as our Savior.

THE VOICE OF THE HEART

The psalmist who was used to worshipping God before the holy ark in the holy city, now is far away, marching bare-footed. He pours out his heart to the Lord who answers him from the holy mountain of the Church, as if David, who is banished, is inside the house of God, or in heaven itself.

❖ *"With my voice have I cried unto the Lord"* [4]; that is, not with the physical voice, which is drawn out with the sound of the vibration of the air; but with the voice of the heart, which to men speaks not, but with God sounds as a cry. By this voice Susanne was heard; and with this voice the Lord Himself commanded that prayer should be made in closets (Matt. 6: 6), that is, in the recesses of the heart noiselessly. This is the prayer of all the saints, the odor of sweetness, which ascends up in the sight of the Lord.

St. Augustine

Tertullian states that it is the voice of the Word, who used to speak in the prophets, that now prays to His Father¹. If it is the voice of David why does he say, "With my voice"? For there is no need to say this expression, for everybody cries by his own voice. But Christ says that to reveal His love as He cries with His own voice to ask His Father for our sake. **St. Justine**² states that the Lord who remained upon the tree almost until evening, then was buried at eventide; then on the third day He rose again is the same who cried and was answered.

If Christ cried as our representative and was heard of the father for our sakes, then this answer was issued from His holy mountain [3], which is Christ Himself. Every answer is realized through Him, or through our faith in Him. St. Augustine speaks about Christ as the Mountain: ["And He answers me from His holy mountain" [3]. Another prophet applies the term mountain to our Lord Himself, when he writes that "the stone that was cut out of a mountain without hands became a great mountain" (Dan. 2:34, 35)].

THE RISEN CHRIST

"I lie down to rest and I sleep, I awake and rise, for the Lord sustains me"[4]. The psalmist speaks of the inner quietness with which he goes to sleep in the Lord's care in spite of the many dangers surrounding him, because of his confidence in the Lord.

¹ *Against Marcion 4: 13.*

² *Dialogue with Trypho, 97.*

Truly it was a dark night of temptations and he struggled much, but his trust in the Lord was more established. Through the night of temptations the Sun of Righteousness shines within our hearts granting us His joyous risen life.

The psalmist speaks here about death as a "sleep" and resurrection as an "awakening." For the separation of the body from the soul for the believer is just a temporary sleep, while the separation of the soul from Her God is eternal death.

- ❖ A sinner, while he is living, is dead to God; and a righteous man, though dead, is alive unto God. For such death is a sleep, as David said, "**I lay down and slept, and awoke**" [4]. Again Isaiah said, "They that sleep in the dust shall awake" (26: 19). And our Lord said concerning the daughter of the chief of the synagogue, "the damsel is not dead, but sleeping a slumber" (Matt 9: 24). And concerning Lazarus, He said to His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to waken him" (John 11: 11). And the apostle said, "We shall not all sleep, but shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15: 51). And again he said, "Concerning those that sleep, be you not grieved" (1 Thess. 4: 13)¹.

Fr. Aphrahat

St. Justine in his first apology declares that the Son is speaking here².

- ❖ He not only figuratively calls the resurrection of Christ rising from sleep; but to the descent of the Lord into the flesh he also applies the figurative term sleep³.

St. Clement of Alexandria

THE TEETH OF SINNERS

The psalmist does not mean the literal meaning of the "teeth." **Origen** says, [It is perfectly clear that in these passages (ps3:7; 5:9; 55:9 etc.) the members can in no way be applied to the visible body, but must be referred to the parts and powers of the invisible soul.]

"You break the teeth of sinners" [7].

Those who are in revolt against God's king are compared to wild beasts, whose offensive weapons are their teeth. David prays that the Lord, like a Warrior, will defeat the taunting enemies, disarming them.

The Lord has already smitten the enemies by His resurrection, just as a man breaks the teeth of the wild beasts to present them helpless even before the children.

- ❖ You have broken the teeth of the sinners" [7]..., that is the words of sinners are cursing the Son of God, brought to nought, as it were to dust; so that we may understand "teeth" thus, as words of cursing (Gal.5: 15)...(The teeth of sinners can also be taken as reference to the chiefs of sinners ...)
- ❖ The teeth of sinners can also signify their ringleaders, who exert their influence in order to cut off men from the way of the upright, and incorporate them into the society of evildoers. To these teeth are opposed the teeth of the Church, by whose authority believers are cut off from the errors of paganism and heretical doctrines and are thus directed to turn to church, the Body of Christ. With these teeth Peter was told to eat the

¹ *Demonstration 8 of the Resurrection of the dead, 18. (See also the First Epistle of St. Clement "of Rome", 26).*

² *Apology 1: 38.*

³ *Stromata 5: 14.*

animals when they had been killed, that is, by killing paganism in the Gentiles, and changing them into what he was himself (a member of Christ's body).

St. Augustine

The teeth that are sharpened against God and His people shall be broken, for His arm is never slow to save!

SALVATION BELONGS TO THE LORD [8]

"Salvation belongs to the Lord, and Your blessing is upon Your people" [8].

What does it mean? No man should take any credit to himself, because the Lord alone can deliver us from the death of sin.

The psalm ends with a note of victory. This verse perhaps was sung as a refrain by the entire congregation, who stands before the Lord, their royal King. The Lord's glory is manifest in the salvation and blessing of His people. **St. Irenaeus** wrote, "The glory of God is in the living human being" [Gloria Dei, vivens homo].

God is glorified in man who has been granted life and salvation. Consequently, the main thought of this psalm is that God is the Saviour of man as well as His whole people or congregation.

❖ *"How many are saying of my soul, There is no salvation for him in his God. But You, O Lord, are my protector, my glory, and the lifter up of my head" [2,3].*

@B CROSS1 = For otherwise the enemies could never hope to destroy the Church which was spreading in every place, unless they supposed that the Lord had no care for her...

"The lifter up of my head," who is Christ of course, for in taking on humanity, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1: 14), He has also taken upon Himself the Church, and has made us sit together with Him in the heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6). When the Head goes before and ascends to heaven the other members will follow; for, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8: 35). Justly then does the Church say, "You are my glory and the lifter of my Head".

St. Augustine

St Augustine makes a comparison between the earthly and heavenly cities, saying:

[The earthly lifts up its head in its own glory, the Heavenly City says to its God, "My glory, You lift up my head" [3].

In the former, the lust for domination rules over its princes as over the nations it subjugates; in the latter both those placed in authority and those subject to them serve one another in love, the rulers by their counsel, the subjects by obedience.

The one city loves its own strength shown in its powerful leaders; the other says to its God: "I will love you, my Lord, my strength" (Ps. 18:1)¹.]

The enemy in mocking the psalmist uses a general word for God "Elohim" [2], saying that He has abandoned him, while the psalmist uses the word Jehovah [the Lord] that designates God and His covenant with His people.

In singing this psalm in time of suffering, we consider ourselves participating in the suffering of our Christ and attaining the strength of His resurrection which is a blessing that fills us in many ways:

¹ *City of God. 14: 24.*

1. We enjoy the risen life [5].
2. We get rid of fear even of the countless enemies who set themselves against us all around [6].
3. The teeth of the wicked (their wickedness) are broken, but they themselves could be saved by repentance.
4. God is glorified in us since we have attained salvation [8].
5. The people are blessed by God [8].

In other words David feels that his salvation which he has attained from his God personally has its effect not only on his life but also on the life of the wicked ones before whom he witnesses and on the people as a whole.

It is worthy to note that wars and battles mentioned in the Old Testament are historical events that offer spiritual meaning for the Christian person, looking to Satan and sin as his true enemies.

- ❖ Unless those carnal wars (i.e. of the Old Testament) were a symbol of spiritual wars, I do not think that the Jewish historical books would ever have been passed down by the apostles to be read by Christ's followers in their churches... Thus, the apostle, being aware that physical wars have become personal battles of the soul against spiritual adversaries, gives orders to the soldiers of Christ like a military commander when he says, "Put on the armor of God so as to be able to hold your ground against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6: 11)¹.

Origen

¹ In *Joshua, hom, 15:1*.

Prayer

- ❖ How many are those who trouble me?
May they throw me even in a grave...
There I shall find You who are risen,
and I shall be risen with You.
- ❖ Why do they destroy my life in despair?
You are my glory, and the lifter of my head!
- ❖ May You break the teeth of sinners,
and redeem their souls!

PSALM 4

GOD IS MY RIGHTEOUSNESS

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSALM 3 AND PSALM 4

This lament shows a more vigorous confidence in the Lord's protection of the just than in most instances of the genre; it can be called a "song of trust"¹.

On account of verses 4 and 8, this psalm is called an "evening hymn." It is closely related to Ps. 3 as evening and morning prayers, due to the repetition of key words or phrases which denote this link.

Evening time is the occasion but not the main theme of the psalm, which is concerned with inward peace [8] even in times of perplexity. The approach of night, with its temptation to brood on past wrongs [4] and present perils, only challenges David to express his faith explicitly and to urge others, as a personal commitment towards his faithful Creator².

Absalom's revolt, which gave rise to Psalm 3, could still be the background here; for David is, as he was then, humiliated [2] and surrounded by lies [2], exasperation [4] and gloom [6]. But such emotions can arise on more occasions than one, and therefore the psalm is used in public as well as in personal worship³.

David, the Prophet, had experienced that the divine mercy was his innermost treasure and his strongest support, which he could always rely on in any kind of affliction. This divine mercy grants him a healthy humbleness, teaching him not to trust in his own but in God's righteousness, who grants him victory. He urges Absalom and the masses who blindly followed him and who were deceived by Ahithophel the true spoiler, to repent and to attain the pious and joyful life, which he enjoyed.

THE TITLE (SUBSCRIPTION)

According to the Septuagint: "*Unto the end, a psalm of David.*"

This psalm speaks about "God my righteousness," denying our own righteousness, therefore the subscription "Unto the end" refers to Christ, our Righteousness, who is the end or aim of our life.

- ❖ "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes" (Rom. 10:4). For this "end" signifies perfection, not consumption!

St. Augustine

- ❖ When the psalm is read and you hear, "Unto the end, a psalm of David," do not understand it except as designating Christ, for the apostle says, "Christ is the consummation of the Law unto justice" Rom. 10:4. If you come to anything else, pass beyond it until you reach the end⁴.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

Some scholars see that the phrase "Unto the end" is supposed to be that this psalm is to be sung always, perpetually, or even frequently, thus declaring this composition of great value and utility.

¹ *Collegevill Bible Commen., p. 756.*

² *Kinder: The Psalms, p. 55.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Sermon 137: 1.*

The subscription according to the Hebrew text is, "To the chief musician on "neginoth" (on the stringed instrument), "a psalm of David."

Fifty-three of the psalms and the third chapter of Habakkuk are inscribed to the chief musician. The musicians and singers were divided into classes. They all prophesied according to the order of the king (1 Chro. 25: 2). Some prophesied with the harp, to give thanks, and to praise the Lord. Others lifted up the horn. All of them sang in the house of the Lord, and were instructed in the songs of the Lord.

Addressing the psalm to one of the pious leaders shows that it was for the whole church and not for one man. It is public property¹.

OUTLINE

1. Opening call for help [1].
2. The difficulties [2-6].
3. Inner joy and peace [7-8].

1. The righteous life

"You hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness" [1].

Our Lord is our righteousness. St. Paul says, "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every man who believes" (Rom. 10:4).

2. The 'enlarged' life [1, 8]

Our Lord calls us to carry His cross and to walk in the narrow way. In sharing Him His crucifixion we enjoy the broad- mindedness and the openness of the heart through His glorious and joyful resurrection.

❖ *"You enlarge me in trouble" [1].* You have led me from the straits of sadness into the broad way of joy...

When he had declared how he was heard, in this very enlargement of heart he preferred to speak with God; that he might even in this way show what it is to be enlarged in heart, that is, to have God already shed abroad in the heart, with Whom he might converse inwardly.

St. Augustine

❖ Through the co-operation and presence of the Word of God encouraging and saving us, our mind is made joyful and courageous in the time of trial, and this experience is called "enlargement"²

Origen

❖ Though a man enters it (the kingdom of heaven) through a strait and narrow way, yet having entered, he beholds immeasurable space, and a place greater than any other, as they declare, who were eye-witnesses and heirs of these things. "You did place afflictions before us." But afterwards, having related their afflictions, they say, "You brought us forth into a wide place," and again "In affliction You have enlarged us" (Ps. 66:11, 12; 4:1)³.

¹ William S. Plumer: *Psalms, A Critical and Expository Commentary with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks*, Pennsylvania, 1978, p. 62-63.

² On Prayer 30: 1.

³ Fest. Letters 11: 1.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

[He does not say, "You have not suffered me to fall into affliction," nor yet "You have quickly removed my affliction," but, whilst it continues, "You have set me at large:" Dan. 3:21, that is "Have granted me much freedom and refreshment." Which truly happened also in the case of the three children, for neither did He prevent their being cast into the flame, nor when so cast, did He quench it, but while the furnace was burning He gave them liberty¹.]

Through the righteousness of Christ we attain the enlarged heart, while through sin we suffer "heavy-heartedness." Therefore the psalmist adds, "Sons of men, how long will you be heavy-hearted?" [2 LXX]. **St. John Chrysostom** says that the "heavy-hearted" means weighted down with earthly cares, instead of rising to divine contemplation. (cf. Luke 21:34). **St. Augustine** also asks us not to be involved in earthly things saying, [Here, one might observe what the foregoing sentence "Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?" is as much as to say: Do not hanker after empty trifles and go in search of lies.]

According to **St. Augustine** enlargement of heart is obtained by the Holy Spirit who pours love in the heart.

In Contrast to those who have enlargement of heart, there are those who are heavy-hearted and the liars who seek falsehood. The psalmist says:

"Sons of men, how long will you be heavy-hearted? Why do you love vanity and seek falsehood?" [2].

Anyone who slanders the psalmist and tells lies about him not only impugns thereby the latter's dignity as a human being, but indirectly attacks also his God. The psalmist's glory is his faith in God².

St. Gregory of Nyssa says that the person who is heavy-hearted and seeks after lying does not call the Heavenly One his Father, but calls the liar and the father of every lie his own father (John 8:44).

In stead of "You have enlarged me" some translate it into *"You have given me room when I was in distress"* [1]. Which room is it? It is a place in the bosom of the Father, for when we share Christ in His suffering we attain a place in the bosom of His Father.

3. The sanctified life [3]

"Know that the Lord has made His holy one wonderful" [3].

The Hebrew word here "hasid" is one of several words for God's people, referring to them as people who are or should be devoted to Him and those faithful to Him. The psalmist wants his friends and his enemies to open their inner eyes and see His glory. He asks them to turn their thoughts from the outside afflictions to the invisible Heavenly Lord who not only helps him but also glorifies him. In Christ, our Lord, we also are glorified, if we receive the saintly life by the work of His Holy Spirit.

After saying, "Know also that the Lord has made His holy one (godly) wonderful" he adds, "Be angry, yet do not sin" [4]. This verse is quoted by St. Paul In (Eph. 4: 26).

¹ Weiser, p. 120.

² NIV Study Bible, p. 789.

- ❖ It may be interpreted in two ways: either, even if you are angry, do not sin; that is, even if there an emotion arises in the soul, which now by reason of the punishment of sin is not in our power, at least let not the reason and the mind to sin , which are after God regenerated within, that is with the mind we should serve the law of God, although with the flesh we as yet serve the law of sin (Rom. 7: 25).Or it may be interpreted as repent, that is, be angry with yourselves for your past sins, and henceforth cease to sin.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Let us not, therefore, make the faculties which were given us by the Creator for our salvation be an occasion of sin for ourselves. To illustrate again: anger, aroused at the proper time and in proper manner, produces courage, endurance, and continence. Acting contrary to right reason, however, it becomes a madness. The psalmist admonishes us, "Be you angry and sin not" [5].

The Lord, moreover, threatens with condemnation one who lightly gives way to anger, but He does not forbid that anger be directed against its proper objects, as a medicinal device, so to speak¹.

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ Being angry is not a transgression, but it's a sin being so unseasonably. For this cause the prophet said, "*Be you angry, and not sin*"²."

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Let there be a door to your mouth, that it may be shut when need arises, and let it be carefully barred, that none may rouse your voice to anger, or you pay back abuse with abuse. You have heard it read to-day, "*Be you angry and sin not*"³.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ What more righteousness than that each one should be angry with his own sins, rather than those of others, and that in self-punishment he should sacrifice himself unto God?

St. Augustine

- ❖ "Be angry, and sin not" [4]; that is, do not persevere in anger, or be enraged⁴.

Tertullian

- ❖ The things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them on your beds [5]; i.e., whatever you think of in your hearts due to sudden and nervous excitements , correct and amend with wholesome repentance, putting it as it were on a bed of rest, and removing by the moderating influence of counsel all noise and disturbance of wrath⁵.

St. John Cassian

The Psalmist adds, "*for what you say in your hearts feel compunction for it on your beds*" [5]. "Beds" here could allude to the place of prayerful prostration (Ps.95:6)⁶. Through repentance we achieve a sanctified life and an enlarged heart.

¹ *Against Anger.*

² *In Matt. Hom. 16: 9.*

³ *Duties of the Clergy, 1: 3 (13).*

⁴ *Against Marcion 2: 19.*

⁵ *The Institutes, 8: 9.*

⁶ *Sabourin, Vol. 2, p. 93.*

- ❖ In the night it is always possible to meditate, as the soul is calm and at rest; when it is in heaven, and under a serene sky¹.
- ❖ If you do this every day, you will with confidence stand before that fearful judgment-seat².
- ❖ We are accustomed to count our money in the morning; as well as after we dine in the evening while we are lying in bed, when no one is there to disturb or interrupt us. Let us demand of ourselves an accounting of all we have said and done in the course of the day. And if we shall see any sin there, let us punish our conscience, let us impose a penalty on our understanding, let us prick our reason so strongly that the memory of this chastisement we have administered at night will never allow us, when we rise in the morning, to lead ourselves again into the depth of sin³.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Let us be sorry "upon our beds," that is, in our hearts, for all our failings. Let us condemn ourselves by daily accusing ourselves to our Judge⁴.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

4. Sacrificial life [6]

"Offer the sacrifice of righteousness" [5].

St. Athanasius of Alexandria states: [Obtain righteousness, do righteousness, and offer it in sacrifice to God.]

- ❖ The (offerings made) through the soul... have no need of a body, nor need of instruments, nor of special places, for each one is himself the priest exemplifying moderation, temperance, mercy and enduring ill-treatment, long-suffering, and humbleness of mind⁵.

St. John Chrysostom

"Offer the sacrifice of righteous, and put your trust in the Lord" [5].

- ❖ The psalmist says elsewhere, "A sacrifice of justice may well apply to an act of penance. What more justice than that a man should castigate his own sins instead of those of others, and by self-punishment offer a holocaust to God?"
- ❖ Or again, does the sacrifice of justice refer to good works done after repentance? When the old man has been destroyed or weakened by penance, the man born anew by regeneration offers to God a sacrifice of justice; the soul now purified offers and immolates itself on the altar of faith, to be consumed by the divine fire which is the Holy Spirit.

St. Augustine

- ❖ They strove to know what time the shadow should last strove (animal sacrifice), and not to forget the time that was drawing near when the bullock of the herd would cease

¹ In Hebr. 14: 9.

² In Matt. Hom 42: 2.

³ In Non ag grat. Vonc. PG. 50: 660 D.

⁴ Sermon 58: 3.

⁵ In Hebr. 11: 6.

to be a sacrifice to God, nor the ram of the flock, nor the he-goat (Exodus 12: 5), But all these things should be fulfilled in a purely spiritual manner, and by constant prayer, and upright conversation, with godly words just as David sings, May my meditation be pleasing to Him. Let my prayer be set forth before You as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Ps. 104: 34; 141: 2). The Spirit also, who is in him, commands, saying, "Offer unto God the sacrifice of praise, and pay to the Lord your vows. Offer the sacrifice of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord" (Ps. 50: 14; 4: 5)¹.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

Offering the sacrifice of righteous means also the openness of one's heart toward others. Man should not only struggle in repentance and in practicing righteousness by the grace of God, but he should also urge others to trust in God and to have the same experience. Therefore the psalmist adds:

"There are many who say: Who will show us good times? The light of your presence has been signed upon us, O Lord" [6].

The psalmist knows that many people round about him are in danger of succumbing to deep despair and to sore temptations. They are eaten by their affections, and in their distress feel urged to ask what God is going to do in this matter; "Who will show us good times?" The psalmist leads the people to attain the same experience he has, and awakens in them joy in the Lord as a divine gift.

The author of the Book of Steps says, [Those who have fought with Satan and vanquished him become worthy of this Church which is above all, in which our Lord shines out openly, and they receive the glorious light of His countenance²].

5. The Joyful life in Christ [7]

"You have filled my heart with gladness" [7].

In biblical language the heart is the center of the human spirit, from which arise emotions, thoughts, motivation, courage and action³.

Interior joy, gladness, peace and safety are divine gifts, granted to those who know God as their righteousness, even when they are in distress. The prophet's gladness is greater than that of those who are against God, even when they are in harvest time.

6. The Enlightened Life

"The light of Your countenance has been signed on us, O Lord" [6]. In Christ the soul is illumined and stamped with the light of His countenance. Thus we are restored and attained the image and the likeness of God.

The face of Moses the Prophet shone as he entered in close contact with God.

❖ ***"The light of Your presence has been signed upon us, O Lord" [6]..*** It is signed upon us, so the psalmist has said, like a coin stamped with the king's image. For man was made in God's image and likeness, and was defaced by sin (Gen. 1: 26). His true and lasting goodness therefore is to be stamped by a new regeneration.

¹ Fests. Letters 19: 4.

² 1: 12: 7.

³ NIV Study Bible, p. 790

7. In Singleness (single-minded)of mind

"Since You, O Lord, in singleness have made me dwell in hope" [9]. Onsemius of Jerusalem states that our Lord became alone in His crucifixion, and He is unique in His glory. **St. Augustine** says that the believers in the apostolic age were one soul and one heart (Acts 4: 32). We also ought to be lovers of eternity, and unity, if we desire to cleave to the One God.

The psalmist's nearness to God enables him to warn those who have distanced themselves to be reconciled and united with Him [3-6]. That nearness also makes him a model of one who enjoys the blessings of God [7-9]¹.

¹ *Collegeville Bible Comm., p. 756.*

Prayer

- ❖ How beautiful you distress
Through you grant me a Christian crucified generous heart expanding love of all
humanity!
- ❖ Grant me, O divine love to be angry and sin! Angered the brothers, but not on my sins
Was convicted myself! Jerusalem, O love my anger!
- ❖ Your resurrection, O sun of righteousness shone on my face with eclat and glory
And resulted in the joy of your salvation in my heart, and you fill me with fat of love,
and grant me your height peace! Your resurrection is my eclat t and the joy and my
people and my peace

PSALM 5

ANTICHRIST, THE BLASPHEMER AND BLOODTHIRSTY

In this lament the Prophet David turns his attention to Ahithophal, the wicked advisor to Absalom who is comparable to the antichrist [6]. He contrasts the security of the house of God [8-9 and 12-13] with the danger of the company of the wicked [5-7 and 10-11], and makes a comparison between himself and Ahithophal. He represents the Church - the spiritual House of God - that is united with the Son of David and that enters into a continuous battle against the Antichrist, while Ahithophal represents the Antichrist and his followers, the wicked people.

This prayer of lament is deeply personal and at the same time touches the believer as a member of the one church. As we have already said, in our worship we cannot separate our personal life from the communal one. Here the psalmist starts the psalm with personal invocation, saying "*my words, my cry, my King and my God*" [1, 2], and concludes it in a communal attitude, saying, "*But let all who trust in You be glad in You. They will rejoice for ever*" [11]. This lament belongs to everyone of every age, and belongs to the whole church as well.

In five strophes, three are turned full-face to God, and alternate with two others that passionately denounce the enemy to Him. The whole psalm expresses the spirit of the cry in verse 2, "my King and my God"¹.

It enables us to weather the worst crises of betrayal within a family or community. We sing it every morning (the Canonical Hours) in order to be filled with hope.

This personal lament seems to have been uttered in the temple in connection with the morning sacrifice (see verses 3,7; 2 Kings 3: 20; Amos 4: 4)².

Dahood classifies this psalm among the "Psalms of innocence" (5, 17, 26, 139). The psalmists and prophets, however, never thought of denying their own sins, but asked to be delivered from it. Their innocence is based not on their own righteousness, but on the grace they attained from God, through their sincere desire to be in communion with God. In other words they are innocent of the falsely accusations which the wicked used to raise against them.

OUTLINE

1. An appeal to the Lord [1-3].
2. Wickedness and God are incompatible [4-6].
3. The righteous worship God [7-8].
4. Deceit of evil people [9].
5. The liturgical acclamation and blessing [12-13].

THE TITLE

The subscription according to the Hebrew text is "*To the chief musician upon Nehiloth, a psalm of David,*" and according to the Septuagint, "*Unto the end for her that obtains the inheritance. A psalm of David.*"

¹ Kidner, p. 57.

² Weiser, p. 123; Sabourin, vol. 2, p. 6.

1. For the explanation of the words: "*To the chief musician*," see above on Psalm 4.

2. "Nehiloth" is explained in several ways:

* Some think it signifies armies. These would render the preceding word not upon, but against, so as to read, To the chief musician against the armies, i.e., a hymn to be sung against the hostile bands that arose in the country or invaded it . This view rests upon very slender grounds¹.

* Some think Nehiloth is the first word of some popular song, and indicates the tune to which this psalm is to be sung.

* Some translate it as "wind instruments," similar to "Niginoth" in the preceding psalm signifying "stringed instruments."

* Others render "Nehiloth" by the word "heritages." This view is sanctioned by the Septuagint. This supposes that David here calls the twelve tribes "the heritages," and that this psalm is a prayer for the nation of Israel².

3. The title according to the Septuagint is: "Unto the end." **St Augustine** says, ["The end of the Law is Christ, unto justice to everyone that believes" (Rom. 10: 4). This end, however, signifies completion, not destruction.] **St. Jerome** comments: [Our inheritance is not promised at the beginning, but at the end of the world That is precisely why the Apostle John says, "Dear children, it is the last hour" (1 John 2: 18).]

4. Many Fathers of the church comment on the word "heiress mentioned in the title according to the Septuagint:

* **St. John Chrysostom** says that the Psalmist speaks on behalf of the bride and starts out, and so intercedes in the courts, by telling us of the one he is defending, and says that he is speaking "on behalf of her who is receiving an inheritance"; the heiress is the Church³.

For what does the heiress ask? Let us listen: "Give ear, O Lord, to my words" [1]. She calls her Bridegroom her Lord, for this is the duty of a well-disposed bride. If it happens in the case of those who have the same nature that the wife calls her husband her lord, how much more is this case with Christ and the Church, where He is by His very nature Lord⁴?

St. John Chrysostom

***St. Jerome** says David sings in the name of the Church⁵. This psalm concentrates on the Antichrist and his followers, who fight against the Church. But this battle ends by her victory and glory.

***St. Augustine** states that the Church of the New Testament herself is the inheritance of Christ and receives the eternal inheritance.

❖ The Church in her turn is called God's inheritance in the original text: "Ask of me, and I will give you the Gentiles for your inheritance" (Ps 2: 5). Thus God is termed our inheritance because He sustains and holds us our very being, and we are called God's

¹ William S. Plumer: *Psalms*, p. 77.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Expos. In Ps. 5. PG. 55: 63 B-C.*

⁴ *Expos. In Ps. 5. PG. 55: 63 D.*

⁵ *Hom. 2.*

inheritance because He governs and rules our lives. This psalm therefore is the song of the Church called to an inheritance in order to become herself the inheritance of our Lord.

- ❖ The Church then is the one signified, who receives for her inheritance eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ; that she may possess God Himself, in cleaving to whom she may be blessed, according to that, "blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth" (Matt. 5: 5)

Augustine

The inscription of this psalm in the Syriac reads, "A prayer in the person of the church when she comes early in the morning to the house of the Lord." But this is an interpretation, not a translation¹.

According to (Ps 142:5) the inheritance of the church is our Lord Himself, "You are my hope, my portion in the land of the living."

DAVID AS A SYMBOL OF THE CHURCH

1. A Man of prayer and meditation [1,2]: He has access to God, to whom he always cries. He is anxious that not only his words and his cry reach the ear of God, but also that God may hear the inner voice of his prayer [2].

- ❖ "*Give ear to my words, O Lord*" [1]. No one has confidence like this except the Church. The sinner does not dare to say, "Give ear to my words, O Lord," but rather hopes that God will not to hear him

"Consider my cry" The word cry in the Scripture does not refer to the cry of the voice, but to the cry of the heart. In fact, the Lord says to Moses, "Why are you crying out to Me?" (Exod. 14: 15) when Moses had not uttered any cry at all Likewise the words of Jeremiah, "Let there be no repose for my eyes" Lam. 2:18. Notice what he says: "Let not even the pupil of my eye be silent." Sometimes, the very pupil of our eye cries out to God².

St. Jerome

- ❖ The Psalmist clearly well shows what this cry is; how from within, from the chamber of the heart, without the body's utterance, it reaches unto God; for the bodily voice is heard, but the spiritual is understood. ("*consider*" *my cry*).

St. Augustine

David cries thrice asking God to hear his prayer, saying:

"Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my cry (meditation). Attend to the voice of my prayer, my King and my God" [1, 2].

Onsemius of Jerusalem states that David on behalf of the church refers in his cry to the Holy Trinity [Lord, my King and my God]. For the Father she says "Lord," and not "my Lord for the Jews also know Him, but she attributes the Son and the Holy Spirit to herself [my King and my God], for she alone acknowledges them.

The repetition here [thrice] denotes the strength of David's affection and his perseverance in prayer. He reveals by these various expressions the variety of his

¹ Plumer, p. 77.

² Hom. 2.

complaints. It therefore signifies that he prays neither coldly nor briefly in few words, but that, according to the vehemence of his grief which urged him, he was earnest in bewailing his calamities before God.

2. **The scholar, Daniel El-Salhy**, says: [Note that David does not refer to himself as king in his prayer. He degrades himself of all royalty and calls God his King and his Lord. Thus he stresses that God alone is the One King. He who is subject to the King is not a king and therefore David says "My Lord and my God" to mean "You alone are my King."]

Since Absalom pursues his father, wishing to take his life as well as his throne, David cries "...Cause me to know the way for I lift up my soul to you" (Ps.143: 8, 9). It is as though he is saying: I need your Holy Spirit to lead me into the royal way to raise me through the cross to You that I may live as a king since I'm joined to the King of kings. I am unable to protect the throne and guard the royal palace, but through You I can enter into the grace of God for You are the One true King!

3. He had trust that even in the future he would have access to God although banished from among God's people and the holy city. Perhaps he used to enter the house of God every day especially in the morning, to stand before the Lord so that the Lord Himself may visit him and watch over him [3].

"You will hear my voice in the morning, in the morning I will stand before You, and You will visit and watch over me" [3].

"Morning" is no doubt a normal time for prayer (Ps. 88: 13) and temple service (Exod 29: 38- 40; Lev 6: 12-13, 2 Kings 3:20) In fact, the morning and evening sacrifice of the temple lies behind the Christian prayer of Lauds and Vespers, accompanied with incense.

Morning was also a symbol of deliverance from Egypt (Exod 14: 20-24); from Assyrians (Isa 38:26), and from the night or the darkness of sin. Dawn or morning was considered as the most auspicious time for prayer, "O Lord, be their arm (strength) every morning" Isa. 33:2. The compassions of the Lord are renewed each morning (Lem 3: 23), which we attain through prayers. The same theme occurs in several psalms: the kindness of the Lord is expected mostly in the morning (59:16; 90:14), God will help the holy city at the break of dawn and save it (46:5; 101:8), a probable allusion to the angel of the Lord's intervention against Sennacherib's army (2 Kings 19:35). There may be an allusion to the "resurrection" theme when the psalmist speak of awaking in the presence of the Lord (3:5; 17:15)¹.

To pray early in the morning is to seek Him earnestly before asking others for help. The person, who gives his first waking thoughts to God, will not be indisposed to acts of devotion at later hours of the day.

❖ Prayers are recited early in the morning so that the first movements of the soul and the mind may be consecrated to God and that we may take up no other consideration before we have been cheered and heartened by the thought of God as it is written, "I remembered God and was delighted" (Ps 77: 4), and that the body may not busy itself with tasks before we have fulfilled the words: "To You will I pray, O Lord; in the

¹ See Saburin, vol. 2, p. 7.

morning You shall hear my voice. In the morning I will stand before You and will see [2]¹.

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ Some interpreters explain these words quite simply in this way: I rise at dawn to pray and make supplication to You Listen to what the words really mean: As long as I am wandering in the darkness of error, You do not hear me, but after the Sun of justice has come into my heart, then You will hear my voice in the morning ; just as soon as the shades of night begin to scatter, You hear my voice; just as soon as I begin a good work, You hear my voice; you do not wait for the end.
- ❖ While the light of virtue is beginning to penetrate my soul I stand before You - not sit down, not lie down, but stand and You fix my steps firmly upon a rock (Ps 39: 3), then by degrees, I shall deserve to see You².

St. Jerome

- ❖ "In the morning" Wickedness, treachery, lying, murder, deceit, and suchlike form the night which must pass away, before the morning can dawn, in which God will be revealed.

What does, "I will stand," but "I will not lie down" mean? Now what else does to lie down mean, but to take rest on the earth, which denotes seeking happiness in earthly pleasures? "I will stand," says the psalmist, "and I will see." We must sacrifice the things of the world if we would see God, who is visible only to the clean of heart !

St. Augustine

Onsemius of Jerusalem states that the psalmist here refers by the word "morning" to the Christian worship. For the Jews who were under the shadow of the law used to celebrate the Pasch in the evening, now as the Sun of Righteousness shines through the incarnation we worship Him in the morning, illuminated by His divine rays. We can say that the new Pasch or the Christian Pasch has been realized in the morning by the resurrection of our Savior, who conquers death and destroys the power of the devil.

The scholar, Daniel El-Salhy, says: [the spirit of sonship informs us of great heavenly secrets through the tongue of the blessed David. After having called Emmanuel "a fruitful tree" in psalm one, David calls Him "the eternal one" on psalm 2, and in psalm 3 "Lord, God, and Savior;" then in psalm four, he calls Him "the righteous one and the light of God's face." In psalm five, David pleads to escape the night of the law and prophetically invokes the coming of the bright day that is the eternal Word of God itself David wishes to teach us that Emmanuel is called the "morning" because He is the true light that is untouched by darkness and He has come after the dark night of the law. He is the morning named by John: "The true Light that shines for all men in the world," for the darkness of the law could not touch Him similarly, Our Lord came one morning as the true light and after the world was immersed in the darkness of sin. The light of life said: I am the light of the world; then He added: "He who follows me, shall not stay in darkness but shall see the light of life."

¹ *The Long Rules, Q. 37.*

² *Hom. 2.*

The psalmist was looking up with confidence, waiting for God's answer to his cry [3]. The imagery is taken from placing one in a watch-tower to announce the approach of a returning messenger or any one else. This state of mind is elsewhere described by the prophets. Thus (Habakkuk 2: 1), "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say to me;" and (Michah 7: 7) "There I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."

4. The psalmist dares to call the Lord [1], for he stands before Him every morning in the House of the Lord. In contrast to him the wicked cannot call Him for they are not admitted to the sanctuary as His "guests" and dwell with Him [4]. The psalmist is conscious of the holiness of the Lord, therefore he keeps himself aloof from the wicked, who are liars, deceitful and bloody.

"You will destroy all who tell lies; the Lord abhors a bloody and deceitful man"
[6].

Lies, deceit and all sins do not injure God, but they destroy those who commit them. Fr. Theodoret of Cyrus comments on these words, saying, [Nothing injures God who cannot be defiled¹.]

❖ Since in turning their (liars) backs upon that which has existence (the truth), they turn aside to that which has none (the lie)

St. Augustine

❖ We should always be cautious to avoid lying since a liar cannot build a relationship with God for lying is instigated by the evil of whom it said "he is a liar and a father of liars," (John 8: 44) While God as truth and accordingly says: "I am the Way, the Truth, and Life" John 14:6. Hence, if we wish to be saved we should love truth with all our hearts and protect ourselves from all wickedness so as not to be separated from the Truth and the Life.

❖ Let us avoid evil (lies) in order to be rescued from the hands of the enemy and let us persevere and hold on to the truth in order to be united with Him who said: "I am the Truth" (John 14: 6). May God grant us to be worthy of the Truth which belongs to Him².

Fr. Dorotheos of Gaza

5. God's house is his refuge and worship is his armor.

"But as for me, in your abundant mercy I will enter Your house; and in the fear of You I will bow down towards Your holy temple" [7].

David says that the godly worships God looking towards the Lord's holy temple. It was customary to pray in the direction of the Holy of Hollies wherever the worshipers might be (1 Kings 8: 30, 38, 42; Dan 6: 10) and the synagogues in Galilee, after the destruction of Jerusalem, were pointed towards Jerusalem.

❖ ***"They will rejoice forever and You will dwell in them"*** [11]

Happy are they who will become the tabernacles of Christ!³

¹ On Divine providence, Disc. 10: 17.

² Dorotheos of Gaza: On Falsehood.

³ Hom. 2.

St. Jerome

- ❖ I will enter into Your house [7], as a stone into a building, I suppose, is the meaning. For what else is the house of God than the temple of God, of which it is said, "for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are"(1 Cor. 3: 17) ? Of which building He is the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20), whom the Power and Wisdom of God co-eternal with the Father assumed.

St. Augustine

Perhaps, David, expresses his conviction, that his exile will not be of long duration, and declares his determination to embrace the earliest opportunity of entering into the house of God. In all this he is humble. He relies not on his own merits, wisdom or strength, but on the abundance of God's mercy: "***But as for me, I will come into your house in the multitude of your mercy***" [7]

It is noteworthy that fear of God and worship are inseparable: and in their fear will I worship [7]

6. God is the Leader:

"Guide me, O Lord, in Your justice direct my way before You because of my enemies" [8].

If the Lord guides us, we shall be safe from our spiritual enemies. The world subjects us to injustice, but God the Just One takes care of His children, showing His mercy, defending and preserving them. We ask Him to direct us before Him or in His sight, imploring divine omniscience both to guide and to search our ways.

In His love for us, our Lord gave us Himself as "the Way" which the enemy cannot overcome. His way is the way of the Cross which becomes our way and which is sweet and easy because we share it with Him.

Divine Justice allowed Christ to carry the Cross to announce His infinite and complete mercy and justice. A justice that is wholly merciful and thus offering the Cross to us as the conquering all powerful and royal way.

- ❖ Lastly, we are bidden to show Him our ways, and make them known, for they are not made straight by our own labor, but by His assistance and mercy. And so it is written, "Make my way right before Your face," so that what is right to You may seem also right to me. Solomon says the same - " Commit your works unto the Lord, and your thoughts shall be established when we commit all we do to the Lord our helper, resting it, as it were, upon the firm and solid rock, and attribute everything to Him¹.

St. Jerome

7. God is the source of man's blessedness. "***For You will bless a righteous person, O Lord***" [12]. **St. John Chrysostom** states that the righteous person does not care of men's insults since God Himself blesses him, for what is his profit if the world and not God honors him?

8. According to God's will his daily walk is joyful, attaining safety and blessing [11, 12].

9. God is his shield and his crown [13]:

¹ *Against the Palagians, 3: 8.*

St. Jerome says, [In the world, a shield is one thing and a crown is another, but with God, He Himself is our shield, He Himself is our crown.] **St. John Chrysostom** says that our life is a spiritual battle, we must be ready, for the devil does his best to incite us to sin.

❖ And in the Psalm it is written, "*O Lord, you have crowned us with your favor as with a shield.*" *For* our victory is won and the crown of our victory is gained by His protection and through His shield; and here we run that hereafter we may attain; there he shall receive the crown who in this world has proved the conqueror¹.

St. Jerome

AHITHOPHAL AS A SYMBOL OF THE ANTICHRIST

1. Evil [4, 5]:

"For You are not a God who wills iniquity; evildoers cannot dwell with You"
[4].

The Antichrist and his followers are evildoers, while God who is Holy has no pleasure in any wickedness. He cannot but love his own image (righteousness). He cannot but hate the image of the wicked one. God and wickedness can never dwell together, for "what fellowship has light with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?" (2 Cor 6: 14, 15). **St. Jerome** says, [God is fire and a consuming fire (Deut 4: 24), everyone who is stubble, everyone who is wood, runs away from the fire lest he be consumed².] The Psalmist did not say, those who have been guilty of wrongdoing, but those who are evildoers, i.e., those who preserve in sin.

2. Proud [5]: He had no access to God, on the contrary he was rebellious against God, and against His church. Rebellion against God is seen on all sides; violence is in the earth under the leadership of the Antichrist.

3. Deceitful [6]

"You will destroy all who tell lies; the Lord abhors a bloody and deceitful man"
[6].

St. Clement of Alexandria says, [He calls him man, as perfect in wickedness. And the Lord is called man, because He is perfect in righteousness (2 Cor. 11:2)³.]

St. Jerome says, [The man who lies is more unfortunate, therefore, than the one who does evil. Though the evildoer is subject to the hatred of God, the liar perishes altogether. "A lying mouth slays the soul." Wisd. 1:11"⁴.]

4. Bloodthirsty [6].

5. His throat is wide-open tomb; with his throat he brings death [9]. David experienced that the tongue is as deadly as the sword. He concentrated on the mouth of the Antichrist as a source of blasphemy that reveals his inner evil.

The evil throat is a wide-open tomb, which never has enough or is satisfied. It is cruel as the tomb, gaping to devour and to swallow up; insatiable as the tomb, which never say, "it is enough" (Prov 30: 15, 16).

¹ *Ibid* 3: 1.

² *Hom.* 2.

³ *Paed.* 1: 5.

⁴ *Hom.* 2.

- ❖ Hear how men make the tongue an instrument, some of sin, others of righteousness! "Their tongue is a sharp sword" (Ps. 57:4). But another speaks thus of his own tongue, "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (Ps. 45:1). The former wrought destruction; the latter wrote the divine law. Thus one was a sword, the other a pen, not according to its nature, but according to the choice of those who employed it. For the nature of this tongue and of that was the same, but the operation was not the same¹.
- ❖ If these heretics employ the wisdom of the Gentiles, we must not admire, but laugh at them, because they employ foolish teachers They are great men in their district, grow beautiful curls, and are enfolded in cloaks; thus far goes their philosophy; but if you look within there is dust and ashes and nothing sound, but "their throat is an open sepulcher" [9], having all things full of impurity and corruption, and all their doctrines (full) of worms².

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Heretics do not have Christ, the Truth, on their lips because they do not have Him in their heart. Their heart is vain (Cf. Ps. 5:10) they speak with piety and conceal impiety. They speak Christ and hide the Antichrist, for they know that they will never succeed with their seduction if they disclose the Antichrist. They present light only to conceal darkness, through light they lead to darkness³.

St. Jerome

- ❖ The psalmist uses the excellent phrase "open tomb," for greed is insatiably open-mouthed, unlike tombs which are sealed up after receiving the corpse
They themselves are in a manner of speaking lifeless, being devoid of the life of truth, they swallow dead men whom their lying words and cunning hearts have first murdered and then drawn into themselves.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Such are many men now also, decking themselves indeed outwardly, but full of iniquity within. For now too there is many a mode, and many a care for outward purifications, but of those in the soul not so much as one. But if indeed any one should tear open each man's conscience, many worms and much corruption would he find, and an ill savor beyond utterance; unreasonable and wicked lusts I mean, which are more unclean than worms⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ The mouths of such as bring forth words of death and destruction are called sepulchers, as also are all that speak against the true faith or make any opposition to the discipline of chastity, justice, and sobriety⁵.

Origen

¹ *Concerning the Statues, 4: 10.*

² *Hom. On St. John 66: 3.*

³ *Hom. 2.*

⁴ *In Matt. Hom. 73.*

⁵ *Comm.. on Songs 3: 5*

6. Bitterness [11]: The righteous men attain the sweetness of God while the wicked find Him bitter to them.

❖ *"Since they have embittered You, O Lord" [10]*. Our Lord has said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51), again, "Labor for the meat which wastes not" and "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (Ps. 34: 8). To sinners the bread of truth is bitter. Whence they hate the mouth of him that speaks the truth. They have therefore found God bitter, because sin has rendered them so sickly that the bread of truth, delicious to souls in health, tastes to them as unbearably bitter as gall.

St. Augustine

At last, the Psalmist says, "Judge them, O God, let them fall from their thoughts" [10].

St. Augustine states, [It is a prophecy, not a curse.]

It is their own responsibility for they are punished by their own thoughts and sins. Sin has its own recompense in itself. Therefore our Lord says, "You shall die in your sins."

A Cry pleading for inheritance

- ❖ Be an inheritance for me
and accept me to be as inheritance to You,
O my Lord and God!
- ❖ With every new morning,
shine gloriously within me:
Dissipate the darkness of my sins,
that I might shine by Your righteousness and lightness!
Dissipate the darkness of deadly law,
that I might be led by Thy Living Spirit!
Hear the words of my heart,
for You alone can understand me!
Destroy the plotting of the deceitful
and deadly evil one who is full of bitterness!
- ❖ Open to me the doors of Your house
that I might enjoy the glory of the holy altar.
Grant me the grace to open the doors of
my heart to You that you might construct
Your altar within me!
- ❖ May your blessings be upon me,
and may You train me to persevere and so attain victory!
- ❖ Grant me the Spirit of cheer and joy
as I unite with all Your people and
praise You!

"To the chief musician on Neginoth upon Sheminith, A psalm of David."
According to the Septuagint *"Unto the end, in hymns for the octave (eight), a psalm of David."*

1. "Unto the end": review the subscription to Ps.4,5.
2. "Upon Niginoth" means "played on strings."
3. The phrase "Upon Sheminith" is found in 1 Chron. 15:21 where we are told of the appointment of certain singers to sound with harps on the Sheminith, "to excel." It is also found in the title of Ps. 12. There are various interpretations to the word Sheminith¹.
 - a. Some render it, upon the superabundance.
 - b. The literal rendering of "upon Sheminith" is **"upon the eighth."**

If for **the eighth** we read the octave our minds instantly turn to something relating to music, and so this term seems to point to something pertaining to music in the public worship of God. Some see that it refers to an instrument, perhaps a harp of eight strings.

c. Some see that it points to the day of final judgment, which is to follow the six days of toil of this life and the seventh day of rest of souls, and then comes the eighth day, which is the end of the world.

Some of the Jewish writers consider the eighth day, the day of circumcision. Some ancient Christians referred it to the Lord's day, being the day after the Jewish Sabbath. It led to theological speculation about the Christian new creation in the Risen Christ. It also refers to the heavenly Messianic kingdom, where all spiritual illnesses are healed. "Messiah" wrote one rabbi, "will loosen the bonds which shackle us to this world²."

Onesimus of Jerusalem states that number eight refers to the resurrection of Christ, for He was risen on the first day of the second week, or the eighth of the first one. Therefore our repentance must be practiced through our faith in the Risen Christ, who grants us hope in the new life.

- ❖ We may safely interpret the octave as the Day of Judgment, for the end of the world will admit us to life everlasting, and then the souls of the just will no longer be subject to the vicissitudes of time. Since all time advances by the repetition of the same seven days, the octave may very well signify that eighth day which is beyond such rotation.

St. Augustine

- ❖ And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all days (of the week). Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, "To the end, for the eighth day," on which our life both springs up again, and the victory over death is obtained in Christ, whom the children of perdition, the enemies of the deny," whose god is their belly, who mind earthly things" (Phil. 3:18, 19), who are lovers of pleasures, and not lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof (2 Tim. 3:4)³.

¹ [REDACTED]

² [REDACTED]

³ [REDACTED]

b. Bodily pain and sickness: Where the heart is troubled, the whole body is faint and broken.

c. Outward enemies: David acknowledges that bodily sickness and outward enemies are not serious, the true problem is within himself, that is sinning. Nehemiah had the same thought, therefore, in hearing about the great distress in Jerusalem: the wall was broken and its gates were burned by fire, he sat down, wept and mourned for many days. He prayed before the Lord of heaven, confessing that he and his father's house had sinned, asking for forgiveness, before starting his movement of restoration (Neh. 1). He did not complain from the enemies, nor did blame other leaders but himself and his father's house, trusting in God who grants victory to His saintly believers.

David sees a close connection between sin, God's anger, sickness and suffering. The sorrows through which the godly have passed produce a brokenness of heart on account of sin, therefore the psalmist stretches out his arms towards God whenever he is overcome by his misery, and cries to God, the Physician of the soul, mind and body, saying, "**Heal me, O Lord, for my bones shake (are troubled)**" [2], that is the support of my soul, or strength: for this is the meaning of "bones." Some scholars see that "bones," the inner skeleton, here represent the whole body; and by adding the "**soul**" [3] the psalmist means his whole being. For the healing of his body and soul, the only way opened to the psalmist is to take refuge in the grace and mercy of God. If God would have compassion on his weakness and would deliver him from the terror with which his soul is stricken!

This cry is a confession of our utter weakness and incapacity for relieving ourselves. Our hope for anything good is in the divine mercy.

St. John Cassian says that some believe that anger is not injurious, if we are angry with those who do wrong, since God Himself is said to be angry, for the psalmist says, "**O Lord, rebuke me not in Your anger, neither chasten me in Your displeasure**" [2].

The Church finds that Jesus Christ is the Subject here since He is the bearer of our sins. We therefore pray verse 2 in the eleventh hour on holy Wednesday before Easter as it refers to the true sufferings of Christ due to our sins. His spirit was exceedingly heavy and He cried: "My spirit is heavy unto death". He said that as He experienced the weakness of the body and added: "The spirit is truly ready, but the flesh is weak," (Mark 14: 38). It is also said that while He was in the garden of Gethsamane: And being in agony. His sweat was as it were drops of blood..., Luke 22:44. To That extent He was disturbed, not due to sins He had committed but due to our sins that He bore to kill on His Cross!

VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

"But You, O Lord, how long ? For in death no one remembers You, and who will confess You in hell?" [4, 6].

"O Lord, how long?" is an unfinished question of desperation, and occurs 30 times in the holy Scriptures.

The psalmist feels that he deserves death due to his sin and that his being is crumpling. Therefore he cries out of his depths praying God not to despise him or forsake him, leaving him to destruction until the end. Death is close and so is hell... hence there is no rescue except through Divine Grace and mercy [3, 4].

St. Augustine states that the Psalmist calls sin death, because it procures death. David acknowledges that through sin he was inclined to hell as if he were a dead man and he has no other way for salvation except the mercy of God, he has to attain through repentance.

1. David starts his repentance with an open speech, as he says, "*But You, O Lord, how long?*" **St. Augustine** says, [God, to whom it is said, "And You, O Lord, how long?" must not be deemed as if cruel: but as a kind convincer of the soul, what evil she has procured for herself. For this soul does not yet pray so perfectly, as that it can be said to her, "While you are yet speaking I will say, Behold, I am" (Isa. 65: 24).]

2. "*Return, O Lord, deliver my soul*" [4]. Why does the Psalmist say "return"? Isn't God present everywhere?

We need to distinguish between two kinds of presence: God's overwhelming presence everywhere and the presence of His Grace that lives in midst of His people and within their hearts thus in union with them.

God's presence is everywhere. This encourages His people to pray to Him, knowing that He can hear me. But His gracious presence is often wanting to His people. One of the most grievous affections is the absence of God. In this alarming strain He threatens His people: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early" (Hos. 5: 15). When God hides His face, people are troubled. His return is regarded as a great mercy¹.

St. Augustine states: [Turning herself, the soul begs the Lord to turn likewise towards her, as it is said, "Turn you unto Me, and I will turn unto you, says the Lord" (Zech. 1: 3). Or is it to be understood according to that way of speaking, "turn, O Lord," that is, make me turn, since the soul in her turning feels difficulty and toil? may be perfected in us which finds You ready, and offering Yourself for the fruition of them that love You.]"

The pleas with which he enforces his petitions are intended not to move God but to move himself, so that he may attain the divine favor and God be reconciled with him. He pleads his own misery; he pleads God's mercy. He pleads God's glory [5]; for in death there is no remembrance of God.

3. "*Save me for Your mercy's sake*" [4]; as if he is saying, "Heal me, not for my merit's sake, but for your merciful sake."

4. "*For in death no one remembers You, and who will confess You in hell?*" [5]

We must not be surprised that David believes that death completely severs every bond between God and the sinner, for there will be no chance for repentance. God's pleasure is in the righteous person who praises Him not only by his tongue but also by his life; therefore the psalmist incites God to grant him His divine grace before the proper time passes.

❖ A further interpretation is that by death the psalmist signifies sin committed in defiance of the divine law. Thus we call it the sting of death, in so far as it leads to death, for the sting of death is sin (1 Cor. 15: 56). This death consists of ignoring God

☒ ☒☒☒ ☒☒☒☒☒

and despising His law and precepts; thus the psalmist uses the term "hell" that blinds and engulfs the soul which is slain by sin.

St. Augustine

- ❖ For as the kingdom of the devil is gained by consenting to sin, so the kingdom of God is attained by the practice of virtue in purity of heart and spiritual knowledge. But where the kingdom of God is, there most certainly eternal life is enjoyed, and where the kingdom of the devil is, there without doubt is death and the grave. And man in such a case, cannot praise the Lord, according to the saying of the prophet... For no man even though he were to call himself a Christian a thousand times over, or a monk, can confess his belief in God when he is sinning; no man who allows those things which the Lord hates, remembers God, nor calls himself with any truth the servant of Him. A person who scorns with obstinate rashness God's commandments suffers the death of which the blessed apostle declares that the widow suffers when she gives herself to pleasure. He says: "a widow who gives herself to pleasure is dead while she lives" (1 Tim. 5:6).

There are many who while still living in this body are dead, and lying in the grave cannot praise God; and on the contrary there are many who though they are dead in the body yet bless God in the spirit, and praise Him, according to this, "O you spirits and souls of the righteous, bless you the Lord" (Dan. 3:86 LXX), and "every spirit shall praise the Lord" (Ps. 150: 5)¹.

Abbot Moses

- ❖ For the present life is indeed the season for living uprightously, but after death is judgment and punishment. "For in hell," it is said, "who will confess unto You²."
- ❖ It is great calamity to depart into the next (world) with loads of sin about us... for there is the place of judgment; then there is no longer a chance for repentance³.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Let us then repent here, so that we may find God merciful unto us in the day that is to come; and be enabled to enjoy abundant forgiveness, which we may all obtain⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

In the ancient concept of the abode of the dead (the nether world, in Hebrew, Sheol) there was supposed to be no activity or lofty emotion among the deceased, who were pictured as surrounded by the darkness of oblivion. The Hebrews shared this common idea almost to the time of Christ, when God revealed a clearer notion of the hereafter⁵.

5. *"Every night I bathe my bed, and water my couch with my tears"* [6].

❖ [REDACTED]

❖ [REDACTED]

❖ [REDACTED]

❖ [REDACTED]

❖ [REDACTED]

❖ [REDACTED]

with the terror of which the prophet was smitten and prayed to God, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, for in your sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. 113: 2).

* There is, too, another kind of tears, which are caused not by knowledge of one's self but by the hardness and sins of others; whereby Samuel is described as having wept for Saul...¹.

Abbot Isaac

❖ Prayer offered at night possesses a great power, more so than that offered in the day. Therefore all the saints used to pray during the night, while they were combating against the heaviness of the body and the sweetness of sleep,

Thus expelling bodily nature...

There is nothing so feared, even by Satan, as prayer which is offered during vigils².

❖ This shall be the sign for you, when you are near to enter that country; when grace begins to open your eyes so that they perceive things by a particular sight, at that time your eyes will begin to shed tears till they wash your cheeks even by their density³.

❖ Tears relate to the mind to indicate the sure distinction between the bodily and the spiritual state, between the state of perception and that of purity⁴.

❖ Every time when the spirit is stirred by the thought of God, the heart becomes hot with love at once, the eyes will shed multitudinous tears; for love is accustomed to shed tears at the recollection of the beloved⁵.

St. Isaac the Syrian

6. *"My eye is troubled with anger"* [7].

❖ Listen to the Psalmist tell how anger clouds the eye of the heart: "My eyes are dimmed," he says, "with sorrow" [7]. Moreover, John the Evangelist testifies how hatred blinds the eye of the heart: "He who hates his brother," he says, "is in the darkness, and walks in the darkness, and does not know whither he goes; because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 John 2: 11). According to this evidence, then, the eye of the heart is clouded by sudden anger, but the light of charity is extinguished by hatred⁶.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

❖ [Illegible text]

GRANT ME REPENTANCE

- ❖ Grant me O You the true Healer torrents of tears that I may weep over my many sins !
- ❖ Enroot the death of sin that my whole life may be consecrated to your praise!
- ❖ Save me O Lord through Your bounteous mercy and grace!
Carry me into Your Joyful kingdom!

PSALM 7

SONG OF THE SLANDERED SAINT

This lament is an appeal to the Lord's court of justice. Its occasion is some event which occurred during David's persecution by some malicious enemies, perhaps Saul and his men. Slandered by his savage enemies, David flees to the Lord in His temple, both for personal safety and for adjudication of the case and a declaration of innocence. Hans Schmidt sees that the psalmist's situation is such as is envisaged in 1 Kings 8:31ff., where a man who has been accused, though he is innocent, calls in the Temple for God's verdict - which shall vindicate him by establishing his righteousness and shall condemn the adversary, who has slandered him, by punishing him as he deserves¹.

David as a pious man turns every event of his life into an occasion of devotion. The wicked sayings and doings of Cush against him incite him to pray and sing a hymn to comfort himself and consequently animate the church throughout the coming ages.

OUTLINE

1. Confidence and prayer [1-2].
2. David the innocent [3-5].
3. Arise, O Lord [6-7].
4. Eschatological judgment [8-9].
5. The end of wickedness [10-17].

THE TITLE

"Shiggaion of David, which he sang unto the Lord, concerning the words of Cush a Benjamite."

1. The meaning of the word "**Shiggaion**"² is quite uncertain.
 - a. Some scholars presume an affinity with the Assyrian term *legu* [=lament].
 - b. Some see that it means "crying aloud," that is when in danger, in perplexity or in severe pain. It is used only here in the Psalms and once more in the plural form "Shiginoth" in (Habbakuk 3:1). There is a very striking similarity in the two instances. The loud crying in Habbakuk's great ode occurs in similar circumstances to those where crying in the Psalm before us.
 - c. Others see that "Shiggaion" means a "wandering." Four explanations are offered below for such an interpretation:
 - * One is that this composition is to be sung to a wandering tune, i.e, a tune full of variations in tone, time and style of execution.
 - * The second is that this is a psalm of various metre.
 - * The third is, that David sang about his own wanderings, but whether it refers to his unsettled state in the wilderness, or to some error or moral wanderings, is not a settled issue.
 - * The fourth is that David speaks about the wanderings, or errors of others dealing with him.
 - d. Others see that "Shaggion" means a "charming" song, very delightful and sweet.

¹ Gaebelein: *Psalms*, p. 40.

² W. Plumer: *Psalms*, p. 106.

2. "**Cush**": The eldest son of Ham bore that name; but the difficulty arises from the fact that no such person is spoken of in history as being a contemporary of David¹.

* According to **St. Athanasius and St. Basil the Great**, "Cush" designates "Hushai," who dissuaded Absalom from following the counsel of Ahithophel. Hushai was called the son of the right hand (Benjamite) as he befriended Absalom to convince him to refrain from fighting his father. Hushai was a source of support to David, standing by his side and working on his behalf.

* Others see that "Cush" refers to Shemei, who was indeed a Benjamite, who reviled David. Perhaps Cush the Benjamite was a kinsman of Saul who was an inveterate enemy to David.

* As "Cush" means "black," therefore some scholars state that "Cush a Benjamite" means Saul the Benjamite whose inner soul was in darkness, because of his malice. Historically the Psalm could be placed in connection with (1 Samuel 24 and 28). Saul is a prophetic type of the coming Antichrist.

* **St. Jerome** sees that this psalm refers also to the time when Absalom rose in revolt against his father David. Cush defeated the counsel of Achitophal, the advisor of Absalom, and sent word to David (2 Kings 15-17), then David sang this song.

1. CONFIDENCE AND PRAYER [1-2]

"O Lord my God, in You I put my trust, Save me from all those who persecute me, And deliver me" [1].

This is the first instance in the Psalter where David addresses the Almighty by the united names "Jehovah" and "my God." David, in his trouble, sees his severe enemy as a lion who desires to tear him [2], therefore he offers prayer and praise to Jehovah as God who enters in a covenant with His people to protect them. Jehovah is the God of all people as well as David's, who takes care of each one personally. It is as though the faithful David is saying to God: "You are the Lord of all the Church and especially mine. You are my God, therefore, whither also should I go but to You? You are my God and I am Your servant who has the right to be protected by You, my shield and my refuge."

Faith and prayer are the keys by which the gates of God's mercies are opened and the arms by which a believer overcomes a formidable temptation and conquers his spiritual enemy. In time of trouble, believer always flees to the Lord of the whole church and takes refuge in Him who gives a personal shelter and has the power to deliver from the adversary who threatens to kill him. He finds all-sufficiency and security in Him. Nothing is more sure than God's sustaining energy to everyone who relies on Him.

Although many enemies are set up against David, one is singled out as the most prominent, and compared to a lion tearing his prey to pieces [1,2]. As a young shepherd, the image of a terrible lion tearing a lamb or a sheep to pieces is familiar to David since his boyhood (1 Sam. 17:34-35). Here the lion is Satan, the adversary of all human beings. He is a roaring lion, an accuser, a liar and the father of lies, the old serpent, the prince of the power of the air, the god of this world, the prince of darkness, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, and none can withstand him effectively. The Lord's protection is the only and last hope of deliverance left to David. The words the psalmist utters are those of a man shaken by mortal terror, who is left trembling and short of

¹ *Ibid.*

breath, and yet they are at the same time the words of a man upheld by the feeling that in God he will find a place of safety and in whom he can trust¹. For it is to the glory of God that the helpless are helped.

Persecution started with Cain, and it was pursued by evil men in subsequent ages. The church, like Daniel, lives in a den of lions. They are always and everywhere roaring, waiting to kill the righteous. But calling on God brings her to a safe refuge.

In the middle of stress and multiple opposition, David sees only that dangerous adversary wanting to "tear" his soul. He is not alarmed about losing his throne, or suffering physical pain, but he dreads that his soul loses faith and eternal life!

The adversary had seized the soul of the first Adam and subjected him. Now he seems to believe in his power and ability to seize the soul of the Second Adam who acts on behalf of all mankind and is the Savior of all, but he will fail. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus calls upon the Father to lift us up in times of stress and upon entering the underworld; Christ shakes its corners and releases all captive souls.

The enemy of goodness is a roaring lion who seeks solely the destruction of souls, while Christ is the lion coming from Judah to save and liberate souls by His precious blood.

- ❖ The apostle says, "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Therefore after the Psalmist says in the plural, "Save me from all them that persecute me," he continues in the singular, saying, "lest at any time he tear my soul as a lion." Note that he does not say, "lest at any time they tear." He knows who that enemy and adversary of the perfect soul is... If God should not redeem, nor save, the devil will seize his prey.

St. Augustine

2. DAVID THE INNOCENT

David who is pursued by an enemy takes refuge in God, and, in the House of God, submits to "an oath of exculpation." He swears that he is innocent [4,6; 1 Kings 8:31, 32], not of all sins but only of the crimes he is falsely accused of. He is charged with a traitorous design against Saul's crown and life. Just as Job (Job 31:1ff.), David takes the great oath of purgation in a last gigantic effort to give voice to his good conscience and invokes boldly God's judgment as he knows of no other alternative than that of seeking God's verdict. He prays for relief so that God would be glorified in his vindication.

He who suffers innocently does not need to fear anything, as he knows that God hears his prayer, drives away his opposers and will deal with the wicked persecutors (2 Thess. 1:4-8). Since David has a clear conscience especially in his dealings with his enemies, he is not afraid to ask for heavenly judgment. In that context St. Paul says: "For our rejoicing is in this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world and toward you" 2 Cor. 1:12. St. John also says: "Beloved, if our heart condemns us not, then have we confidence toward God" 1 John 3:21. A person who enjoys a righteous conscience in God does not fear people's opposition but rather confides

¹ Weiser, p. 136.

in God the searcher of our depths. That person may often suffer pressure, but he believes in Him who vindicates and glorifies His children.

Because David has not despised God's commandments and consequently has loved his enemies without malice or evil thought, he is confident that he will suffer no condemnation or curse and that his prayers will be answered.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, there are six conditions necessary for a prayer to be answered¹:

- * The supplicant is worthy to attain what he asked.
- * His petition is in accordance with God's law.
- * His perseverance.
- * He asks for nothing that is earthly .
- * He struggles to attain a virtuous life.
- * His petition is in accordance with God's will.

The psalmist claims his innocence before the Lord, saying:

"O Lord my God, if I have done this; if there is unrighteousness in my hands; If I have requited with evil those who wronged me, let me fall empty before my enemies" [3, 4].

David had Saul twice completely in his power. First, at En-gedi, then in the trench of Ziph, but he would not hurt a hair of his head, nor suffer anyone else to injure him. Doubtless he would also treat any other foe with true scriptural benevolence (1 Sam. 24, 26). The sense then is, If I am a guilty man they say I am, yea, if I am not benevolent even to my worst foes, then "Let my enemy persecute my soul"[5]. If Cush can make good his accusation, then let the worst come on me, that my enemy desires - let him take my life - cut short my existence - and bury my glory in the dust [5]².

- ❖ For what is glory if we do not injure him who has not injured us? But it is true virtue to forgive when injured³.

St. Ambrose

- ❖ Moses was meek above all men (Num. 12:3), and David was exceedingly meek (Ps. 131:2). Consequently Paul exhorts us as follows: "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle towards all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves" 2 Tim. 2:24, 25. Do not seek to avenge yourselves on those that injure you, for (the scriptures) say "If I have returned evil to those who returned evil to me" [4]. Let us make them brethren by our kindness⁴.

St. Ignatius of Antioch

- ❖ ***"If I have paid back evil for evil, let me fall down defenseless before my enemies" [4].*** What does "Let me fall down" mean? As long as a man is on his feet he has power to stand up to his enemies, he strikes and is struck, he wins a victory or he is defeated, but he is still on his feet. If, however, he loses his foothold and falls down, if he is lying on the ground, how can he go on struggling with his enemy? We should therefore

¹ Onsemius of Jerusalem, Psalm 7.

² W. Plumer: Psalms, p. 108.

³ Duties of the Clergy, 3: 9: 59.

⁴ Ep. To the Ephesians, 10.

pray fervently not only lest we fall down before our enemies but also lest we fall down defenseless... We pray that the opponent may throw us down in this way if we render evil for evil.

Not only do we pray for this, but we add, "let our life be trodden down into the earth" [5]. What do we mean by our life? Our capacity to act righteously should instigate us to ask that our life be trodden into the earth, so that we become completely earthly, and for all our thoughts and actions are earth bound.

"Let him plant my glory in the dust" [5]. What is this glory of ours if it is not the knowledge generated in the soul that obeys the commandments?!...

We curse ourselves if we repay evil for evil... not only in actions but also in words and in attitude... For there are times when a person, either by his attitude, his movements, or his looks, disturbs his brother - and does so intentionally - and this is to render evil for evil. Another man may not render evil for evil, by deeds or words or attitude or movement, but by wounding the heart and harboring resentment against his brother... Another may hear that someone has annoyed his enemy or opposed him or at the same time slandered him and is therefore glad when he hears it; then it is clear that he too is rendering evil for evil in his heart¹.

Fr. Dorotheos of Gaza

❖ As often as we repeat these words, let us not seem to utter a dire curse against ourselves. Let us return evil for evil to no one².

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

Death is an evil in David's esteem - let him tread down my life upon the earth [5] - yet the laying of his honor in the dust is a greater evil.

3. ARISE, O LORD

"Arise, O Lord, in Your anger, lift up Yourself because of the rage of mine enemies. And awake for me to the judgment that You have commanded. And the congregation of the nations shall compass You; and for their sakes return You on high" [6-8].

Note that in the liturgies recited during the feasts of the Cross, the psalms, where the word "lift up" is used, are chosen. This significantly indicates how the church aspires to Christ who is raised on the cross to destroy Satan, the enemy, and to grant victory to His people and honor to His Father. Here, the psalmist points to the Lord's crucifixion "lift up Yourself" and to His resurrection "awake" and to His ascension "return You on high." He does so before speaking about judgment or eternal condemnation.

The psalmist says to the Lord, "Arise" yet the Lord never slumbers or sleeps (Ps. 121:4). In times of stress, we think that evil has the upper hand and we consequently cry to the Lord in the same words of the psalmist. They indicate anguished impatience with the Lord's inaction in the face of great need! The psalmist's prayer reveals his great need as well as his inability to save himself. He therefore pleads God to rise and resolve the situation he is facing³. This cry is associated with the ark of the covenant and its symbolism of God's presence among the people in the desert, and later on in times of war

¹ *On Rancor or Animosity*

² *Sermon 36: 3; 75: 3.*

³ *The NIV Study Bible, p. 792*

(Num.10.35; Ps. 68:1; 1 Sam. 4:1-4) and with God's action for the defenseless (Isa. 51:17).

"Arise, O Lord." It is not our business to vent judgment upon an enemy. We have a gospel with a positive message and one that brings a blessing. A Christian should at all times be above petty jealousies and slandering. He should never lower his standards and fight back with the same implements which the enemy used in attacking him. If a sword is to be used, if judgment is to be exercised, Let the Lord do it. It is He who arises to judge men and the whole world with righteousness¹.

In his utter grief, the psalmist seems to think that the Judge has temporarily quit the court. Consequently he pleads that He arises to utter a verdict in his case. David entrusts everything into the Lord's hands and waits for His judgment. God's silence reveals His long-suffering, but if the wicked misinterpret that and tread upon His saints, then the Lord surely arises and brings them to judgment.

- ❖ Since they did not recognize You in Your kindness, let them experience You through Your wrath. **"and be exalted in the utmost confines of Your enemies"** [7]; the Psalmist pleads for his enemies, that God be glorified in the land of his enemies. When thy will have ceased to be enemies, then You, O Lord, will be exalted among them².

St. Jerome

- ❖ Surely in this psalm the soul is praying not against men but against the devil and his angels. Sinners and ungodly belong to this category. Hence it is a sign of piety, not of anger, when any one beseeches the Lord, who amends and justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5), to rob the devil of his prey. For to justify the ungodly means to make him pass from impiety to holiness, and from being the possession of the Devil into being the temple of God.

St. Augustine

It is as though the psalmist cries to God, the Judge and Savior, begging Him to condemn the state of enmity and evil and consequently destroy the evil of the wicked, then transform them to His righteousness through the power of His Cross and Resurrection. This is the meaning of **"lift up Yourself because of the rage of mine enemies"**[6], i.e, pierce Your Cross in their hearts, that Your blood may fill their hearts, thereby purifying them and transforming their darkened earth into Your heavenly kingdom where there is light and joy. Thus the Lord shall gather His holy members, "the congregation of the people shall encompass thee about" and they shall become your church where there is no blemish or hatred.

Rise, O Lord, on the Cross and over the land of the enemy and turn him into a friend, or even more, make him a holy bride to You. Awake, O Lord, from the dead, from among the people deadened by sin, in order to create from them the living Church, alive because of Your presence in it. Return on high and ascend into the heavens, so that all may ascend with You who are truly the first born.

St. Jerome, in his comment on the words, **"Rise up, O lord my God"** [7], says that our Lord is glorified through His resurrection.

¹ Erling C. Olsen: *Meditation in the Book of Psalms*, N.J., 1985, p. 41.

² Hom. 3.

❖ Actually, this is what we say: You suffered for us; You were crucified for us; arise and save us.... Arise, in order that a vast multitude may believe in You, for after You have risen, what else would we pray for? Return to the Father. "***And over it ascend on high***" [7]. For whose sake? For the congregation of peoples. In that You suffered, You suffered for us: in that You rose again, You rose for us; in that You ascended to the Father, ascend for us. "***And above it (the congregation) ascend on high.***" And no one has ascended into heaven except Him who has descended from heaven: the Son of Man who is in heaven" (John 3:13)¹.

St. Jerome

This is the prayer of David on behalf of his enemies. He wishes to see the Saviour glorified in them. He wishes Him to destroy the evil in them by the power of His Cross so that they may be lifted up and taken to Heaven with them. This prayer is in accordance with the Divine Will since David says, "***....to the judgment that You have commanded***" [7]. Hence the psalmist prays in accordance with God's plans for salvation and love for mankind. St. John also says, "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). God's divine will is so clear in His wanting to save mankind through His Cross, and wishing to share His heavenly glory with His people!

4. ESCHATOLOGICAL JUDGMENT

"The Lord shall judge the nations: Judge me, O Lord according to my righteousness, and according to my innocence that is in me" [8].

Since in this case David was innocent, he asked the Lord to scrutinize his inmost heart.

❖ Note how this soul that is in a state of innocence is not afraid of the Day of Judgment. It is indeed able to pray with a longing free from anxiety: "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10)...

Judge me, O Lord, according to my innocence, since my righteousness and innocence are from on high... You light my lamp, O Lord" (Ps. 18:28)... Judge me according to the flame which is from high, which does not originate in me but shines in me from Your enkindling.

St. Augustine

David the prophet who pleads God to vindicate him in this psalm, pleads in another psalm that God does not judge him, for no one can be righteous before God. What he prays for here, however, is not that God conceives his self-righteousness or his purity, for that would be vain but that God may vindicate him over his false accusers who misinterpreted his actions. That is why he turns to Him as the fair Judge who tries the heart and reins [9]. He is the Fire that consumes evil and upholds truth : "***O, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end but establish the just....***" [9].

St. Jerome comments on these verses where the psalmist prays that God may judge him according to his righteousness [8] by saying: [David could not have meant these words about himself: these words properly indicate the unblemished Savior who has never sinned.] Truly they are the words of the Risen and Ascended Christ!

¹ *Ibid.*

5. THE END OF WICKEDNESS [9-17]

"O let the wickedness of sinners come to an end, but guide the righteous" [9].

Origen notes that David prays God to destroy evil so that the sinner is liberated from the evil one and becomes a righteous friend walking in the straightway.

David asks God to destroy the wickedness of the sinners and to establish the righteous. He believes that wickedness will be finally and utterly overthrown, and God seeks to be reconciled to the sinner, but not to his sin or wickedness.

In other words, David does not pray for the destruction of the wicked but for the destruction of the evil within them. He does not pray God to annihilate his enemies but to terminate their enmity so that they become good. Moreover, he prays for the establishment of the righteous.

By the redeeming action for our Lord, His crucifixion, His resurrection and ascension, He prevails over the wicked who repent and return back to God or who are ultimately condemned on the Last Day.

"It is God Who searches the hearts and reins" [9].

God does not need witnesses on the day of judgment, for He knows the innermost secrets of the heart, feelings, emotions and thoughts. He knows the passions and lusts of the body...all are unveiled and naked before Him and consequently His judgment is righteous.

- ❖ "All the hidden things of darkness He will Himself bring to light" (1 Cor. 4:5). This will be effected through Christ; for He is the Light (Isa. 42:6), as Christ declares Himself to be a lamp, "searching the hearts and reins"¹

Tertullian

On the last day, all evil will come to an end. This will not be achieved now on account of God's long-suffering nature. Thus He grants all a chance to repent and return to Him.

The psalmist says, *"God is a just Judge, strong and patient, not inflicting vengeance every day"* [11].

The psalmist who asks God to vindicate him according to his innocence, knows that he himself together with his enemies are in need of God's long-suffering. If He inflicts vengeance every day nobody will be saved.

- ❖ *"For God is a righteous Judge, and strong, and long-suffering, and visits not with wrath every day"* [11]. But if we abuse His long-suffering, there will come a time when He will no more be long-suffering even for a little, but will straightaway inflict the penalty².

- ❖ Here on earth there is the chance to repent, He is long-suffering, and thereby would lead you to repentance. But if you continue in sin, you will after your hardness and impenitent heart treasure up unto yourself wrath³.

St. John Chrysostom

¹ *Against Marcion 5: 7*

² *In Cor., Hom. 9: 4.*

³ *In 2 Tim., Hom. 3.*

Thus the Psalmist is aware of God's long-suffering nature which He shows even towards the wicked. Yet we should not be lax for He has prepared a sword and bow to destroy the wicked: the sword to be used to strike at a near distance goal while the bow for long range.

"If you do not return, He will polish His sword; He has drawn His bow and made it ready, and in it He has fitted the arrows of death; He has forged His bolts for those who are burning" [12,13].

Indeed, both the bow and sword were used in the death of Saul (1 Sam. 31:3, 4). Both refer to God Himself as His justice is sharp and deadly as a sword, and piercing and violent as war arrows. God has prepared His bow and made it ready to shoot the hardened heart and conscience. By so doing, He threatens and incites the sinner to repentance. For God wishes to use His inflamed arrows to burn sin yet save the sinner. By God's sword, or by His Word, sin is destroyed, and the sinner becomes righteous by the divine grace.

St. Augustine states that the bow [12] is the Word of God. He says:

- ❖ This bow apparent in the strength of the New Testament is similar to strings ... this bow has shot forth the disciples like arrows, or has sent forth preachers of the divine word. These arrows have been directed towards those who are aflame. In other words, towards those who would be fired with the love of God when pierced by them. With what arrow was the soul pierced of the one who said: "Bring me into the wine cellar, set me amid perfumes, compass me about with honey, because I am wounded with love," (Song 2:4)?

What other arrows could set on fire the man who made up his mind to return to God, who quit his wanderings and begs for help against deceitful tongues while saying: 'What shall be given to You, or what shall be added to You against a deceitful tongue? The sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals that lay waste,' (Ps. 120: 3,4). It is as if the Psalmist says: "If you are pierced by these arrows and set on fire by these coals, you will burn by so great a love of the kingdom of heaven as to despise the tongues of all who resist you and would turn you back from your purpose.

St. Augustine

These two verses [12, 13] might conversely refer to the devil or the threat of being under his power if a person does not repent and relinquish his evil ways. Satan has his bows always ready to capture and bring us down. That explains the psalmist's reason for saying: ***"He has prepared... the instruments of death"*** [12], and St. Paul says that the arrows of Satan are fiery (Eph. 6:16). It is as though the wicked person gives Satan the chance to stir his heart with wicked passions and lust. He becomes a prey to the lion who prepares a deep pit for him and accompanies him even into hell.

In verse [14], the wicked is likened to a pregnant woman who conceives through unity with sin. She undergoes suffering in the hope of bringing a wholesome child that brings gladness, but conceives "mischief" and "falsehood."

"The sinner travails with wrongdoing; He conceives trouble and gives birth to iniquity" [14].

A person who is united with Jesus Christ conceives the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace ... (Gal. 5: 22) and gives birth to truth. But a person who is united with Satan conceives lies, deception, violence and anxiety.

- ❖ Every man conceives, and no one can exist without conception, but some conceive of Christ while others of the devil. Of those who conceive of the devil, it is said: "***He was pregnant with mischief, and brings forth failure***" [14]; while of those who conceive through the Holy Spirit it is written, "We conceived and writhed in pain, giving birth to the spirit of your salvation" (cf. Isa. 26:18)¹.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

The psalmist also likens the wicked one to a man who has dug a pit for his brother but falls in it, as he says:

"He has dug a pit and scooped it out, and he will fall into the hole he has made" [15].

- ❖ Do not then lay open your pool, dig not with vices and crimes lest anyone say: "He has opened a pool and digged it, and is fallen into the pit which he made [15]².

St. Ambrose

While the wicked is occupied with preparing the pit, still working at it, he falls in it. David reveals that sin contains in itself its recompense while righteousness, too, contains its own reward. The holy scriptures show that sin is generally considered as having a sequel of self-retribution (lex talionis):

"Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him" (Prov. 26:27).

"Whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent" (Eccl. 10:8).

"I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads" (Ezek. 22:31).

"They have followed vanities, and have become vanities" (Jer. 2:5).

- ❖ To dig a pit is to prepare a trap by opening oneself to mundane affairs, and as though ensnare and delude oneself and others.

The sinner digs this pit when he opens his soul to evil suggestions and worldly greed or covetousness. He digs it when, having done so, he goes on to actual deception.

St. Augustine

Abbot Serenus³ says that devils struggle against men not without effort on their part, in order to secure victory over them. But there is, hurled back upon them, the same confusion which was awaiting us, had we been worsted by them. Accordingly it is said, "His mischief shall return upon his own head" [16], and also: "Let destruction come upon him unawares; and let his net in which he has hidden himself, in that very destruction let him fall" (Ps. 35:8). In other words, the destruction that the evil has over prepared for others is reversed and falls upon him so that he suffers from what he wished others to suffer from.

The psalmist concludes by acknowledging God's justice and praising his name, for he is aware of God's work within his life and His power to reverse evil onto the evil one. Accordingly, he says:

"I will give thanks to the Lord for His justices; and I will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High" [17].

¹ Sermon 154: 3.

² Of the Holy Spirit, 2: 183

³ Cassian: Conf. 7: 21.

This is the first place in the Psalter where we find God called the "Most High." It is used for the first time in (Gen. 14: 18), however, it occurs several times in the Pentateuch, and often in later books. It is found more than twenty times in the Psalter. God is the most high in His glorious elevation of nature, of counsel, and of government. There is none like Him. There is none with Him. There is none beside Him. He is not only in all and through all; but He is above all and over all, God, the most blessed forever¹.

- ❖ It is such a wonderful saying: Inasmuch as God has been lifted up, likewise has the devil been debased.

St. Jerome

Likewise, the psalm concludes with a song of joy and victory as well as praise. Sadness is transferred into joy, and resistance of evil into an experience of God's work within us which instigates our tongue to praise Him.

- ❖ Singing is a sign of joy, whereas repentance for sin is expressed by sadness.

St. Augustine

David teaches us to praise God and thank Him even in our darkest moments, just as Job did, as well as apostles Paul and Silas while in prison at Philippe.

- ❖ Let us praise the Lord perpetually: let us never cease to give thanks in all things, both by our words; and by our deeds. For this is our sacrifice; this is our oblation; this is the best liturgy, or divine service in accordance to angelical manner. If we continue singing hymns in this way, we shall end our days in purity and attain the promise of the joy to come.

St. John Chrysostom

¹ *Plumer, p. 115-116.*

* اشترك في الترجمة الدكتور جرجس كامل يوسف وميرفت يوحنا بطرس

A Prayer

- ❖ Teach me, O Lord, not to repay evil for evil.
Rather, quench the glance of evil by the waters of Thy Holy Spirit that grant life !
- ❖ Grant me courage to despise the roaring lion,
For You are shield, the Lion coming from the tribe of Judah!
- ❖ Reign over my inner life as well as within the hearts of all mankind.
Lift us up from our failings and raise us with You into heavenly glory.
Grant us a share in the comfort of Thy Father's arms, and carry us with You above the clouds!
- ❖ Teach me to thank You continuously by testifying to Your Glory which is in me!

PSALM 8

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE SON OF MAN

This psalm is a song of praise (Hymn), glorifying God the Creator, for having given human beings responsibility and dignity. Its theme is the greatness and the glory of God which is perceived through the greatness and honor of man.

It declares the glory of God's Name and His abundant grace, by claiming who He is and what He has done, and relating us and our world to Him. It brings to light the unexpectedness of God's ways in the roles He has assigned to the strong and the weak [2], the spectacular and the obscure.

This psalm gives an answer to the question, "What is man?", by underlining the redeeming work of the Son of Man who was incarnated and appeared in humiliation, a little lower than the angels, to taste death on behalf of every man, but is now crowned with glory and honor, so that we might be glorified in Him and with Him. In other words, God's glory is manifested in the dignity of human nature as it was in its origin, and as it is to be restored in Christ who became the "Son of Man."

As in many other psalms, two main feelings fill the soul of the psalmist: fear of God and joy in His glory. The melody of the whole psalm is inspired by these two feelings or attitudes. These feelings do not oppose or contradict each other but they are integral and complementary. For the awe of God or His glory grants peace and joy within His children who hope that they will participate in His heavenly glories.

Some scholars state that this psalm was composed at night, while David was watching the flock. It is an evening meditation.

A MESSIANIC PSALM

Psalm 8 is quoted in the New Testament three times. Our Lord mentions it when the children in the temple cried out "Hosanna to the Son of David (Matt. 21:16). St. Paul also quotes it in (1 Cor. 15:27 and Hebr. 2:5-9), indicating that it refers to our Lord.

It is considered as a highly Messianic Psalm¹; It is a prophecy concerning Christ in His passion, His resurrection and His dominion over all creatures. A Syriac scholar says, "The eighth psalm concerns Christ our Redeemer."

In the Hebrew version the first word of the first and of the eighth verses is Jehovah. Number eight refers to the world to come or to the end. Then this Messianic Psalm speaks of Jehovah as the first and last who embraces all believers to raise them to the eternal glories.

OUTLINE

1. How wonderful is Your name! [1-2].
2. Contrasts the awesome universe and tiny human beings [3- 4].
3. Man's dignity as a divine gift [5-9].
4. Praise of the name of the Lord [9].

THE TITLE

¹ *Plumer: Psalms, p. 121; Weiser, p. 141.*

" Unto the end, for the presses. To The chief musician upon Gittith. A psalm of David."

The word "Gittith" is used also in the titles of (Ps. 81 and 84). The three psalms distinguished by this title are of a joyful, thanksgiving character.

"Gittith" is in some way related to the Philistine city of Gath. It could be a reference to a musical instrument, a kind of lyre, some particular tune, or the beginning of some famous and well-known song popular in Gath. David had a close association with the Philistines, having lived with them while a fugitive from Saul (1 Sam. 27: 1-7) and had employed them as his personal bodyguard (2 Sam. 8:18).

The word "Gittith" in Hebrew means "wine press" (Judg. 6:11; Lam. 1:15; Joel 3:13). In the plural we have in Neh. 13:15 Gittoth, very nearly the same as Gittith. The Septuagint and Vulgate uses in the title the expression "For the wine-presses." It is an allusion to Edom which shall be trodden down like grapes in a wine press. It may be a reference to the wine press where the precious blood was poured on Calvary's cross (Isa. 63: 1-4). This title is connected with that of Psalm 9 "Muth labben" which means "the death of the Son".

❖ We may take the wine press to mean the church For even the Divine word may be interpreted as the grape. Since the Lord has been called a Cluster of grapes: the Word that was sent before to the people of Israel, brought from the land of promise hanging on a staff, and as if He was crucified (Nun. 13: 23)...

That wine, which is the product of the vine of the New Testament and which the Lord has to drink with his saints in the kingdom of His Father (Matt. 26: 29), is most sweet and most health-giving.

❖ "Wine presses" usually indicate martyrdom, as if they who confess the name of Christ are trodden down by the blows of persecution, yet their moral remains as husks are left over after pressing on earth, but their souls flow forth to rest in the heavenly habitation (as wine).

St. Augustine

HOW WONDERFUL IS YOUR NAME!

"O Lord, our Lord, how wonderful is your name in all the earth! For Your majesty is exalted above the heavens" [1].

1. God's Name is wonderful through his creation, and through His covenant with man, wherever he is! This psalm reveals how excellent is the Lord's name, as the King of the universe. It uses royal terms such as: "majestic" [1-9], "have crowned Him with glory and honor" [5], "You have set Him over the works of Your hands (dominion); You have put all things under His feet" [6].

What does "the earth" refer to? Earth refers to our body which was created from earth. He is glorified in this body which He honored through His incarnation, and which He renews by His Holy Spirit in Baptism and forms it as His own holy temple.

Consequently, His glory fills "all the earth" as the Creator of the universe.

- ❖ Human arts produce houses, ships, cities and pictures. But how shall I express what God makes? Behold the whole universe; it is His work: and the heavens, the sun, angels, and men, are all the work of His fingers. How great is the power of God¹!

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ For man upon earth, as far as his bodily nature is concerned, is dust and ashes: but he has been honored by God, by having been made in His image and likeness; not in his bodily shape, but rather because he is capable of being just and good, and fit to practice all virtues. The Creator, therefore, takes care of him, as being His creature, and for the purpose of adorning the earth with him. For as the prophet Isaiah says: "He made it not in vain, but that it should be inhabited" (Isaiah 45:18) - inhabited of course by a rational animal, who can discern, with all the modulations of the mind, the Creator and Artificer of the Universe, and hence glorify Him as do the spirits that are above².

St. Cyril of Alexandria

St. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and St. Gregory of Nyssa see that God is above any name. His names are given to us just to acknowledge Him by our limited mind.

St. Gregory of Nyssa say, [How can He who is always beyond everything we know be designated by a name? The great David often calls God by a multitude of names and admitted them as being inferior to the truth: "For You are God, compassionate, merciful, patient, rich in mercy, true, strong, steadfast, a refuge, power, help, assistance, horn of salvation, ect..." And again David confesses that God's name is not known in all the earth, yet it is admired. "How wonderful is Your name in all earth³."]]

2. His praise is chanted on high: "For Your majesty is exalted above the heavens" [1].

Since the "earth" refers to our body, then we praise Him with all our body, i.e. with all our feelings, emotions, and capacity. For 'the heavens', here, refers to our "inner heaven," i.e. our soul, where God has established His kingdom (Luke 17:21). His glory is reflected upon and in our soul, for He says: "And your name has become known among the heathen because of your beauty, which I have put in you" Ezekiel 16:14.

AWESOME UNIVERSE AND TINY HUMAN BEINGS

"For when I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon, and the stars, which you have established" [3].

Here he mentions only the moon and the stars with no allusion to the sun, which refers to our Lord, the Heavenly Bride groom (Ps. 19:5). The moon with its changes is the church, and the stars with different degrees of brightness are typical of believers. The moon and stars that glorify God are the sinners who receive the grace of God and are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, they were earth and have become heaven.

The psalmist says that heavens are the works of God's fingers [3]. As in all manual work where man uses his fingers, so also in condescension to our capacities God is said to have made the heavens by His fingers. This is an ascetic and humble form of expression even though there is the realization that He has no body or physical members.

¹ *Exhort. To the Heathen, 4.*

² *Comm.. on Luke, hom. 96.*

³ *Comm.. on Canticle, sermon 12*

The Law also is written by the finger of God (Exod. 31:18), by which we understand the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who records God's words in our hearts has alone the power to change us unto heavens!

St. Augustine states that the Holy Spirit who gave Moses, the servant of God, the Law, works in the mind of the ministers, enable them to understand the Holy Scriptures as being the heavens. The babes and suckling are lifted up by the Holy Spirit to understand the Scriptures, i.e., to allow them enter the heavens!

As for the verse where David says: "the moons and the stars that You have established," Father John of Damascus comments: [By the word "established" he refers to the stability and permanence of the order and role that God has designated to them"¹.]

3. His praise is acceptably echoed from the cradle and the nursery for the babes praised Him on His entrance unto Jerusalem (Matt. 21:16). The babes stand for new born souls, who praise God not only be their tongues but also by their lives, as they attain the new life in Christ.

St. Augustine says: [I cannot take babes and sucklings to be any other than those to whom the Apostle says, "As unto babes in Christ I have given you milk to drink, not meat" 1 Cor. 3:1, 2.] Those simple believers enjoy praise of sweet childhood "because of Your enemies." In other words, they have the power to overcome the persecutors, heretics and atheistic philosophers, by faith. The miraculous power of God is to be found in the very fact that He "chooses what is weak in the world to shame the strong so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" 1 Cor. 1:27, 29. It is the pleasure of our Lord to open the gates of His kingdom to the little ones (Matt. 11:25,26; Luke 10:21; 18:17), granting them divine wisdom, power and joy, to participate in angelic hymns and praise.

❖ David says, "My soul shall rejoice in the Lord, it shall be glad in His salvation," Ps. 35:9. And for this cause, upon His entrance into Jerusalem, all those who were in the way recognized David their king in His sorrow of soul, and spread their garments for Him, and ornamented the way with green boughs, crying out with great joy and gladness, "Hossanna to the Son of David..." But to the envious wicked stewards, who circumvented those under them, and ruled over those that had no great intelligence, and for this reason were unwilling that the king should come, and who said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?!" and the Lord replied, "Have you never read, Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?" Matt. 21:16 - thus pointing out that what had been declared by David concerning the Son of God, was accomplished in His own person; and indicating that they were indeed ignorant of the meaning of the Scripture and the dispensation of God; but declaring that it was himself who was announced by the prophets as Christ, whose name is praised in all the earth, and who perfects praise to His Father from the mouth of babes and suckling; wherefore also His glory has been raised above the heavens².

St. Irenaeus

¹ *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 7.

² *Adv. Haer.* 4: 11: 3.

❖ We are children. In many ways the Scripture celebrates us, and describes us in manifold figures of speech, giving a variety of names of the simplicity of our faith... "And they brought to Him," it is said, "children, that He might put His hands on them and bless them; and when His disciples hindered them, Jesus said, Suffer the children, and forbid them not to come to Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," Matt. 19:14. What this expression means is explained by the Lord Himself who declares: "Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" Matt. 18:3. In this instance the Lord is not speaking figuratively of regeneration, but setting before us, for our imitation, the simplicity that is in children. Likewise, David in a prophetic spirit distinguishes us as children¹.

St. Clement of Alexandria

❖ For Christ, by accepting praise out of the mouth of babes and suckling, has declared that neither Childhood nor infancy is without sensibility².

Tertullian

In psalm 2, as our Messianic King was enthroned on the Cross, the kings revolted against Him. Here his name is glorified not only as the Creator but also as the Redeemer who recreates our nature, granting us the new life in Him.

C. Stuhmueller says, [The quotation of the psalm is 1 Cor. 15:20-28 includes references to the new Adam-humanity and the new kingdom and to the conflict with the enemies, the last of which is death, and to the new creation (cf. Eph. 1:15-23). The New Testament also makes clear that Jesus suffered our struggle with evil in his own body, that was crucified and buried, whenever we seem to die in our goals and in our weakness, we find a new dignity and a new creation in Jesus, risen from the dead³.]

4. God's Name is exalted through man's dignity and power [6-9]. There is no revelation of God except it also throws at the same time a special light on the nature of man; and, conversely, a true understanding of man cannot be achieved if God is disregarded⁴. The psalmist expresses his wonder at the marvelous world crowned by human beings [6-7]⁵.

God has granted us authority over "all sheep and cattle," i.e., over the body with all its senses; over "the beasts of the field," i.e., over the emotions of the Body; over "the birds in the sky," i.e., we have authority over our thoughts ; "over the fish in the sea," i.e., have spiritual authority even over the circumstances which appear as if they are outside our hands or above our capacity.

MAN'S DIGNITY

This psalm shows that man is not the product of random chance. He was created in God's image. Man is the highest order in God's creation. Truly human life is valued not in itself, but as a gift from God. It is God's will that man rules the earth, as His own representative.

¹ *Paed. 1:5.*

² *A Treatise on the Soul, 19.*

³ *Stuhmueller, p. 90.*

⁴ *Weiser, p. 142-3.*

⁵ *Collegeville Bible Comm., p. 757.*

"You have set him over the works of Your hands: You have put all things under his feet: all sheep and cattle, and also the beasts of the plain; the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea" [6-8].

Man is not as long-lived, as strong, as active, or in his gait as elegant as some beasts, but God grants him dominion over them.

St. Gregory of Nyssa says that God created man with a natural dignity. Therefore a master should not be angry against his servants, for they are created to be equal to him, having the same dignity, [For the Lord of the universe has ordained that only irrational nature should serve man¹.]

St. Augustine sees that by "all sheep and cattle" we understand the holy souls, either yielding the fruit of innocence, or even laboring so that the earth may bear fruit. In other words, that earthly man may be regenerated unto spiritual richness. To St. Augustine, "the beasts of the plain" designate men rejoicing in the pleasures of the flesh, therefore they do not lift up themselves or pursue higher aims. For "the field" is also "the broad way, that leads to destruction" (Matt. 7:13). "The birds of the air" are the proud, and "the fish" are the curious people. It means that the holy men together with the sinners who are absorbed in the carnal lusts, the proud and the curious people are all subject to the Son of Man.

We must take notice of the fact that in verses 5 and 6 it is always God who is the subject, and that it is from His hand that man receives the position of a ruler in the world. In spite of his insignificance, man has been appointed by God to have dominion over the earth. The Lord of the universe has entrusted man even with the divine function of governing. The King of the universe has even gone so far as to install man as the king of the earth and to crown him with the regalia of majesty and glory which really are the attributes of God's own appearance². This divine gift was bestowed to man in his creation "in the image of God and after His likeness" (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:19), and revealed more clearly in the redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we can say with the apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

❖ God has subjected the universal works which He has made to His own image, that is, to man³.

Tertullian

❖ The philosophers have learnt from our writings that all things were made subject to man, and, therefore, they believe that all things were produced also for man's sake⁴.

St. Ambrose

You have placed him (man) a little lower than the angels [5]

In (Hebrews 2:6-8) verses 5 and 6 (LXX) have been understood in the sense of prophecy, since the "son of man" [4] is interpreted as referring to our Lord, the Son of Man, who is above angels but had been humbled to become a little lower than the angels,

¹ *The Lord's Prayer, serm. 5.*

² *Weiser, p. 144.*

³ *Of Patience, 5*

⁴ *Duties of the Clergy, 1: 28: 139.*

by the sacrifice of His incarnation, to grant us participation in His glory (Heb. 2:6-8; 1 Cor. 15:27).

❖ Well, but as bearing human nature, He is so far made inferior to the angels¹.

Tertullian

Tertullian uses this verse as one of the arguments against Marcion who denied the manhood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- ❖ Now these signs of degradation (Isa. 53:1-4; 8:14; 8:5; 22:7) quite suit His first coming, just as the tokens of His majesty do His second advent, when He shall no longer remain "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense," but after His rejection He has become "the chief corner-stone" ... For the Father after making Him a little lower than the angels, "will crown Him with glory and honor, and put all things under His feet" [5, 6]. "Then shall they look on Him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, tribe after tribe" (Zech. 12:10, 12); because no doubt, they once refused to acknowledge Him is the lowliness of His human condition, "He is even a man" says Jeremiah, "and who shall recognize Him?" Therefore, asks Isaiah, "who shall declare His generation?" (Isa. 53:8).
- ❖ In the lowering of His condition, He received from the Father a dispensation in those very respects which you blame as human; from the very beginning even to the end He was destined to become Man. It is He who descended, Who was glorified, Who was judged and who also gives bounteously.
- ❖ But as for our Christ, He could not do otherwise than make such a declaration; "made" by the Father "a little lower than the angels" [6], "a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Ps. 22:6) that by His humiliation our salvation should be established².

Tertullian

Thus the expression, "**You have made him a little lower than angels**" is applicable to Jesus Christ incarnated. However, some scholars consider that this applies to mankind in general since God has given him sovereignty but as he has been subjected by death he has become a little lower than the angels.

- ❖ He has made us a little lower than the angels [5], I mean by reason of death, but even so we have now recovered.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Due to the innocence and righteousness of the holy angels being in proportion to their nature and glory, they are entirely distinct from inhabitants of the earth who spare, of a lower kind, and inferior in every respect, just as they are inferior to them also in nature. Nevertheless those who wish to live in holiness cannot change this nature without labor; for the pathway that leads unto virtue is rugged and steep and for most men too difficult to walk upon³.

¹ *On the Flesh of Christ*, 14

² *Against Marcion* 3. 7; 2: 27; 4: 21.

³ *Comm.. on luke*, hom. 99.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

GLORIFYING THE NAME OF THE LORD [9]

The psalmist does not conclude his hymn with the contemplation of man's dominion over the earth, but he returns to the starting-point of his meditation, I mean the glorification of the name of the Lord. It is as though he feels that the glory of God is the theme having overall importance, the beginning and the end. As for man's glory, it is but the gift of God glorified throughout the earth: "*O Lord our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!*"

How Excellent is Your Name !

- ❖ O Lord, most wondrous is Your glory,
You have crowned me king over the earth, bearing dominion over all Your creation
made for me !
Grant me dominion over my body, senses and feelings,
Over my soul and all its potentials and capacities !
- ❖ O Most Holy, make me holy !
O Most Glorious, glorify me !
- ❖ Open my lips with Your praise and count me among the children and babies praising
Your name !
- ❖ Grant me companionship with Your angels,
that I may share in their prayers and joy as they sing to You!

PSALM 9

A TRIUMPHAL HYMN

PSALMS 9 AND 10

The ninth and the tenth psalms are closely connected. It is generally agreed that they constitute a single poem. In fact the ancient Greek Septuagint, followed by the Latin Vulgate and the ancient liturgical texts of the Eastern and Western Church, calls them simply Psalm 9. Many convincing reasons are present for uniting the two psalms:

- * A certain Hebrew alphabetical or acrostic structure which extends throughout both psalms is noticeable.

- * The absence of a title to psalm 10 supports the view that it runs on from psalm 9.

- * The tradition of the church in the East and West.

- * The continuity of ideas and vocabulary. In psalm 9 David writes about external enemies (heathen nations), in psalm 10 he writes about internal enemies who oppress the poor, humble and orphans. Both mention "times of trouble" (9:9; 10:1). Besides, both indicate the conflict between righteousness and wickedness.

THE OCCASION INSPIRING THE PSALM

David, the Prophet, may have uttered this psalm as a thanksgiving in gratitude for one of his victories, perhaps over Goliath, the terrible.

Weiser considers that the celebration of the Lord's covenant was the occasion when this psalm was recited. Evidence of this is the reference to God as the King enthroned (9:4; 10:16) in Zion (9:11) who passes judgment on the nations, thus pointing to a cult festival. He suggests that the two psalms represent a "prayer of supplication." Mowinckel, however, classifies them as one of the "national (or congregational) psalms."

THE LITERARY FORM

The psalm's literary form is mixed similar to (Ps. 36, 40, 89, 90 and 139). It is a lament, as well as a thanksgiving and liturgical psalm expressing sapiential confidence. The temple liturgy at Jerusalem may have begun with praise and thanksgiving and then proceeded to petition for help and expressing sorrow due to difficulties, and then ending with confidence and dependence on God.

KEY WORDS AND IDEAS

- * The Gentile nations [10 times].
- * The poor [10 times].
- * Insolent and deviously wicked people [15 times].
- * God's justice [8 times].
- * God's enthronement in the temple [5 times]
- * The state of being vanquished and lost [5 times].

THE OUTLINE

1. The praise of the Most High [1-2].
2. The Lord, the Judge [3-8].
3. The Lord, the Refuge [9-11].
4. The Lord, the Redeemer [12-20].

THE TITLE

"To the chief musician upon muth-labben, a psalm of David," and according to the Septuagint: "Of David, to the end, for the hidden things of the Son (for Muth-labben)."

1. "For the hidden things to come:" this has already been explained in Psalms 4, 5, 6, 8.

❖ "Unto the end" is used since we have been saved by Christ's death and that was the goal for which Christ came in the flesh. This is what St. Peter refers to in his words: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently and they prophesied of the grace that should come for your sake: Searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:9- 11)¹.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

❖ The words "unto the end," do not refer to the Jews, but to us who in the end believed. The Jews are the first son, we who are the last, ought to heed this psalm because it concerns those who believed at the end.

St. Jerome

2. "Muth-labben" occurs in the Septuagint as "For the Mysteries of the Son."

A. "Muth-labben" means "the death of the Son" and could refer to the death of Bethsabee's first son or to Goliath, or Nabal or Absalom. Some suppose that "Labben" was the name of a great captain, who commanded forces, hostile to David and Israel, and that this psalm celebrates deliverance from him after his death².

B. Some are inclined to see it as reference to the death of the Son of man on Calvary, where the devil was conquered.

❖ As "to the hidden things of the Son" there may be a question: but since this Son is not defined, the very Only-Begotten Son of God should be understood... Obviously, this psalm is a song celebrating the mysteries of God's only-begotten Son.

St. Augustine

3. "Higgalon" means "meditate on that."

1. THE PRAISE OF THE MOST HIGH [1-2]

"I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will show forth all Your marvelous works, I will be glad and rejoice in You. I will sing praise to Your name, O You Most High" [1-2].

The opening of this psalm is a thanksgiving uttered in gratitude for a decisive victory which the psalmist gained over his enemies. It is to be understood as a vow to the Lord that the worshiper will testify to His name and tell of His wonderful deeds. It contains characteristic phrases for public liturgy.

In the opening verses, the points may be noted:

¹ Onsemius of Jerusalm, Ps. 9.

² Plumer: Psalms, p. 132.

A. The spirit of thanksgiving is one of the principal marks by which the true church, and believers, as members of the heavenly church are distinguished from the world.

B. The psalmist enters the fight to praise the Lord who grants victory over evil rather than to face the enemy. In other words, he does not want to focus on the troubles he faces, but, rather, wishes to stress rich blessings the Lord has granted him. Consequently, his heart over praises the Lord incessantly. This is what Isaiah says: "And in that day you shall say : O Lord, I will praise you, though you were angry with me, Your anger is turned away... Behold, God is my salvation: I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord (Jehovah) is my strength and my song; He also has become my salvation. Therefore, with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation," (Isa. 12: 1-3).

C. Another feature to be noted and which is closely related to the previous one, is the gladness arising from being with the Lord and not merely enjoying His wondrous work. In this context, **St. Augustine** says: [If you wish your joy to be steadfast and lasting, stick to the eternal God who never changes but is the same always¹.]

Joy in the Lord, and in His wondrous miracles creates in us the spirit of praise and thanksgiving. Besides, the constant practice of praise increases our joy and cheerfulness. In this way, the believer mounts from one joy to a greater one, and from one glorification to another.

❖ It is the whole hearted praise of a forgiven and spirit filled people, who praise the Saviour for His redeeming work.

❖ **"I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart" [1].** He does not, with a whole heart, confess unto God if he doubts of His Providence in any particular matter: but he who sees, already the hidden secrets of the wisdom of God, and how great is His invisible reward can do that and can say, "We rejoice in tribulations" (Rom. 5:3). He can also see how all torments inflicted on the body are either for the exercising of those that are converted to God, or act as a warning that they might be converted. Or torments could just be for the preparation of the obdurate unto their last damnation: and so now all things are referred to the governance of Divine Providence, which fools think are done, as it were, by chance and at random, and without any Divine ordering.

St. Augustine

❖ Great men have spoken not of God but rather of His work, saying, "Who shall declare the powers of the Lord?" (Ps. 106:2) and "I will relate all Your wonders" (Ps. 9:2), and "Generation unto generation shall praise Your works" (Ps. 145:4). This is what they discuss and this is what they have to say in their attempt to translate reality into words. But when their discourse touches on that which transcends all knowledge, it is only silence that they prescribe. For they speak "of the magnificence of the glory of His holiness there is no end²."

St. Gregory of Nyssa

¹ Fr. T. Malaty: *Isaiah, 1990, p. 155-156 (in Arabic).*

² *Comm. on Eccles., sermon 7: 44.*

d. Thanksgiving arises from the whole heart. Thus a worshiper does not give lip service while his heart is divided between the love of God and the love of the world. A heart filled with God's love constantly praises God from the depth and sincerely.

Some scholars divide worshipers into three classes¹:

Those who serve God but are hypocrites,

Those who serve Him with divided heart, and

Those who worship Him wholeheartedly.

Father Onsemius of Jerusalem says: [He who loves God with all his heart, praises Him with all his heart, that is with all energy and strength. It is similar to a person who repents over his sins with all his heart.] Likewise, **St. John Chrysostom** interprets this as he says: [I thank you Lord for everything, not only for a good life and a clear soul, but even for what is contrary to that." Thanking God for everything is like settling a debt. On the other hand, giving thanks to God in times of stress and suffering make God as though a debtor. In return for your thanks, He will bless you with strength thus arming you against pain...]

Jesus Christ, "the Only-Begotten Son" offered praise and recognition to God with all His heart, rejoiced in the spirit because the wisdom of our salvation was hidden from the knowledge of the haughty while it was revealed to simple-minded children. Thus the Lord says, "I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them to babes" (Matt. 11:25). This might explain why the title of the psalm is "For the secret [mystery] of the Son."

Let us be united with our Lord so that He might renew our hearts with His Spirit. Thus we will be able to sing His praise and give thanks with all our hearts incessantly. We will do so particularly concerning the mystery of salvation which He has declared to us. We should constantly cheer His name as the secret of our salvation and power so that we might ultimately share in His eternal glory.

2. THE LORD, THE JUDGE

David was not absorbed in victory over the visible enemy, but he was involved in God's presence and work, glorifying Him as the fair Judge [1-8, 15-20], the Refuge [9-12], and the Redeemer from the true enemy [13-14].

"When my enemies turn back, they shall be feeble and perish at Your presence" [3].

When our spiritual enemies are fallen, this is a result of God's presence. It is that and the glory of His power that alone are capable of destroying the enemies of God's people. An example of such an occasion occurred when Jesus came forward and said: "I am He," His enemies then stepped backwards and fell upon the ground (John 18:6)².

1. For forty days Goliath continued to insult God, while king Saul and his army were in shame. As for David, the pious youth, he believed in God who is the Just Judge, God does not prevent the wicked from practicing their wickedness but He leaves them only for a while. He judges justly amongst His people in the due time; He delivers the godly men from their evil plans of the wicked, while He leaves the wicked to attain the fruits of their wickedness if they insist not to repent. God's honor and glory are vindicated

¹ *Plumer, p. 133*

² *M. Henry Comm. In one volume, p. 586*

when He judges and punishes the wicked. Thus the psalmist says, "**When my enemy is put to flight, my foes weaken and perish from Your presence**" [3]. The believer thus leans on the Lord's bosom (John 13:23) acknowledges that God is long-suffering, waiting for the repentance of all men, even for His persecutors. At the same time, He is just and cannot leave evil for ever.

Some Fathers consider this section to be a reference to the Jews who resisted Christ.

- ❖ This has been the case with the Jews. They said that they would kill Jesus, lest the Romans should come and take away their place and nation... He who was slain is in Heaven, and they who slew Him, have for their portion, hell¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ **St. Augustine** says, [For now the Person of the Lord begins to appear speaking in this Psalm, for the following verse says, "**I will sing to Your Name, O Most High, in turning mine enemy behind**" [2, 3]. His enemy then, was he turned back? Was it when it was said to him, "Get you behind, Satan"? (Matt 16:23). For then he who was tempting desired to put himself before, when he was turned behind as he failed to deceive Him who was tempted, and by availing nothing against Him... For in truth the devil is turned behind.

St. Augustine

We may say that this was fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ who forced the devil, the opponent of goodness, to retreat in defeat and shame fullness. This still continues today in Christ's church, namely whenever Satan plans to become its head and weaves temptations to entrap God's people. In the process, the Real Head forces Satan to retreat powerlessly.

a. The temptation on the mountain is an instance when Christ allowed Satan to tempt Him, but He conquered for our sake and forced Satan to retreat.

b. When the wicked wanted to arrest Christ, He said: "I am He." They were so surprised and ashamed of themselves that they could not face Him and stepped back, but He came forward and surrendered by His own will.

c. **St. Augustine** also says that when we flee from the devil, our persecutor, and follow our Lord as our Leader, the first turns behind us.

d. We can also say that when we accept the cross with our Lord Jesus crucified wear the new man which, according to the heavenly image of his Creator, while the old man retreats back to the apostate.

e. The second Adam (Jesus Christ) came to lead our life, while the first Adam retreated. St Paul says: "The first man is of the earth, earthly; the second Man is from heaven, heavenly; (1 Cor. 15: 47). He also says that he forgets those things that are behind, and reaches forth unto those things that are before (Phil. 3: 13).

Thus the enemy of righteousness is destroyed by the Second Adam who forces him to fall behind. Thus our old man is crucified and we can sing and say: "**You uphold my cause and my right**" [3].

¹ In John, hom. 65: 1.

2. God, the Judge, establishes His righteous and all powerful heavenly throne within the heart in order to erase the multitude of sins that have occupied our depths. Thus cities are utterly destroyed so that holy cities may be established within us, hence the psalmist says:

"You uphold my cause and my right, sitting enthroned, judging justly. You have rebuked the nations, You have wiped out his name for all eternity You have destroyed cities" [4-6].

Since our Lord is the Judge of the earth, who will come to judge the living and the dead, dealing to each according to his deeds...He establishes now, therefore, His throne in the hearts of believers. In so doing, the power of His cross condemns and destroys all sin and evil thus unseating the evil one from the seat he has usurped. At the same time, Christ announces His kingdom within us - a kingdom based on His justice and righteousness. Thus He takes charge of the problems in our lives and never forsakes us or allows oppression or injustice to befall us.

a. **The righteous Judge sitting on the Throne:** As a king who is getting ready to debate an important and dangerous issue relating to His kingdom, He sits on the throne to declare judgment. Similarly, the Almighty takes charge of the case of His believers and announces His awesome rule.

❖ **"You sat on the throne judging right" [4].**

The Son says this to the Father. He also says: "You could have no power against Me, except it were given you from above," (John 19:11) meaning that the Judge of men was judged for men's advantage in order to achieve the Father's equity and His own mysteries.

Man could be the speaker here addressing God: "**You sat on the throne, You who judges right,**" indicating that God's throne is in man's soul, so that his body may be the earth, which is called God's footstool (Isa. 66:1).

Or the reference could be to the soul, or the whole Church, which is without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27). Thus the soul or the Church is worthy of the "hidden things" of the Son in that the king has brought her into His chamber (Song of Songs 1:4). She consequently says to her spouse: "You sat upon the throne judging right," in that You have risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat on the right hand...

St. Augustine

b. **"You have rebuked the nations (the heathen)":** who are the heathen rebuked by God who reigns in our hearts as well as in His Church where He is enthroned? They could be nothing else but sin and evil. For where God reigns there can be no evil even as light and darkness cannot co-exist.

May the Lord enter into our innermost depths to uproot all our weaknesses and reign righteously within us, granting us His holiness and the fruit of His holy Spirit.

c. **"And the wicked one has perished:"** Sins - the heathen - have been spoken of in the plural, whereas the cause of these sins is Satan, the one enemy of mankind.

❖ The enemy mentioned by the psalmist is spoken of in the singular, not in the plural, and his swords have become blunt. Who is that enemy but Satan whose weapons are the thousand erroneous theories he employs like sharp swords directed to carry the sail to death?

St. Augustine.

d. **"You have wiped out his name for all eternity:"** sin does not last as it is destroyed. Satan, too, and his band will not have lasting power for their names and memory will be put out for ever.

e. **"The swords of the enemy have utterly failed:"** the enemy is proud of the injustice he brings about as he believes he can threaten the righteous by his sword... but God, Who condemns evil, seizes that sword and flashes the sword of God's Word which amputates evil and disjoins it, thus glorifying God.

The sword of Satan is destroyed by the sword proceeding from the mouth of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:16). The psalmist also says: "Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O most mighty, with Your glory and Your majesty. And in Your majesty ride prosperously" (Ps 45:3).

f. **"You have destroyed their cities:"** God destroys all traces of sin: He rebukes the heathen, and erases their name, he destroys their sword and demolishes their cities....thus the enemy is wholly devoted and can find no place to settle in our hearts.

The judge destroys all the cities of the enemy that exist within us in order to erect for us an eternal city that has been created and founded by God Himself.

❖ And their cities were destroyed, that is those who were like towers and cities¹.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

❖ These cities are places where the devil holds sway, where insidious and deceitful suggestions are held, as it were, in a royal court...

The populace of these cities are but the sensual appetites and disturbing emotions which stir up daily discovered within man...

Our Lord destroys these cities when He casts out their prince as He told us: "The prince of this world has been cast out" (John 12:31)... In this way, the words of the apostle are fulfilled: "Sin may no longer reign in our mortal body," (Rom. 6:12).

St. Augustine

3. THE LORD, THE REFUGE

"The Lord is the poor man's refuge, his helper in times of trouble" [9].

The godly, who know the name of God, suffer much tribulation. Through these, they discover God as a Refuge. Various names are used in Pss. 9 and 10 to refer to the godly : the poor, the humble, the afflicted, the needy, the innocent, the orphans, and all those who seek God and cherish His name.

a. God is a Refuge to the oppressed and to the poor [9]. Some of the special titles of God in the Psalter is, in fact, the Defender of the lowly (147: 6), the Father of the orphans the Defender of the widow (68:5) as well as the Guardian of the little ones (116: 6).

God is a high place for the protection of His saints. Thus He is beyond the reach of the mightiest evil enemies.

❖ What harm will come to those to whom the Lord is become a refuge? It is as though they have chosen to be poor in this world, over which the Satan is ruler, not setting

¹ *Comm.. on Luke, hom. 12.*

their hearts on the things that are temporary and which tempt a man even though he lives and loves them, but when he dies they have to be left behind. Such are the poor for whom the Lord has become "**a helper in times of trouble**" [9].

St. Augustine

b. God never forsakes His believers who want Him and know His name as their Father, trusting Him and rejoicing in His promises, seeking Him with their hearts and their conduct.

"Let those who know Your name put their trust in You, for You have never failed those who seek You, O Lord" [10].

God's name means His personality which we get to know through our communion with Him.

To seek God means to desire to know Him, love Him, obey Him, serve Him, trust in His protection, and to be in communion with Him. And finally to be with Him in His heavenly glory.

Believers must seek Him intelligently, not superstitiously; diligently, not carelessly; humbly, not proudly; with all the heart, not hypocritically; in the name of Christ, not relying on our own righteousness¹.

Believers are required to trust God and that is achieved through the grace of active spiritual knowledge which they choose to seek actively. At the same time who should pray God to come to Him to enjoy His presence.

c. God is a Refuge to His believers as they hide in Him while He lives in them: they find in Him protection while He finds pleasure in them, so that He lives in His church, which is His holy city, and the spiritual Zion.

"Sing to the Lord Who dwells in Zion, declare His ways among the nations" [11].

❖ When the soul tears itself away from this world and seeks the Lord for its trust, the knowledge of god's name comes opportunely to the rescue.

St. Augustine.

4. THE LORD, THE REDEEMER

The psalmist compares between the destruction the enemy hopes will overtake me and the Salvation that Christ offers me.

First: the enemy is blood thirsty and God hears the cry of innocent blood:

"As the avenger of blood He remembers them; He does not forget the prayer of the poor" [12].

God sometimes permits His believers to be martyred, but at the appropriate time there is an inquisition for their blood, every drop of it. At that time the prayers of the humble are answered and He would say to the wicked what He said of old to the first persecutor: "Your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10). A crime or an act of injustice may seem forgotten, but God never forgets the old cries and never disregards injustice.

¹ Plumer, p. 138.

- ❖ For when inquisition shall be made for their (the martyrs) blood [12], and they shall attain to glory, then all shall be confounded by Christ, who have cast a slur upon their martyrdom¹.

St. Irenaeus

God does not forget the cry of the oppressed or their prayers for as **St. John Chrysostom** says:

[Prayer is a haven to the shipwrecked,
an anchor to those sinking in the waves,
a staff for limbs that totter,
a mine of jewels to the poor,
a healer of disease,
and a shield of health.

Prayer ensures the continuity of our blessings at once and dissipates the clouds of our calamities.

O blessed be prayer!

You are the unwearied conqueror of human woes,
the firm foundation of human happiness,
the source of eternal joy,
the mother of philosophy.

A man who can truly pray, though languishing in extreme indigence, is richer than all others. On the other hand, the wretched one who bows his knees, though proudly sitting as a monarch of all nations, is of all men the most destitute².]

Secondly: the enemy wishes to humiliate me, whereas God wishes to glorify me:

"Have mercy upon me O Lord, see how my foes humiliate me" [13].

The enemy of the godly entices man with lust and sin. He wishes to disarm him of his honor and esteem in order to transform him into a humiliated slave. On the other hand, the Redeemer came to buy us with His precious blood as He wishes to set us as His honorable children of God and partakers in His glory.

Thirdly: The enemy kills me by instilling anxiety within me; while God restores my joy and gladness:

"You have lifted me up from the gates of death; That I may tell of all Your praises in the gates of the daughter of Zion. I will rejoice in Your salvation" [14].

Since the enemy pushes me into the grave of sin and deadens my soul, I cannot glorify God because "for in death no one remembers You: and who will confess You in hell?" (Ps. 6:5). Sin closes the gates of eternal death over us. It deprives our soul of its peace with God and with itself and consequently cannot praise the Lord. Our Lord, however, has conquered death and lifts us up after breaking the locks of its gates. Therefore our hearts have been liberated and sing to spread His praise. The Lord carries into the daughter of Zion, the heavenly Church, that joins the saints in their liturgy and thanksgiving.

¹ *Adv. Haer. 3: 18: 5.*

² *Plumer, psalm 9.*

The eternal Arms lift us out of the gates of hell to carry us into the gates of the daughter of Zion where there is a place for us in the Father's Bosom.

Fourthly: the enemy sets up traps and enticing corruption while God leaves him to reap what he sows:

"The nations are stuck in the rot that they made; in this trap which they hid is their own foot caught" [15].

Satan prepared a cross to get rid of Jesus Christ. However, he himself got destroyed and lost his power over believers.

St. Cyril considers that this verse is applicable to the Jews who made Pilate bow down to their whites and issue the decree against the Lord Jesus Christ. It would have been better for them if Pilate's will had prevailed and the Lord, who was innocent and most righteous and sacred, set free. Thus the innocent would have been freed from His bonds which had been put unjustly. But they resisted and opposed vehemently, and so they gained a victory that was the mother of their undoing. They prepared a snare that led to their ruin¹...

Fifthly: God punishes evil and **rewards** the righteous for their patience:

"The Lord is known by the judgment He makes; the sinner is caught in the works of his own hands. the patience of the needy will never perish" [16, 18]

God's justice is apparent in the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the righteous.

❖ The Lord is known by executing judgments and others profit thereby².

St. John Chrysostom

❖ As the righteous who are perfected in good works shall not come into the judgment to be judged (Ps. 1:5), so of the wicked also whose sins are many, and the measure of whose offenses is overflowing, it shall not be required that they should draw nigh unto the judgment, but when they have been risen again they shall turn back to Shoel³.

Fr. Aphrahat

Sixthly: God announces the weakness of my enemy...

¹ *Comm. on Luke, hom. 152*

² *In Acts, hom. 12.*

³ *Demonstration 2 on Deathe and the Latter Times, 17.*

Prayer

- ❖ Lift me O Lord from the gates of hell.
Take me to You in order to enjoy salvation!
- ❖ Take me to Your joyful kingdom
So that my life becomes an endless song of praise!
- ❖ My whole heart is Yours... You are mine,
You are my righteousness, my refuge and my salvation!
- ❖ My enemy is a violent lion... before you he is nothing!
Destroy his weapons of evil, dissipate his injustice,
Free sinners from his captivity so that they might share with me Your love and Your
glory!

PSALM 10

FORGET NOT THE POOR, O LORD

As we have said this psalm is closely connected with the previous one. While in psalm 9 the psalmist speaks about external enemies, in psalm 10 he writes about the internal enemies who oppress the poor and the orphans, ignoring God's judgment.

Psalm 10 ends with faith in the Lord, who is compassionate towards the orphan and the oppressed and determined never to let devious and wicked people, whether in the community or in the world at large, tyrannize defenseless folk and drive them from their homes.

This psalm concentrates on the "heart" [6, 11, 13], as it declares that the wicked is proud. "He has said in his heart, I shall not be moved; I shall never be in adversity" [6]. In contrast the humble heart is a dwelling place of Christ, the humble and modest One. In fact the proud heart has no place to Christ, for it is the throne of Satan.

"He (the wicked) has said in his heart, God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see" [11]; "He has said in his heart, You will not require an account" [13]. The pure heart sees God as His beloved Savior, while the defiled one, i.e., the heart of the wicked suffers atheism and believes God has forgotten his wickedness and consequently will not judge or examine him.

THE OCCASION

Some see that this psalm as several others, was composed in general terms and not for a special historical event. It represents a cry for help issuing from the church in times of persecution. At such times, its eyes and concerns are devoted to bearing witness to the gospel. It also helps believers to endure their personal troubles and afflictions as well as the pressures exerted by proud or evil ones. Strangely enough, this psalm is convenient for the persecuted, righteous believers suffering tribulation, wherever and whenever they may be, i.e., at any period of time or place. It also describes the suffering church of Christ and the doom of her wicked enemies.

On the other hand, Some scholars give this psalm a special historical origin and this could be any of the following occasions¹:

- * Saul's persecution of David.
- * An invasion of Canaan by the hordes of Philistines.
- * Concerning Sanballat and other enemies during the Babylonian captivity (Neh. 4:1).
- * The dreadful persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes at the time of Maccabees.

Some scholars consider that Pss. 9 and 10 express the groaning of the Church under the tribulation of the expected Antichrist, atheism and immorality, that will undermine its ultimate sufferings.

THE OUTLINE

- I. Why stand You away far off, O Lord? [1].
- II. The wicked and his features [2-11].
- III. Do not forget the poor O Lord [12-18].

¹ Plumer, p. 150.

1. WHY STAND AWAY FAR OFF, O LORD?

God never forsakes His saints in their troubles. The believer, however, at such times, waits a long time for divine consolation, complains of God's withdrawal. Consequently, he asks: why stand you away far off, O Lord?

God's presence is undoubtedly a source of joy and consolation to His people. Doubting His presence creates anxiety and instability. Some scholars conceive this question as a lover's misgiving and a sacred objection that is not unusual in a holy interaction. Something similar occurred on the Cross, based on the faith that God sees everything and that He alone can grant rescue, for He is a just God who ultimately vindicates justice. Why then does He seem to be an indifferent spectator and withhold assistance when it is so much needed¹?

"Why....do you hide in times of trouble? "[1]

In the Hebrew version, verse one occurs and carries the meaning of "why do you disappear in time of trouble?!" What is psychologically disturbing to a believer is the disappearance of God and the withdrawal of His holy face rather than the actual condition of tribulation.

Hardship will certainly end one day, but what I yearn for is the presence of Your Face at such times... I feel the pain while I enjoy the experience of Your Hands wiping away my tears.

2. THE WICKED ONE AND HIS FEATURES

The wicked one here may refer to the Antichrist, or to those who have his attitude. The psalmist delineates their moral characters and features. These may serve as the accusations brought against a criminal in court and consist of the following:

- a. Pride, boastful, and arrogant [2, 3].
- b. Atheist [4].
- c. Corrupt [5].
- d. Deceitful and scheming [7, 8].
- e. Violent [9].
- f. Hypocritical [8].

a. Proud, boastful, and arrogant:

Through their pride, the wicked attempt to burn the poor man, but in fact they bind themselves by their own sins. The Psalmist says,

"At the pride of the godless, the poor man burns; they are caught in the crafty counsels they have planned" [2, 3].

It is quite natural for the proud to molest the poor for no purpose but to burn him. However, the cup which Babylon filled for Christ's Church is the same that it will drink of (Rev. 17:6, 18:6). Similarly, the dogs that licked Naboth's blood were the same that licked the blood of Ahab, the king (1 Kings 21:19). Moreover, the gallows Haman prepared for Mordecai were the same used to execute Haman (Esther 7:9).

❖ *"They are taken in their thoughts, which they think" [2], that is, their evil thoughts become chains to them... The tongues of flatters bind souls in sin.*

St. Augustine

¹ *Ibid*, 151.

"For the sinner praises himself for the desires of his heart; and the unjust man blesses himself" [3].

The wicked extols the wicked desires of his heart or his soul, considering himself very happy as he walks in the broad way. He glorifies himself in his shame, as he has long been vaunting it. It is a dangerous thing for a man to bless the wicked and envy them for their temporary prosperity, confusing sweet for bitter and light for darkness.

It seems that the wicked are not satisfied with mere evildoing. Their pride leads them to boast concerning their wickedness and degrading lust. What is even worst, is that they distort reality to make evil seem good and vices seem virtues. If they are angry they explain that to be a sign of courage and lucidity enacted to maintain truth. Upon surrendering to lust, they explain that this is a sign of maturity, experience and flexibility. The words of the prophet are relevant to such behavior as he says: "Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20).

❖ ***"For the sinner is praised in the desires of his soul; and the unjust man is blessed" [3].*** If he is dissolute, he is called happy; if he is avaricious, it is said that he saves his money¹.

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

Pride breeds the desire to satisfy corrupt lusts through injustice or greed...for there is a close link among those three: pride, adultery, and violence.

In many instances of adultery and physical immorality, man has just to examine his inner depths to discover that, most often, the cause is pride. Thus a youth who fasts, reads the Bible and gives thanks but who is violent in his dealing with his parents or critical with his colleagues may often be someone vanquished by secret lust and corrupt habits.

"For he says in his heart: I shall never be shaken; no harm will ever come to me" [6].

The wicked in his prosperity misinterprets the divine long-suffering; instead of leading him to repentance, it hardens him in his iniquity. He thinks his evil works will not have to be accounted for. He considers himself above any questioning or judgment!

In his arrogance, the proud says in his heart that he will never be shaken nor he will die. Thus he dismisses God from his assessments and plotting.

Pride is such a dangerous thing! It is a sin that turns all blessings into curses, and makes men shameless. There are many kinds of pride (Prov. 16:18; 29:23): one is proud of his humble origin, another of his noble birth; one of his precious clothing, another of his poor and rough garments; one of his virtues, another of his vices.

b. Atheism:

"The sinner provokes the Lord; in his great anger he will not seek Him. God is not before his eyes" [4].

According to the words of **St. Augustine**, behind every atheistic stand there is some kind of lust. For even though a certain person's mind and logic indicate the presence of God, he wishes to comfort his conscience and satisfy the lust of his wicked heart and

¹ Sermon 59:7.

body as well as his unjust practice by excluding God from his plans. While a believer's heart enjoys God and constantly utters His holy Name with every breath, the wicked ignores the grace of God, wishing to believe that He is far off, away from the world; and that He does not care about man's acts or his life and does not condemn him! As long as a wicked man enjoys some kind of prosperity, he imagines that God and His judgment cannot possibly touch him whenever he meets opposition, he is sure of his power to vanquish or tear the opponent apart by a puff or breath¹. In other words, if sin had its way, it would both dethrone and annihilate God and ultimately cancel His presence from the heart, His royal seat. As far as it can, sin affects a wicked man's words, thoughts and actions in a way that underlines the absence of God.

The wicked misunderstands God's patience because of his spiritual blindness. Accordingly, the psalmist says that God is not before his eyes for he says in his heart that no harm will ever come to him, and that God will not look unto his deeds. But God is everywhere even though the wicked does not wish to admit that. It is due his evil blindness that the wicked wishes to believe God is absent, or at least that He does not see his deeds, or even if He sees wishes to ignore them.

St. John Chrysostom finds that violence, injustice and anger are at the root of atheism, saying, [Anger is darkness. "The fool," says the Scripture, "has said in his heart, there is no God" Ps. 14:1. Perhaps this applies to the angry man, for he too says: "There is no God." And the scripture says: "Through the multitude of his anger he will not seek" (after God) [4]².]

If anger dims the eye, i.e. damages the inner vision of the soul, then man is deprived of the heavenly light.

We should not be surprised when we find atheist societies characterized by two features: immorality, especially physical lust, and man's deification. Those who are victims of physical immortality do not wish to have to restrain or reckon with them. Similarly, those who defy themselves do not wish to have God who would interfere with their lives.

It is the Antichrist who will try to instill these two ideas: immorality and deification.

c. His ways are profane:

"His ways are always profane; Your judgments are removed from before him; He will gain mastery over all his enemies" [5].

Since God is holy, and His true believers are saints bearing the features of their Father, it follows that the enemy of goodness is corrupt and his followers bear his features within them and are corrupt too.

Just as holiness is an inner state of being, a state of communion with God expressed through words as well as thoughts; similarly, corruption is a state of inner death prevailing and destroying everything in man. This corruption is the fruit of unification with the evil one, which has laid hold of a person in a way that disables him from shaking it off except if he attains the grace of God.

¹ Plumer, p. 154.

² In Acts hom. 39.

The above verse [5] reveals the wicked man's relation with his own soul (inner corruption!) and with God (complete rejection of His will!) as well as with others (dominance and authoritarian!). It is as though inner corruption is closely related to practical atheism and violence.

d. Deceitful and Scheming:

"His mouth is full of cursing, gall and deceit, under his tongue are trouble and pain. He sits in ambush with the rich in secret places to kill an innocent man; his eyes are fixed on the poor man" [7, 8].

The mouth of a wicked person is full of curses, bitterness, and deceit as he bears the spirit of Satan, his father, within him. Satan, who is condemned, instills condemnation through the mouth of his followers. On the other hand, Jesus Christ, who is called the Blessed as He is the source of all blessings, upholds His believers as a blessed community. There is no greater contrast in the world than that between blessings and curses. Accordingly, St. James, the Apostle says: "Out of the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things should not be so. Does a fountain send out at the same place sweet water and bitter?!" James 3:10, 11.

Our Lord is wholly sweet and enhances the soul with inner sweetness whereas Satan is marked by bitterness that fills wicked souls with loathsome bitterness.

Our Lord is the Justice that shines out in believers as the Truth. As for Satan, the enemy of goodness, he instills in his followers the spirit of treachery and deceit.

- ❖ "Under his tongue are trouble and griefs..." [7]. Under his tongue and not on his tongue, because he will devise these things in silence, and to men will speak other things, that he may appear good and just, and a son of God.

St. Augustine

- ❖ "Under his tongue is trouble..." [7]. The wicked (poneros) has his name from (ponen), "to have trouble." And, indeed, thus the Scripture is ever calling "wickedness" by the name of "labor¹."

St. John Chrysostom

In his treachery, he meets with the rich in order to plot under cover how to kill the poor... here it could be a reference to what the evil one did, exerting all his power, to kill the Lord of glory who became poor for our sakes. Satan used the rich and the great, those who were rulers and leaders as well as religious teachers, to undo Him!

Satan watches the poor treacherously and violently, waiting for the opportunity to seize and kill him! There is such a great contrast between the eyes of the Lord that look at the poor in order to inspire in him the spirit of hope and confidence as well as life itself; and those of the evil one which are filled with jealousy and wickedness!

Some scholars consider that the toil and grief hidden under the tongue of the wicked consists of heresies. He talks in soft sweet words that coat the poison of heresies underlying them. He conceals his intentions not because he is ashamed but for fear lest his schemes be discovered. This might explain why **Fr. Onesimus** interprets the words of the psalmist, "He sits in secret places with the rich" by saying: [Satan chooses those whom he believes to be wealthy in words and lies, and sits within them as though they

¹ In Acts hom. 7.

were hidden, secret traps.] He even uses philosophers and wise men to conceal his wickedness behind their thoughts so that it may seem logical and convincing.

e. Violent:

"He lurks in secret like a lion in his den; he lurks to make a prey of the poor" [9].

Since heretics and deceivers as well as the wicked accept to be a lion's den, the latter slyly conceals himself in them. He conceals himself within their thoughts, intentions, feelings, philosophical view, talents, and conduct, with the purpose of exploiting all their potentials to serve his ends.

Satan hides as a thief in secret places and dens. He is like a lion in his den, lying low then leaping suddenly on its innocent prey and tearing it! He appears careless and thus tricks his prey into believing in his disinterest. Suddenly, however, he bounces forward and digs his claws into the victim's flesh to tear it into pieces! Among the opponents of the Church it is difficult to find someone characterized by honesty, sweetness, sympathy or gentleness. Conversely, such people are typically violent and sly!

❖ **"He lurks in secret as a lion in his den"** [9]. By a lion in a den, he means someone characteristically violent and deceitful. For during the persecution of the early Church, violence took form of confiscating property and inflicting suffering and death. Some Christians were compelled to sacrifice. The second persecution is crafty, which is now conducted by heretics of any kind and false brethren; there remains a third, which is to come by Antichrist, than which there is nothing more perilous; for it will be at once violent and crafty. Violence he will exert in empire, craft in miracles. To the violence, the word "lion" refers; to craft the words "in his den."

St. Augustine

He is a deceiver who has previously tricked Eve in the form of a serpent, and according to **St. Gregory of Nyssa** who says: [This is the Serpent, the great apostate, Hades itself with open maw, the tyrant of the powers of darkness who holds sway over death, and all the other things that the inspired word tells us of him¹.]

f. Hypocritical:

Some Protestant commentaries² consider that the evil one here is the Roman pope who works together with his cardinals against the true believers. They base their idea upon this saying: *"He sits in lurking-places with the rich, in the secret places to kill an innocent man"* [8]. Nevertheless most of the Fathers of the Early Church see that the wicked here is a sign of the "man of lawlessness" or Antichrist "the son of prediction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

3. FORGET NOT THE POOR, O LORD! [12-18]

"Arise O Lord God, let Your hand be uplifted, forget not the poor" [12].

Having described the bitter characteristics of the wicked one and his violent fierce opposition to the children of the church - referred to as "the poor," the psalmist cries out

¹ Comm.. on the Canticle serm.

² Plumer, p. 155.

to God for help. He prays Him to come and save the poor, as though the Lord was sleeping in the boat and the psalmist calls, "*Arise, O Lord!*"

Whenever our faith falters, we get weak and, as if we were asleep; or our Lord is asleep in our boat. We have therefore, to wake Him up just as the disciples did when they said: "Lord save us: we perish," (Matt 8:25).

- ❖ The Church then laboring in such times, like a ship in great waves and tempests, awakes the Lord as if He was sleeping, that He should command the winds, and calm should be restored (Matt. 8:24-26).

St. Augustine

As oppression strongly afflicts the psalmist here, he finds in the glorious Cross and the Resurrection of our Lord a secret source of power. He cries to the Lord that He might lift His hands to announce the power of His Cross; just as He did when His hands were powerfully raised on the Cross to destroy the source of evil, Satan, and his power. The psalmist prays the Lord to reign in his heart, granting him the power of His resurrection which conquered death. Thus he can say with Thomas: "*My God and my Lord!*"

By calling upon the Lord to "Arise" the psalmist may wish the quick coming of the day of judgment. Then the Lord will arise and sit as Judge to condemn evil and reward the poor and the orphan, for he says in the final verse:

"To judge the orphan and the humble man, that no man on the earth should continue to boast" [18].

- ❖ Let us always bear in mind this tribunal, that we may thus be enabled at all times to continue in virtue; for as he has cast out from his soul that day, rushes like a horse that has burst his bridle to precipices... He that always retains this fear (of judgment) will walk soberly¹.
- ❖ A man cannot possibly live a pure life without believing in the resurrection².

St. Gregory of Nyssa

Throughout his cry for rescue, the psalmist repeats the words: "the poor," "the orphan," and "the humble" as he perceives that He who was rich became poor for our sake. We, thus, have become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). He found that we were orphans as we had lost our Father due to our sins.

Therefore He came, as a humble One, to carry us who are humble into His heavenly glory. Now, we have become rich and glorified, and no longer orphans.

It is God's personal delight to help the feeble and defend the injured, besides announcing his adoption of the fatherless, protection of widows, and proximity to the humble. This explains why we pray in **the Gregorian** liturgy and say: "You are the help of those who are helpless, and the hope of those who are hopeless."

God listens to His believers and hears their cries in times of tribulation. He does so because their hearts are prepared [17].

¹ In John hom 39: 1.

² In John hom 45: 3.

- ❖ His reply comes through the Prophet, "While you are still crying, He shall say: Here I am" (Isa. 58:9). Even before the bride has made her prayer, He hears her petition and attends to the preparation of her heart [17]¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

- ❖ The preparation of the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:14) is nothing else than a most virtuous life; according to what the prophet says [17]².

St. John Chrysostom

The psalmist closes the psalm by announcing God's miraculous deeds in the midst of His Church. He is there as He wishes to reinstate the joy arising from her salvation and affirming that He hears her cry in times of tribulation. Thus He destroys Satan's pride and arrogance.

¹ *Comm.. on Canticle, serm.*

² *In Epn. Hom. 24.*

PRAYER

- ❖ Return O Lord and look at Your Church,
See the enemy - how like a lion waiting for its prey
and throwing the nets up so as to catch it!
- ❖ Arise O Lord, Our Redeemer,
and assist your bride!
- ❖ You, who have become humble for my sake,
look at the humility of my heart!
- ❖ Stripe me from the state of orphanage,
and let my heart rejoice in Your Fatherliness!
- ❖ Let Your eyes look at me as the enemy stares at me since he plans to devour me!

From among the interpretations and the meditations of our Forefathers

**The Psalms
(Psalm 11 – Psalm 20)**

1991

**Father Tadros Yacoub Malaty
St. George's Church at Sporting**

Psalm 11

Faith is Greater than any Escape

The Praise of the Assured One

David the prophet appears at this point as rejecting the advice of his scared friends. They suggested he should flee to take shelter in one of the mountains, away from Saul's chasing him (1 Sam. 23: 7-18). David believed God, the righteous King, would never desert him. The God, who has created the mountains, in his refuge. Some scholars think this psalm is one of the psalms spoken on behalf of the people. It reveals the divine help when facing savage and barbaric enemies. David did not reject his friends' advice because his escape would be regarded shameful for a leader as he was, but rather because this suggestion implied some mistrust in God. This was inappropriate for a man of God, a man who was used to constantly giving inward praise to God from his deep heart, saying, "In the Lord I put my trust." (Ps. 11)

This psalm is called the Praise of the Assured One, which is among the psalms of the confidence in God (Ps 11, 16, 23, 62, 125, 129, and 131). These psalms reveal that absolute distance away from God makes prayer impossible. The one who suffers has no other alternative than to denounce and curse God, and so he dies. This has been referred to by Job's wife regarding her man (Job 2:9). In these psalms, the believer is enlightened by the beams of confidence in God. He only realizes that God, who has often delivered His people in the older times, He is still alive and he will perpetually save them. In this hope, the believer is exalted above every suffering, instead of fleeing to the mountains that have been created, he thus realizes on the Creator of those mountains, He who dwells in the heavens whose eyes investigate the people's matters. He is the refuge of His believers!

The word "refuge" has been repeated more than once in the book of Psalms. In the Holy Book it is mentioned 37 times, 22 in this book alone. The topic of this psalm as well as many others is to rely on god against the evil power. This confidence is the basis of the joyful hymn-singing in the church, in all of her worshipping and righteous life. The entire psalm teaches us that whenever we fall in any ordeal or temptation, it is appropriate for us not to complain, but rather to resist Satan and thus he flees from us¹.

The General Framework:

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------|
| 1. The False Advice | 1-3 |
| 2. The Trust in God | 4-7 |

1- The False Advice:

"In the Lord put I my trust: How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?" (Ps. 11: 1).

David remembers the advice of his friends (Ps. 11: 1-3) who advised him to leave his country and to take shelter in the mountains. The Hebrew word synonym to the word "flee" means to hesitate or to rock back and forth, or to walk in zigzag, as if in fear when facing his skillful adversary. But David's answer was "In the Lord put I my trust".

David's friends were very similar to Job's wife. Cowardice is always hazardous, and nothing is as harmful as it is. it is the one of the criminal deeds that springs up from

¹ Plumer: *The Psalms*, p. 173.

the lack of faith. Any advice to depart from the field site is a stupid and evil action to be taken. What his friends said has depressed him and hurt his feelings, for he was a believer who put his trust in the Lord¹.

David might have been working at this time in the royal palace if he had run away he CD have been accused of negligence in work, as well as cowardice. But what the prophet was concerned about was not the people's accusations; but rather, his inward depths that reject the doubting in God's protection of him.

We do not deny that David the prophet escaped more than once from Saul's face, because Saul has persecuted him. He also escaped from his son's face, Absalom the rebellious one, for there is an evil escape and a sanctified one.

1. The evil escape is that of which is based on inward fear and having no reliance on God, or trust in His protection and care. This is what David the prophet rejected!

2. The sanctified escape is that in which we escape from the face of evil. This is not due to the lack of trust; but rather, it is due to not wasting time in resisting the evil. Our Lord Jesus Christ has run away to Egypt from Herod's face (Matt. 2: 13). Lot also was asked to flee to the mountain (Gen19: 17). Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ has asked us to flee to another city when we are cost out of one (Matt. 10: 41). When we escape from the sinful matters, particularly those that we cherish, this is a sign of our love to God, and not due to our lack of trust in His saving us (2Pet. 2: 20). Joseph has left his cloak by Photiphar and he ran away (Gen39: 15). In the book of Revelation the woman ran away from the dragon's face to the wilderness (Rev. 12: 6).

❖ If you are still pure, up till the present time, then try to be even purer by avoiding such scenes. Do not rejoice in vain discussions, and do not find useless pretexts. Rather, have one excuse only; leave the Egyptian adulteress, as Joseph did, and run away from her hands, leaving your clothes behind².

St. John Chrysostom

❖ To run away from your Egyptian mistress, leave behind the robe that pertains to the world³.

St. Jerome

❖ The soul is similar to a bird: there is the good bird that by nature is able to spiritually fly. There is also the evil bird that is unable to fly due to the earthly unrighteousness. This last example is sold for two pennies (Luke 21: 6). How cheap the cost of iniquity is⁴!

St. Ambrosios

Therefore, we do not flee due to fear or doubt in God's ability to save us; rather, if we flee, it is the flight from evil to God.

David the prophet teaches us to struggle continually, and to ignore the difficulties surrounding us, however long our struggle might be, and however difficult these hardships may be. Have trust in God and in His promises.

David was the symbol for Jesus Christ, David's son. It is He to whom some Pharisees came and advised Him to go away because Herod wanted to kill Him. But the

¹ *Ibid*, 165.

² *In Matt. Hom. 18: 2.*

³ *Ep. 145.*

⁴ *In Luc. 12.*

Lord rejected this, and predicted to them that He was about to undergo the path of suffering and the cross (Luke 13: 31, 32). We, too, should not flee to our mountains, which are our personal righteousness; rather, we have to rely on the heavenly Father, for He is our Lord.

St. Augustine thinks we have to climb up the one mountain, our refuge the Lord Jesus. That is, we have to be in Him, and be blessed by being, members in His church. In other words, the holy mountain is the Lord Jesus, and also it is Christ's church. As for the heretics, they try to deceive suggest by climbing the mountains, Which means to accept the false doctrines.

Through the church, the holy mountain, we are exalted to heavens itself, to our heavenly Christ, and His church that is the icon of heaven. But as for the heretics teachings, there exalt us to the mountains of arrogance.

The Enemy is Ready for Work

“For, look, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart” (Ps. 11: 2).

David manifests that dangers surrounded him from every side, and that he is about to lose his life. It was impossible to hide from them or run away from his enemies, for they were well-equipped with weapons, and were only too ready to kill him with the arrows. As we mentioned previously, the church in all ages, wherever it may be, was living as Daniel did, in the lions' den. He was like someone in heaven itself, enjoying the fellowship of the angels that shut up the lions' mouths and he shared them God's praises.

It is appropriate for the righteous not to be shocked however much evil faces them. The wicked are constantly as debased as could be, and their evil is in their hearts. Their wicked deeds befit them as being the children of darkness and Satan's sons. In every generation there is Cain, Ahitophel, Judas, Dimas and his false brothers and his dogs, and his cowards that are lack all principles, his despots that are so heartless¹.

The enemy does not only have the bow, but also the stringed arrows ready for use. His aim is the righteous at heart, so he hits them in the dark, when there is no moonlight. The moon is the symbol for the church. This is why the enemy is unable to aim the fiery sinful arrows and the vain teachings in the light of the church. Rather he will aim them when this moonlight vanishes and when the darkness of iniquity covers it up.

- ❖ The moon is understood to be the church, because it gives no light of its own; rather it is the only Son of God who shines it. In many parts of the Holy Book He is referred to symbolically as the Sun (Kings 4: 2). This is not unknown to some heretics, and they are unable to understand it, and thus they attempt to mislead the simple-minded.

St. Augustine

The prophet had a straight and righteous heart. Likewise is the church that is sanctified by the Holy Spirit, in being worthy of precious blood of Jesus. It is not a crooked one, but rather 'straight'. The Savior of the church is Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. He shines on her with His divine light, giving her His light so that she becomes the light of the world. The world cannot destroy the church, because he tries to aim his arrows at the righteous hearts in the dark, and not in the light. As long as Christ the Lord shines in His godly glory on His church, united in Him, then the heretics will never be able to destroy her faith, however much they aim their arrows of false teachings.

¹ Plumer, p. 171.

Some people think the church is as the moon that has shining side that has one shining side that receive the light of the Lord Jesus by means of the Holy Spirit working with her. There is also a dark side that has the theoretical faith, which has no shining life by the strong Spirit. This side accepts the heresies easily and reacts with them.

Some others think the church is the dark side, amidst her affliction due to her constant persecution; the heretics aim their fiery arrows against her. This is to pierce the righteous hearts while the honest servants are busy with the afflictions that keep harming the church!

“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11: 3).

The Hebrew translation came as follows: if the pillars are turned upside down, what can the righteous do?

Some apply these words to the destruction of Nob’s priests (1Sam22). Others think the pillars of the foundation that have been turned upside down, refer to the nobilities and prestigious people.

But the assumption mostly accepted is that David speaks here of the foundation of justice¹ that have become crooked by means of King Saul. So, can the righteous David put that right?

St. Jerome understands this structure here to be the lawful doctrine. The work of the adversary is to wreck it, and to destroy the church role by creating an atmosphere of controversy. The church foundation is the law of love. This is why the role of the adversary is to ruin the love and the unity we have in the church.

When we are in need of love, what can the righteous one do? This matter needs God Himself to correct the assembly and renew it.

- ❖ The ones he calls ‘wicked’ here are the invisible devils who aim their arrows secretly. Some of these arrows are adultery, other are greed and temporal love. The devils hurt many as much as they possibly can².

The Scholar Oreganus

St. Augustine thinks the righteous one here refers to the Lord Jesus who has offered immense love by shedding His life for the sake of the world. What will He do? Since the heretics destroy the pillars of the faith? He has been intensely patient with them, in the hope of their repentance.

These words point to the last age, when the pillars of the church are about to be shattered due to the deviation from the true faith and the departure from love (Matt. 24: 12). There will be difficult times to come (2Tim. 3: 1), and it will see as if there is no opportunity for the righteous to work. Even the elect might be misled as well. Amidst all of this we cry out in faith *“in the Lord I put my trust...the Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven’ His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.”* (Ps. 11: 1, 4)

The adversary attempts to cheat the simple hearted by drawing them in the dark, away from the moonlight. But faith raises them from the earth to the spiritual heavenly church so they could behold the brilliant and divine throne. There they will see the Head, the holy temple, and yet His throne is in the heavens. This means His spiritual worshippers are blessed with the heavenly glory which is their resort and refuge.

¹ *Ibid*, 167.

² *Comm.. on Songs* 3: 8.

The word ‘temple’ here often means ‘palace’ or ‘palaces’ as plural form (2Kings 20: 18; Ps. 45: 8; Prov. 30: 28’ Is. 13: 22). The word ‘temple’ was said about the tent before David was born (1Sam. 1: 9; 3: 3). This shuts the door for any argument that the writer is not David. This relation makes clear that David here speaks of GOD for He is the Judge and the King. He judges in righteousness and sits on His throne in heaven. It is not as understood in the older times, that he dwells in “shaking” a Hebrew word that means ‘a dwelling place’ that is of the Ark of the Covenant. God is in His holy temple. Here David refers to the heavens, the real holy place which the temple was a symbol of. This is clear in the following statement where he utters more specifically *‘the Lord’s throne is up in heaven’*¹.

The psalmist describes to us the difference between heaven and earth. He noticed that now the earth waves chaotically, where no one could obtain justice or equality, and that there is no means for salvation in these present tedious times. he cannot trust anyone, only God does he trust, He whose dominion prevails over all. He constantly does righteousness, and exalts forever above every envious power. He does not forget His role as the Judge and the Ruler for everyone, with no partiality whatsoever. The psalmist did not only say that God dwells in heaven, but he also said that He judges from His throne up above, as if forum his royal palace where His throne or His seat is.

We understand that heaven is the righteous soul. We moreover can say that whereas the adversary is trying to direct at us his arrows by means of physical passions, the Lord declares His heavenly kingdom inside our souls. These souls are His royal palace or His holy temple. The enemy is eager to make of us an earth, but the Lord wants us to be His heaven. The New Testament encourages us not only to find the Lord in the temple alone (Matt. 5: 34, 35), but also to find Him in the righteousness given other us as a blessing to the church (Matt. 18: 15-19).

In other words, the prophet David’s friends were scared, and thus they advised David to flee to the mountains, as a helpless small bird does, that is unable to face the fierce enemies. These enemies do not set a small trap for the bird to be caught; rather, they carried stringed arrows, ready to kill those who have an upright heart, such as the poor bird. Every foundation for justice has collapsed, and the righteous David had no means for correcting what has been destroyed. God Himself is there dwelling in His heavens and performing justice. The Holy God dwells in his heavenly church as much as in the soul that is sanctified by Him. He does not carry the soul to the mountains as a bird. He rather grants the soup His Holy Spirit so it flies to heavens itself. For this reason the psalmist sings *“in the Lord do I put my trust”*.

Friends ask us to flee to the mountains of human wisdom, and to rely on human arms and worldly means. But as for God, who dwells in the heavens, He grants us His Spirit so we may be exalted with Him to His throne, where we could find a place for us in His Father’s embrace.

Righteousness and our Souls

The psalmist answers his weak-hearted friends *‘in the Lord do I put my trust’*. This confidence has to be appropriately declared through the righteous life, I mean, through our being blessed by Christ’s righteousness. He alone is the Holy One, the One who dwells in His holy temple, that is, in our hearts that have to be sanctified by His

¹ Plumer, p. 167.

Holy Spirit. it is then that he looks upon us for we are His poor ones, and He becomes a refuge to us “***His eyes behold, his eyelids test the sons of men***”.

God dwells in His heavens, for they are His holy temple. We do not see Him with our physical eyes, but He sees us. We may be forgetful of Him, in the midst of this transient life. But He is preoccupied with each one of us. He looks upon us, and investigates our life with His eyelids, through His sweet promises.

God dwells in heaven, and His eyes look upon His poor ones, because they are His children who have a place in His heart. They live on the earth where the wicked ones surround them and pressure them, and practice against them the most severe means of injustice. But there is no place that God’s justice and His care for His people that cannot be reached. He truly allows His children to be tempted in every place and at all times. But very soon, His grace and His mercy embrace them whenever they are to be found.

The Lord’s eyes the look upon us are His mercy and His grace, or His love and His care. The Lord’s eyes could also refer to the Holy Book in both Testaments. Through them, God declares His eternal covenant, and His dwelling amidst His people, and His dwelling amidst His people, and His divine promises, as well as His heavenly glories. By means of His word, we can see Him looking upon us in tender love and in practical fatherhood so that He exalts us up to heaven. There we should live with Him eternally in His Holy Temple, or, He lives inside us as His Holy temple (1Cor. 3: 17). We thus become (Eph. 5: 30) “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones”.

The righteous is surrounded and cared for by the Lord’s eyes, but the wicked one is hated even by himself. (Ps. 11: 5) “***but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates***”. The unjust one loses his fellowship with the Holy God, love itself. He becomes so aggravated at heart, that he cannot tolerate even himself. His consistence gets disturbed, just as Herod’s conscience disturbed him after killing John the Baptist.

❖ I beg you that we do not hate ourselves, and to love injustice. Injustice is surely unprofitable in this present world, and s in the world to come, it will beget for greater destruction¹.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ It is not surprising that you become your own enemy, because ‘the lover of injustice is hated by his own soul’. Therefore, if you hate yourself by your love to injustice, are you then surprised that you hate God’s word that desires your own good?

❖ For real, if you love yourself in a wicked way, then you will destroy it. But if you truly hate yourself, then you will keep it. Therefore, there is evil love for the soul, and good hatred for it.

❖ By loving injustice, you do not only not love yourself, but you also hate it. how then can you love God or love your neighbor²?

Father Caesarius, Bishop of Arl

The Portion of the Wicked

“Upon the wicked He will rain coals; Fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup” (Ps. 11: 7).

¹ Hom. On St. John 49: 3.

² Sermon 145: 1; 173: 2; 173: 5.

The wicked are not only hated by themselves, but even by God Himself, who truly hates sin. He leaves them to take the fruits of their won wickedness, since they reject any repentance.

The wicked ones set their traps secretly and in deception so they snare the poor ones, God's children. They believe no evil will even reach them (Ps. 10: 6). But not only do they fall in their won snares (Ps. 10: 2), but God also rains openly snares on them as in an obvious cloud. He sets traps for them from which they cannot escape. He so patiently waits for them, offering them so many opportunities for repentance. But they assume they are above God's justice and laws. They become like horses in a stampede, unrestrained, set loose in the open space. But what await them are numerous traps that God showers them with from heaven so He catches them in His snares. When all openings and escape doors are shut, the awesome and fearful moment comes: this is when God's fiery wrath is declared with brimstone showered on them like rain from heaven, just as in Sodom and Gomorrah, that have been devastated and wiped out and no more recalled.

- ❖ As the psalmist says 'fire and brimstone and poisoned winds are the portion of their cup. Why is it so? Because as I have said they rejected the grace that is through the faith. Therefore, the sin of their iniquity was not wiped out. They forgot they were to carry the punishment of the love of iniquity which they deserve¹.

St. Cyril the Alexandrian

- ❖ The 'clouds' are understood to be the prophets in general whether they be the good ones or those evil ones who were called the 'false prophets'. The lord God set those false prophets so they entrap sinners (Matt. 24: 24). It is only the sinner who follows them, and thus they plot to destroy him if he insists on sinning. But if he leaves his pride and repents, he will ask for God more loyally.

The clouds could also mean the righteous prophets alone. With these also God showers snares for the wicked ones. But God also quenches the thirst of the good people with them, and they lead a fruitful life. The apostle says (2Cor. 15: 11) "these have the smell of death for death, and these have the smell of life for life".

It is not only the prophets, but all those who quench the thirst of the souls by the Word of God; these could also be called 'clouds'. Also from among the clouds of the Holy Book, and according to the merits of everyone, rain will shower in the form of fire, brimstone, and poisoned winds, on the sinners, and whereas fruitful showers will fall on the righteous.

"Upon the wicked He will rain coals, fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup".

This is punishment and the end of those who blaspheme against God's name. They will be burnt by the fire of their passions and the poison of their wicked deeds. They will be cast out of the fellowship of the righteous and will enter the most unutterable and severe punishments.

I think the 'cup' has been mentioned here for this reason' that we do not assume that anything forum among the punishment of the wicked will happen without measure of reason "***For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness***" (Ps. 11: 7).

"His countenance beholds the upright" (Ps. 11: 7). It is as if he is saying 'we can see justice in His face' that is 'to come to know Him' because God's face is the poor one

¹ Comm.. on Luke, Hom. 95.

by which God becomes known to those who deserve Him. or at least he means 'He does not allow for Himself that the wicked know Him, only the righteous' and this is justice.

St. Augustine

When God's children cling to their good Father alone, the just One, they are blessed with His fiery Spirit that kindles their depths with love. As for the wicked ones, they drink their cup of fatal fire that makes them lose life and peace.

The psalmist may have meant 'their cup' here with what was mentioned in the book of Numbers, where the accused one drinks a cup of holy liquid. If he is guilty he will perish and die (Numbers 5: 23-31).

Conclusion:

Just as the psalm began, it ends with the work 'the Lord' whose quality is 'righteousness, and answers all the believer's fears who faces persecution.

Teach me to Flee to You

- ❖ If I have become as a lonely bird surrounded by strong and wicked enemies...You Lord are my refuge. To You I fly, and to Your embrace I resort.
- ❖ I do not wish to flee to the mountains of human wisdom nor to the temporal authority, nor to the worldly means, but to You I flee, You holy mountain. Grant me Your Spirit as wings of a dove, and so I fly to You and dwell in Your Father's embrace.
- ❖ Grant me Your Holy Spirit, and thus I love Your righteousness...With You, I shall love myself, and shall love my brethren as myself.
- ❖ Take away from me the love of injustice, so I do not hate my depths.
- ❖ Shower on me Your fiery Holy Spirit, cleanse my depths. As for the fire, the brimstone and the burning winds, let them not be in my cup portion.

Psalm 12

The Words of the Wicked, the Words of Righteous and the Words of God

The psalmist here reveals the impact of people's vain words (Ps. 12: 1-4). As a contrast he reveals the good impact of God's pure words (Ps. 12: 5-8), as well as the words and crying out of the miserable righteous ones (Ps. 12: 5). The wicked words are the worst evil possible; these destroy man's soul, the family unity and the church. This issue may seem insignificant and of no impact and that there is no comparison between it and the rest of physical sinful passions, and violent crimes such as murders, slavery and theft. This iniquity that may seem insignificant pierces our inner person, our families and the church. In such a way it could tear the links of man's very existence. If we do not believe a husband of wife, a brother or a sister or a priest – then, the entire structure of the family and the church will collapse to the ground.

The psalmist presents to us three kinds of words:

1. The words of the unrighteous lying, hypocrisy, and arrogance. They speak on behalf of their father's mouth, Satan. He is the liar and father to every liar. He is the deceiver and the arrogant one.

2. The words of the righteous: the signs of the poor ones because of their sufferings and the hardships of this life. The Lord our Father hears the words of the heart and its hidden signs.

3. God's words: these are the pure words, the source of salvation.

Some think this psalm is a **plural lamentation**¹ or dirge that has been uttered by the psalmist on behalf of those who fear God. They cry out asking for salvation, and for the deliverance from the cheating ones, who adopted the form of hypocrisy and lying on one hand; also the form of violence and injustice on the other hand! The psalmist declares how God's people have long waited, begging for God's work of salvation so they be kept safe from the hypocrites. They fond the healing answer in His divine Word that promises His godly covenant.

The structure of the Psalm

1. A call for salvation.	1
2. The Motive for this desperate call.	1- 2
3. A prayer presented by the chorus.	3
4. The utterance on behalf of the wicked ones, by means of another choir.	4
5. A godly inspiration uttered by a priest or a prophet in the name of God	5
6. A response from the Choir hymners to God's words, by means of a second choir group.	6
7. A prayer of confidence said by the first choir.	7
8. Conclusion; similar to the introduction of lamentation chanted by most of the choir singers.	8

¹ *Interpreter's Concise Commentary, Psalms, p. 80.*

The Topic

“for the fulfillment, for the sake of the eighth”, we have previously commented on such a topic when studying the Psalms 5, 6, 8.

St. Augustine says, “the ‘eighth’ is understood to mean ‘eternity’. After the passing of the present time, which is the cycle of seven consecutive days, the eighth comes as the portion of saints. The psalmist says (Ps. 12: 8) ‘The wicked prowl on every side’, that is, they walk in the passion for what is temporal. This cycles in repeated chains of seven days, and for this reason they do not reach the eighth day. this means they are not blessed with eternity, which is the topic of the psalm”.

The Hebrews used to make use of this psalm on the eighth day, the circumcision day.

The Need for the Saints

The world is in need of the saints as witnesses for God’s work, as a source of blessing for others. David cries out saying (Ps. 12: 1) “**Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases!**” as a foil to the saints, there are humans in this world of great numbers.

The chanter found no rights or truth among the people, he just found lies. More accurately, he found emptiness which means ‘falsehood’ and ‘disloyalty’ and ‘negligence’. (Ps. 12: 1) “For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men”.

David the prophet meditated within himself in bitterness, only to find out that his generation has deceived him. He became s if dealing with the sons of Baal, where there is no righteous one he could trust. David may have looked around only to find King Saul, whom David had rescued from shame, and from the mighty Goliath, trying to arm the country’s potentials against David. He was also betrayed by the people of Zef (1Sam. 24: 19), as well as by the people of Kaiila (1Sam. 26). David may have also recalled the priests who met their death at Ndo (1Sam. 21). David felt as if there was no honest man in the entire world. In this feeling, he may have resembled Elijah the prophet when he cried out saying (Rom. 11: 3) “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars, and I alone am left and they see my life”.

David the prophet may have been speaking on behalf of the Lord Jesus who has come to save the world. The human nature has become corrupted, and the truth has been lost from man’s life. This is why he cries out in our name asking for the salvation by renewing our nature, and our being united with the truth.

There is no other path for the return of the righteous life and the return of justice to the world, except it is by the Lord Jesus’ Salvation. This is why the psalmist begins with a sort and mighty cry, ‘**Help, Lord**’.

The Evil Tongue

“**They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; With flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, And the tongue that speaks proud things, who have said, with our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?**” (Ps. 12: 2-4)

The tongue is a gift from God; with it we give praise to God, and with it we talk with others. If we misuse it, it becomes fire and an evil-doer (James 3; Ps. 141: 3). **St. Augustine** says the disdainful hypocrites rely on their speech in deceiving people, and not yielding to God.

David the prophet pleads to God asking the hypocrites may perish. These are the ones who threaten the righteous; God promises to help those who undergo hardship, and to answer the sighs of the poor ones.

- ❖ May no one deceive his neighbor, as the psalmist says here and there ‘with following lips and a double heart they speak’ there is nothing that begets enmity as much as cheating and deception¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ The mouth is the source of all evil; rather, it is not the mouth but those who misuse it. From it curses spring up and humiliation and blasphemies, and what provokes passions, murders, adulteries, thefts – all of these come from the mouth being misused. You may ask ‘how could it cause murder? This is because due to curses wrath is provoked. From wrath, there comes the beating, and this urges homicide. Once more ‘how could it cause adultery?’ Someone may say ‘this woman loves you and speaks to you sweetly!’ at this point passion is kindled in you²!

St. John Chrysostom

After the psalmist has spoken of the wicked ones’ words that reveal their father’s nature: the deception together with violence, he then offers us the word of God in us.

The adversary has planted in us two hearts, or two faces. With one of these we utter soft and sweet words and with the other we have ugly and wicked thoughts. With one of them we live inside the church, and with the other we deal with others. The issue is remedied by changing the work of the adversary by God’s work, or by changing the adversary’s word with the divine Word of God, for it is the word of the One who grants us salvation “*For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, Now I will arise, says the Lord; I will set him in the safety for which he yearns. The words of the Lord are pure words, Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times.*” (Ps.12: 5, 6)

The arrogant words of people lead to atheism, for they say ‘our lips are our own; who is lord over us?’ as for the Lord’s words, they are pure’ they are as the silver purified in a furnace seven times. His words are actually promises offered to us, that ensure our safety in Him.

- ❖ ‘they have been purified seven times’ – this is by means of:
 1. the fear of the Lord
 2. by correction
 3. by knowledge
 4. by the ability
 5. by the council
 6. by understanding
 7. by wisdom (Is. 11: 2).

There are seven stages for being blessed. The Lord ascended them as mentioned in St. Matthew’s gospel, in the same sermon He spoke on the mount (Matt. 5: 3-9).

St. Augustine

¹ Hom. On Eph. 14.

² Ibid.

- ❖ just as the silver is probably purified, likewise is the righteous one tested. He thus becomes a currency for the Lord, which receives the royal picture. Solomon too, says (Prov. 10: 20) “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver”. By these words he shows that well-tested education that has been confirmed in its wisdom, this is appreciated and accepted. This is proved on earth when the agnostic spiritual and knowledgeable person is sanctified in several ways. This spirit is pulled out of the earthly fires. As for the body in which this spirit dwells, this is purified and attains the appropriate purity benefiting a sanctified temple¹.

St. Clemendos the Alexandrian

Safety in the Midst of Difficulties

The deceiving people surround us on all sides (Ps. 12: 8). They whip their wicked tongues against us in deceit and inward violence. But the Word of God offers us divine promises and changes our life into a ‘joyful praise’. Thus we chant with the psalmist (Ps. 12: 7) “*You shall keep them Lord, You shall preserve them forum this generation forever*”.

The wicked keep resisting God’s children in every generation and in every spot in the world till the end of ages. The Word of God remains truthful to us and keeps us safe forever.

¹ *Stromata* 6: 7.

Your words are Spirit and Life

- ❖ Let the wicked tongues wage against me,
Let its arrows so fatal, strike me.
Your word, o Lord grants salvation
It is my shelter and my salvation,
It is my joy and my entire life.

Psalm 13

Till when, O Lord?

It seems that David faced endless hardships in a certain stage in his life. This problem is entreating the Lord, and pleading Him to support him against his enemies.

Some scholars think this psalm has not been written during David's troubles with Saul, because these difficulties were before his falling into his abject iniquity. These scholars think the psalm was added during Absalom's rebellion, when David ran away from his son's face. The outer cloud of sorrow was only an unclear symbol of what weighed his soul down due to his sin. This was darker than the midnight dimness¹.

This concise psalm expresses David's personal suffering. He recoded it as a strong and open-hearted cry springing from his afflicted deep soul, and he harbored in his Savior's embrace, He who gets him out of bitterness to the life of joy and praise-giving. This psalm is a prayer that comprises all the properties of lamentation: it is a complaint, a begging, confidence, thanks-giving that are appropriate for every righteous person suffering from inward and outward affliction.

William Plummer says "the flow of this psalm is natural and beautiful indeed. In verses 1 and 2, David cries out 'How long, O Lord?' and reiterates it four times. In verse 3 he begins seriously to ask for help. In verse 4 he entreats God and argues, which he usually does when speaking to God. Because he entreats God, he increases in faith. Because he has faith, he rejoices in the Lord. When he rejoices, he overflows joyfully in praises of thanksgiving"².

The General Frame

1. How long, O Lord?	1-2
2. The Pledge	3-4
3. The Song of Victory	5

1- How long, O' Lord?

David the prophet began the psalm with a question, because he saw outwardly, that the enemies have been exalted, whereas his soul inside him was sorrowful indeed. But God was up there watching in silence.

David repeats in verses 1 and 2 'How long...?' four times to emphasize his depression and his fear. Some think the four times repetition show that the psalmist cries out not in his own, personal name, but rather on behalf of the entire nation that fell as prisoners of war four times; the Babylonian imprisonment, the Persian or Medianites, the Greek one and the Roman imprisonment. Thus this psalm is counted a collective dirge and a historical prophecy. The psalmist may also have repeated these words four times to declare that wherever he goes, be it towards the east or west, the north or the south, he will find no rest because the Lord has turned His face away from him.

Not every repetition is prayer in rejected, but the false repetition is the one to be rejected.

"How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will you hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" (Ps. 13: 1, 2)

¹ Plumer, p. 183.

² Ibid 187.

David could find no rest for himself in all the earth. This is not due to his son's rebelling, but it was due to his sin that made God turn His face away from him. The manifestations in His holy sepulcher, in the assembly tent that referred to the Holy One who dwells amidst His sanctified people. There is nothing that rejoices the heart, and enlightens the inward vision as much as the presence of God that grants the believers, for He is the life of the soul and its light. There is no more fearful darkness than that which springs up from the feeling that God hides His face from man. Job's peak of affliction was when he said (Job 23: 3, 8, 9) "Oh, that I knew where to find Him, that I might come to His seat...Look I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him. When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him, when He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him".

- ❖ ***"How long will you hide your face from me?"*** Because God does not forget, therefore He does not hide His face. But the Holy Book speaks in our human language and so the Book says God hides His face away from us. This is when He does not declare His knowledge of Himself to the soul that has not been purified in its thoughts to a sufficient degree.

St. Augustine

What David spoke of implies the prophecy of the Lord Jesus who cries out on behalf of mankind, for He has carried the weight of man's sins. He therefore says to the Father, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" May we all be like Him in His modesty, and His crying out in faith, entreating the Father to turn His face towards us.

Man sometimes feels in moments of spiritual coolness as if God has deserted him, or has turned His face away from him. It is as if iniquity, man's enemy, has been exalted over him, and desires his eternal perishing. At that moment man finds no other refuge other than God his Savior. Man cries out to Him so He shines in his splendor and turns His face to man's inward soul.

In time of bitterness man feels as if God has left him for a long time. But when man returns to meet God through His mercies so great it is then that man realizes the divine words (Is. 54: 7). "For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you".

2- Entreating

"Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death" (Ps. 13: 3, 4).

David the prophet felt his need for God who has turned His face away from him because of David's sin. He wanted God to once more turn His face towards him, and to enlighten his inward man with His divine light, so David would not continue in his iniquity, and so he would not die or sleep with those who died in their sins.

The psalmist's cry 'How long O' Lord?' does not spring from despair, rather, from an afflicted soul that knows how to change the complaint into prayer. In faith, it turns to God asking to be enlightened with the brilliance of His face. In love, it turns to Him, pleading '***Look...answer...enlighten***'. He alone, is the One able to reach our depths, and look into our very core, answering the secret sighs of our hearts, and shines on our nature that has become darkened.

- ❖ To draw closer to the true light, I mean to Christ we praise Him in the psalms saying "enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death". The death of the soul is the real death, and it is not the physical death. Real death is when we fall short of the true and

straight edification and when we choose falsehood instead of truth. Therefore we have to be well-girdled, and our lanterns lit brightly as we have been told¹.

St. Cyril the Great

❖ When man shuts his eyes to mercy, he sleeps in the pleasure of physical passions².

Father Caesarius, Bishop of Arl

When our Christ shines in us, with His Holy Spirit He gives us the enlightened vision. We thus obtain new understanding of God's love, His fatherhood, and His work of salvation. We also come to realize Christ's mystery that comprises the nations and countries coming to Him as members of His sanctified body. They are filled with His fiery Spirit that no waters could put out in our inward self. He also grants us the open eye that is able to witness the heavenly glories. The Lord also grants us a new vision of humility at large, a vision filled with love that is shed in love and sacrifice for the sake of everyone.

With this enlightenment, there is no place for darkness in the soul, or in the body or mind or heart...etc. Rather, all what is inside us is enlightened by the Lord.

"Lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed against him"; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved" (Ps. 13: 4).

In this way David the prophet presented a short prayer that spring from his need, yet it is a powerful prayer. He asks God to shine on him with His light. The fathers of the church advised us to keep saying short prayers continually. These are called the 'prayers of arrows' because they are short as arrows against Satan.

Who is this enemy that the psalmist fears he would over-power him and put him to shame? He is the devil or iniquity. The chanter fears the scorn of his enemies, who thrill over him if he is moved in his faith. The devil is exceedingly pleased with this success even if its for a little while.

God is amazing indeed when He often permits His people to fall for a while under violence or despotism of spouses or parents or leaders or employees. It was necessary for Daniel and his pious friends to live under the pressure of Caldean rulers who had their own pleasures. Abigail also lived with a husband who was Baal's son, and no one was able to utter a word in his presence. This is the school to which the saints go, for their won good and to obtain glory; because the intolerable hardships only lead us to blessings and victory³.

3- The Song of Vicotry

David's confidence and his faith in God have changed his affliction to a joyful song of praise. His suffering was changed to salvation, and this is why he says: *"My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me"*.

Stuhimueller says, "It is hard to search for the cause of this sudden change. has the psalmist so quickly recovered? It is quite possible that the psalm was written during long nights of wakefulness and bitter pain and desperate prayers and cruel recollections. All of this developed gradually for peace to spring up. Even at death, man's wrath or his depression is changed to inward peace and sure love".

¹ Comm.. on Luke, hom. 92.

² Sermon 137: 3.

³ Plumer, p. 188.

The psalm began with sighs, and was concluded with praise. As the bride says, “because winter has passed, and rainfall is no more, and because the earth began to blossom the fruitful time has come, and the voice of the dove has been heard in our land” (Song of Sol. 2: 11, 12). Sirach says (Sir. 2: 11) “Look, you people, and know well, there is no one who relied on God and was disappointed”.

Prayer

- ❖ Lord, change bitterness of my soul to prayer!
- ❖ Look to my depths, and answer all the sighs of my heart, and may you enlighten my vision.
- ❖ When I see You, I will know You, and I will love You, and be united with You, and share You Your glories!
- ❖ Enlighten the eyes of my heart with Your light, and thus no darkness will have place in my depths.
- ❖ Lead me in the school of affliction so I enjoy the sharing of Your cross, and be blessed with the power of Your resurrection.
- ❖ Carry me in midst of the valley of tears, and so my heart rejoices in Your salvation, and my mouth be opened with Your praise.

Psalm 14

The Foolish One

The personal lamentation of David's could have been written when Absalom rebelled against him.

Psalm 53 is only a repetition of this psalm, but there is some difference. In this psalm the name Jehovah is used four times, whereas in psalm 53 it was mentioned only once as Elohim.

This psalm, as well as its identical psalm 53, has focused on the foolish man. The 'foolish one' has been mentioned in the book of Psalms five times. Here as well as in psalm 53 he says (Ps. 14: 1; 53: 1) "There is no God". The foolish scorns the righteous and he makes fun of him (Ps. 39: 8). What is even more evil, is that he scorns God's name (Ps. 74: 18, 22) ¹.

The psalmist imagines the world as being divided into two teams of people. The foolish (Ps. 14: 1-3) and the righteous people, or God's afflicted people. The psalmist complains of the wicked people's persecution of the righteous ones, whereas God is watching them from the heavens. David expresses his great hope in God, who will be coming from His sepulcher to punish the wicked and to strengthen the believers².

The foolish does not as for God, but the wise one asks for Him.

Basic Words (the key to the psalm)

1. The Hebrew synonym for the word 'foolish' in the psalm is 'Napaal',. Some scholars think it is derived from a verb that means 'to fade' or 'to dry up' as the falling autumn leaves. Linked to this meaning, is the idea of behavior debasement, and lack of principles with the foolish man.

In 1Samuel 25, we have a true image of Napaal's ignorance, Abigail's husband. This word has formerly been linked to the abhorred behavioral attitude, and then later on it referred to the desecration of what is holy. At the beginning, the stupid behavior touched very harmfully the entire group, and was linked to sexual corruption (Gen. 34: 7; Dent. 22: 21; Judges 19: 23; 1Sam 13: 11). Recently, the word Napaal was used when there was a threat against the people, as in (Prov. 30: 21-23). When concerning the prophets, it referred to the betrayal of the nation at large to the covenant with God, as well as their betrayal to each other (Is. 9: 15-17; Jer. 17: 11; Neh. 3: 6) during the long history of Israel. Ignorance, therefore, which is (Napaal) has been linked to the family looseness, the society and the local promises. Ignorance at first, had disastrous impact on the family in the world. This impact was transferred to the religious society that was more pure³.

2. The Hebrew word 'esah' means 'advice', where the decisive decisions were taken. The idea moved from the environmental family society to the political arena, then to the religious assemblies to express God's judgments and decisions. Despite this, it was usually affected by the political aspect and the social justice (Is. 28: 29).

The foolishness joined together with the good counsel in this psalm confirms God's dominance and authority over the family ties, politics and the state affairs⁴. **This means that even though man has behaved foolishly, and has resisted God's counsel,**

¹ A new Catholic Comm., Nelson, 1969, p. 447.

² The Collegeville Bible Comm., 758.

³ Stuhl, ueller, p. 109.

⁴ Ibid.

yet God in His goodness uses even the weakness of man and his wickedness to save His children. out of evil, He has brought out goodness, and He has changed the hardships to the joy of salvation for His children, and constant rejoicing and praise giving.

The General Frame

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. The corruption of the wicked ones | 1-3 |
| 2. The enmity of the wicked ones to those who are righteous | 4-6 |
| 3. The Savoir, the Liberator and the Rejoicing One | 7 |

1. The Corruption of the Wicked Ones

(Ps. 14: 1) *“The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, There is none who does good”*.

Verses 1-3 comprise a strong lamentation about the corruption of the wicked who say there is no God. These words do not mean an atheist creed, but a practical atheism, for, to do sin insistently is foolishness and practical atheism.

During their Ignorance

a- The wicked ones cannot convince themselves there is a God, but they wish there is no God. With this imagination that it is possible there is no God, they rejoice. They are atheists by means of their desire.

b- The wicked ones ignore God in their behavior, and so they live as if there is no God and they give Him no honor whatsoever in any of their projects. in their life and heart they have the attitude as if God was non-existent, even though there is no greater foolishness than that of forgetting God in the daily life.

c- They do not ask for the divine help; they are theists because their foolish hearts have become darkened, and their conscience has deviated. Their minds and thoughts have deserted the life with God, by their denial of His care and guidance to them. They show strong enthusiasm for their own thoughts, their strength, their authority, and even their willingness to die for their own personal opinion and beliefs.

d- The wicked ones ignore their corrupt nature.

e- In their ignorance, the wicked ones harm God through His children. they eat them greedily just as they eat bread, and they disregard the counsel of the poor ones.

The heart, or the inner man, is the one that discovers man, whether he is foolish or wise a saint or wicked one. Man’s heart is the center of all goodness or vice. In it you have Christ’s kingdom or the anti-Christ’s kingdom established.

Collective Corruption

God’s assessment for mankind is that no man is righteous, for there is no one who asks for God. St. Paul adopted these words in (Prov. 3: 10-12). “There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one”. St. Paul wished to prove that the Jews and the Gentiles were on equal footing, all under the yoke of sin. It is not only the atheists who are sinners, but all humanity as well. The entire world is guilty before God. This leads us to understanding the issue in a general aspect regarding the human natural. Our entire nature that is centralized in the heart needs a renewal.

“The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good”.

In such a way the foolish have become defiled in their attitude, their deeds and their deviation. Their sacrifice and their increase are undesirable to the Lord, even their feasts and their celebrations are defiled (Prov. 15: 8; Is. 1: 13). The vicious may be doing good deeds but their inward motives are evil. They do not anything that is counted as good in the Lord’s eyes, and “Love is the fulfillment of the law”, for the vicious ones have no love. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and the evil ones deviate from the faith. Sin destroys and shatters every deed of the evil ones¹.

- ❖ They have become corrupted and have done abominable deeds; this means that as they love the world and do not love God, these deeds that corrupt the soul and blind it, this leads the foolish one to say in his heart there is no God. (Rom. 1: 28) “28And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting”.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Because they are stupid in their thinking, their deeds are manifested to be evil; for the lord says (Matt. 12: 34) “How can you, being evil, speak good things?” they were evil because they were thinking of what is evil. How could these make righteous deeds whereas their minds are established on deceit and wiles²?

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

- ❖ How could he be wise, if he does not look upon his maker³?

St. Ambrosius

- ❖ When he says, “The Lord looks from the heavens” he describes his full knowledge of everything in a metaphorical way, taken from mankind⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

The evil **ones do not understand**, neither do they ask for God. If their minds had not been darkened, they would have witnessed the beauty of the Divine, and would have loved Him. When humans love the godliness, then they know something and even a lot about its beauty; for we cannot witness beauty unless we love it. We can never give a vital and joyful concern about any subject unless we have the readiness to embrace this subject.

The phrase ***‘any who understand’*** in this passage was mentioned in many other places in the Holy Book, having the meaning of **‘wise, reasonable, experienced, skillful’** (Dan. 12: 10; Amos 5: 13; Jer. 1: 9; Dan. 1: 4). It also signifies ‘to teach, to behave wisely’ (2Cor. 30: 22; 1Sam. 18: 14, 15). The meaning also implied ‘to consider, to refresh, to be cultured, to obtain good success, to deal intelligently’ (Job 34: 27; Jer. 10: 21; 20: 11; 23: 5; Neh. 9: 20; Prov. 21: 11; Josh. 1: 8; Is. 52: 13). The wicked are not adorned with wisdom or experience or smartness. They do not behave sensibly, and neither do they afford good and truthful edification. They have not been taught good or correct education, and they are not successful in their life, neither do they prosper and

¹ Plumer, p. 192.

² Paschal letters, 19:6.

³ Duties of the Clergy 1: 24: 117.

⁴ In 2 Cor., hom. 3: 6.

thrive. They are all selly, and not blessed with one element of any wisdom in any of their attitude, regarding their commitment and their loyalty.

As for the word 'to ask' or to investigate, this implies to 'inquire' (Deut. 13: 14) or 'to search' (Jer. 29: 13), or 'to take care of' (Job 3: 4) or 'to be careful about' (Deut. 11: 12; Is. 142: 4). The evil ones do not care about God and do not lift up their faces to Him. they do not search for God or ask for Him. the verb equivalent to it is 'to struggle hard' for the real wisdom is founded on asking for God and finding Him¹.

“They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does well, No, not one” (Ps. 14: 3).

It is like a unity or an agreement among themselves; because they have all gone astray and became corrupted. All of them have become defiled and regressed!

The Need for Renewing our corrupt Nature

Adam and Eve have sinned, and are responsible for their personal mistake. But they have both lost the goodness of nature; therefore we have inherited from them its corruption. We find this issue even in the little children, because they get fretful and jealous without being taught this. It was necessary for an able Savior to re-make the creation of our nature, or to renew it.

❖ God has created man, and He wished him to remain incorruptible. But mankind were scornful and rejected to meditate on God. They invented and plotted evil for themselves. Thus they obtained the death sentence with which they were warned. Since that time, they no more continued to be in the way they were created. Rather, they have become corrupted according to their plotting.

When the 'Word' saw that man's corruption cannot be wiped by any other way than by death as an essential condition, which is why he became incarnate in the flesh, so as to accept death. By the unity of this body with the Word who is above everyone, He would be worthy to die on behalf of everyone. And because the Word has come and dwelt in Him He remains incorruptible. Thus corruption is cast out of everyone, by means of the grace of the Resurrection.

It was essential that no one else become incarnate except God the Word Himself (Heb. 2: 10) "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings".

St. Athanasius the Apostolic

2. He Enmity of the Wicked Against the Righteous (Ps. 14: 4-6).

“Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways. And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes”.

The above excerpt is not mentioned in the Hebrew version, but in the seventies translation, and some other translations derived from it such as the Coptic version. This applies to what was mentioned in Rom. 3: 13-19.

The wicked one is not only ignorant of any wisdom, and his denial of God's existence in his practical life, and his not asking for God's help and his counsel, and the

¹ Plumer, p. 192, 193.

corruption of his deeds, but he also feels a lot of hatred towards his brother. His pleasure is to have his mouth a device for the adversary, full of deceit. The adversary changed it to the serpent's mouth that is full of poison and is a tomb for killing the innocent ones and burring them. He also has great love for shedding blood, for hatred and spite. They work with no fear of God and ignore His law.

The enmity of the ignorant against God's believes is addressed to God Himself. This is why it is considered practical atheism. They eat up the church of God by provoking the saints, by torturing them and murdering them for no other reason than being God's men (Ps. 14: 4, 5). "***Who eat up my people as they eat bread, And do not call on the Lord? There they are in great fear***".

- ❖ They feared losing the earthly kingdom whereas there is no need for any fear. Now they are losing the heavenly kingdom which they should have feat lest they lose it.

St. Augustine

This happened at the time Jesus Christ, when all plotted against Him. They believed that by His presence they would lose their power, their honor and their money, Pilate asked Him if He were the King. As for Jesus the Lord of glory who has become for our sake a poor One, He declared that His kingdom was not in this world.

What occurred to Jesus Christ constantly happens with the poor church that does not ask for any worldly glory, and so the world believes it is taking away its glories. At any rate, the plots of the stupid ones against their poor brethren angers God Himself, and the righteous ones who are unjustly treated these have no refuge except God Himself.

The enemies attempt to eat up God's children and devour them, those who are called 'poor ones'. But God is glorified in their midst throughout the difficult times, and He declares His presence and His dwelling in their midst because (Ps. 14: 5) "For God is with the generation of the righteous".

Due to the annoyance of the wicked ones God's children are called 'poor ones'. But the Savior Himself, who is so rich, He has become poor, so that with His poverty, that is, with His righteousness He makes them rich. The wicked ones may laugh at the poor ones, but this is only for a little while, for God Himself becomes refuge for the poor!

The Savior, the Liberator and the Rejoicing One (Ps. 14: 7)

After the psalmist has rebuked the wicked ones, he concludes the psalm with a look that full of hope for God's help and His Salvation. For God is the Savior of His church 'the spiritual Zion'. God grants her liberty from Satan's imprisonment. With God's grace He shows her the way that exalts her from darkness to light. In future, He would come to her and transforms her tears to joy and praise.

"Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad" (Ps. 14: 7).

The freedom from bondage means to be free from any evil and woe, or any great hardship. We have been in Satan's bondage until the Son came and set us free by His cross, and He granted us joy and salvation.

The Jews kept referring to this last verse as a prophecy of the Messiah's time, as a Redeemer to them. This salvation has been fulfilled by means of the church, the new Zion. The entire picture has been changed, from weakness to outcries of joy as a declaration of victory over the enemy. But as for the Jews, they have clung to the fatal

literacy, and they still keep asking for the materialistic salvation, and for a temporal kingdom of a Zionist concept, far away from the true written concept.

prayer

- ❖ Oh true Wisdom, dwell in my depths, and take away the spirit of ignorance from me!
- ❖ You have impoverished Yourself, so I be rich. Grant me to accept all suffering with You, so I become rich with Your grace!
- ❖ Oh Lord, change my tears and the sighs of my heart to joyful praises and songs.

Psalm 15

Life on the Mountain Peaks

It seems normal indeed that this psalm follows the previous one, psalm 14. The previous psalm reveals the trails of the wicked one; but this psalm reveals the characteristics of the righteous man.

The psalm, together with psalm 24, David the prophet may have been inspired by them during the transportation of the covenant ark to his city. David failed in transferring the ark the first time, for he did not assign this to the Levites according to the law. But in the second attempt, he was not only careful to assign this job to the Levites whom the Lord has chosen to carry it (1Chron. 15: 2) but he also planned it that the ark would be entrusted to the man whom the Lord has blessed his house, when the ark was in his house; for Obadiah Edom and his many sons worked and served in the Lord's house (1Chron. 26: 8, 12). This psalm is considered a praise that reveals the characteristics of the true believer, that the Lord is pleased to appoint in serving Him in His spiritual house, that is in His church.

The psalm might be expressing David's deep thoughts when he was in exile, where he was deprived of any worship in the Lord's house.

The psalm has a link to (Isaiah 33: 14-16), and St. James' epistle might be considered a commentary on this psalm and an interpretation of it.

This psalm was a section of the festival psalms at the temple door. The temple was God's house which could not be entered unless at certain times and on special conditions. The visitor who when to these holy sites had to take permission from the appointed priest whenever he wished to get in. He would ask "*Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?*" (Ps. 15: 1) The house guard then answers him, giving him the conditions or qualities required for entering. The civilian visitor asks, and the priest answers, not by offering a list of outer ritual commitments, but rather by commitments regarding the conscience inspection.

This psalm contains the passage read when entering the Lord's house to share in the liturgy service: it is like a repentance prayer and self cross examination before sharing in the Eucharist liturgy.

Mowinckel thinks this psalm is a part of the liturgy concerning God's celebration, Jehovah's feast¹.

Some fathers called this psalm 'Jacob's ladder', that is climbed by the righteous person so as to reach God.

Some believe the usage of the word 'tent' to refer the settled place of the ark of the covenant, shows that his psalm could not have been possibly set after David's rule, or the beginning of Solomon's rule' for after this time the word 'tabernacle' has been used, or any other word other than 'the tent'. Also, the psalm could not have been possibly written before King David, because the ark was not yet transported to mount Zion².

Psalm 14

This psalm is psalm 14 according to the seventieth translation. **St. Jerome** comments on this number saying, "we read in Exodus 12: 6 that on the fourteenth day a

¹ A new Catholic Comm. 447.

² Plumer, p. 199.

lam sacrifice is offered; on the fourteenth day, when full moon, and when its beams and light is at its utmost. You can see Christ not offering Himself a sacrifice except it be by His perfect light and fulfillment. On the fourteenth day the oblation is offered by your means. This is why the prophet is amazed and he asks, ‘Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle¹?’

It is as if, if we wish to be blessed with Christ’s redeeming sacrifice, it is appropriate for us to receive His divine light in our depths. Then we shall become as if we are in the fourteenth day, as a full moon lit with the Sun of Righteousness. It is then that we enter His house and be blessed with the mystery of His holy tabernacle.

With true repentance in being worthy of the blood, the Holy Spirit of God takes us to the divine holies. We then participate in the Eucharist liturgy with a joyful soul, enlightened by the Holy Spirit. This is why, before the partaking of the holy mysteries, the priest cries out, saying “The holies for the holy saints”. When the entire congregation feels the need for God’s holy work to sanctify them, they answer “One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit”.

The General Frame

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| 1. God’s guest | 1 |
| 2. The Characteristics of God’s guests | 2-5 |

1. God’s Guest

“Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?”
(Ps. 15: 1).

The psalmist asked, “Lord, you are the Holy One who dwells in the heavens. Who could draw near to your dwelling, or have partnership with You? Heaven is not pure in your eyes, and your angels are attributed with stupidity, then how can man, who is liable to death to draw close to your divine glory?

By means of the divine covenant and His constant promises, David the prophet realized that he who becomes a guest at God’s place, when he enters the holy place, is protected from his persecutors by means of God’s peace (Ps. 27: 4; 61: 3). He is blessed with God’s salvation and His blessings through the partnership with God that He blesses His church with.

Indeed, it is expected that those who enter God’s house they would obtain the highest amount of justice, and the finest degree of goodness. This is in contrast with the foolish ones, about who the previous psalm spoke of. These are the ones who are stupid in their thinking, their words and their deeds.

The Lord’s dwelling place was his tent on mount Zion in David’s time. It is a new place prepared by the prophet king, and not the tent that was used in the wilderness and remained in Gibeon. As for the holy mountain, or the mountain of his holies, this is Zion’s mount in Jerusalem, the symbol of the new covenant church.

The psalmist believes that he who is not prepared for the heavenly and glorious church in the age to come is not worthy of the spiritual membership in the church here on earth. He who will not participate in the partnership of life eternal, he is a stranger even to God’s kingdom here. This is why he asks, “Who will be a true member in Your holy church, and will not be cast out of it? Who will enter Your eternal and glorious dwelling place?”.

¹ Hom. 5.

❖ *‘Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?’* To me, I think the tabernacle is the church in this world. The churches that we see today these are the tabernacles, because we are so journers in this world. We are not in one constant place of origin; rather, we are like someone about to immigrate to another place.

❖ In this world, as we see, will pass away (Matt. 24: 35) and heaven and earth will pass away, ‘how much more so will the rocks be with which the visible churches have been built? Therefore, these churches are tents or tabernacles; we leave them and depart to the holy mount of God.

What is God’s holy mount? In Ezekiel it mentions the opponent against the king of Tyre “therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God” (Ez. 28: 16).

Since we keep moving from the tents to the mountain, it appropriate for us to come to know those who immigrate to it¹.

St. Jerome

❖ *‘Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle?’* If the real meaning for the word ‘tent’ is taken, it is something that concerns the war. This is why the soldiers are called ‘the followers of the people in tents’, for these have their tents shared together. This meaning is appropriate to the words ‘who may abide’ (temporarily) because we fight Satan for a while, then we need a tent in which to test and refresh.

‘Who may dwell in your holy hill?’ This refers immediately to the eternal dwelling itself (2Cor. 5: 1, 2) which is understood for the word ‘mountain’, which is the peak of Christ’s love in eternal life.

St. Augustine

‘to sojourn temporarily’ means ‘to live as a stranger’, as with Abraham in the land of Canaan (Gen. 15: 3), and also as Israel’s way in the land of Egypt (Exodus 23: 2). The word ‘dwell’ is derived from an old Hebrew word that concerns living in tents, a symbol of shelter, easy to set up when the family is in a state of traveling. This word is used later on for God’s dwelling place. God is able to move forward before His people, as happened in the bondage days (Ez. 10: 18-19, 22-25). God is also able to appear to the prophets in an estranged country (Ez. 1: 1; Isaiah 40: 1-11)².

The aim of this psalm is to clarify the strong inseparable link between God’s worshipping in His dwelling place, and our testimony of it in our practical life. He who manifests his righteousness not only in the assembly worship, but also in his life, he deserves priority in God’s house³.

Therefore, the question has its particular weight that is posed at an awesome moment. The answer in its positive aspect came in verses 2 and 4. The negative aspect comes in verses 3 and 5.

2. The Characteristics of God’s Guests

The question spring up from a heart that is eager to depart to God’s house and settle in it, so as to be blessed in the fellowship with God, and rest in the Fatherly embrace. Thus there is no one who could offer the answer other than the Holy Spirit of

¹ Hom. 5.

² Stuhlmueller, p. 113.

³ Plumer, p. 200.

God. He declared the characteristics of God's guest, or the one who wishes to enjoy eternally God's divine presence.

The answer came as a simple as could be, but it is quite impossible to the corrupt human nature. It is as if the psalm declares indirectly that the divine fellowship needs God's intervention so we be clothed in Christ's righteousness. Thus we shall sit in His banquet, and be blessed with the bride's garment and found to be sitting in the King's heavenly assembly. We need the free and rich grace of God that is granted by faith to him who struggles lawfully.

1. Blamelessly

The answer came as general in the beginning (Ps. 15: 2), then in more details (2-5). The synonym for the word 'blameless' is the negative aspect of the Hebrew word "tamim", which applies to 'everything', all the heart and its peace. He who serves God has to behave loyally, keeping himself undefiled in the world.

The synonym for 'blameless' is used in the Old Testament regarding the lambs offered as sacrifice, and that were a symbol of God's lamb who is blameless. In this same way, if we wish to be acceptable worshipers to God, we have to unite with the Lord Jesus. We have to be like Him, perfect people flawless, straightforward...etc. We have to offer our straightforward lives as a daily sacrifice.

- ❖ 'The one who behaves blamelessly, and does justice' this is mentioned in psalm 118. Also (Ps. 119: 1) "Blessed are the unified in the way". In this our psalm he says 'He who walks uprightly'. The one who walks is 'on the road!' Understand what He commands us to do. The Holy Spirit did not say 'he who has reached the end sinfully'. He rather says 'he who is on the road, and is undefiled'¹.

St. Jerome

At this point **St. Jerome** clarifies that though the undefiled life is essential, yet the need is not for us to reach the end of the road, but rather to walk struggling in the Lord's Spirit. In other words, we may fall, but being worthy of the blood, we are washed and with the Holy Spirit we obtain forgiveness. By the partaking of the divine mysteries we are firm in Christ's righteousness. In this way, we go ahead on the road day by day without any despair. But you are on the road that is, in Christ Jesus. Let us live by His Spirit, and follow his righteousness. If we are weakened, let us cry out to Him and he will sanctify us anew.

2. The positive aspect of life of Righteousness:

St. Jerome says, "Someone may say, I am sinless, I make no evil. It is insufficient to stop doing any evil, unless we make righteousness as well".

- ❖ "*He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness*" (Ps. 15: 2). Justice has no other brother, or father, or mother; it only knows the truth, and has no partiality. Righteousness follows God's example, and does not covet what belongs to other, and finds no pleasure in others' difficulties, for this is just².

St. Jerome

¹ Hom. 5.

² Hom. 5.

3. “And speaks the truth in his heart” (Ps. 15: 2).

There is some harmony between the tongue that speaks, and the heart. The conversation will be similar to an honest show, with what goes inside the heart, such as the hidden feelings.

The word ‘the truth’ here means what is sure and truthful, and only what is correct. The Lord Jesus is the Truth. To speak in truth means to witness to the Lord Jesus who dwells in our hearts. It is not by mere words, but also by the thoughts, the feelings, the intentions, the deeds and the attitude. **St. Augustine** says, “**it is not enough to speak the truth, unless the truth also lives in your heart**”.

The words about speaking the truth came after the speech of the blameless life and the righteous attitude, because the wicked attitude usually makes lie as a covering up for evil. This is what happened to Jehezi who ran after Namaan the Syrian asking for silver and clothes. When Elijah the prophet asked him, he denied (2Kings 5: 25) and he did not tell the truth. Indeed (Prov. 10: 9) “He who walks with integrity walks securely”.

4. He loves his neighbor

The psalm makes clear to the very maximum the strong relation between the faith in God, and the deeds of mercy, or the love towards the close ones. The real believer makes no evil to his neighbor, and he gives him no loan with interest, and does not betray him. He rather honors generously those who fear the Lord. The psalmist here does not give a following description of the sins that could be committed against a neighbor. He only widens the range of what is mentioned in (Prov. 10: 12) “Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins”.

St. Augustine says, “The word ‘neighbor’ has to include every human being. **St. Jerome** says, “All humans are our neighbors...all of us are relatives...all humans towards all humans, for we all have one Fathr”.

“He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend” (Ps. 15: 3).

It is appropriate for God’s true worshiper that he has no insolent tongue, and does not use it in back biting. An atheist said, “the backbiter is the most fearful of all savage beasts¹”.

The true believer, who knows that man’s reputation is more precious than all the treasures of the world (Prov. 22: 1) he realizes there is no worse harm than that of scandalizing a man’s reputation.

5. His scorn of the strong wicked ones, and his honor to those who fear the Lord:

“In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the Lord” (Ps. 15: 4).

He who fears the Lord praises Him, and thus God glorifies him, and He also asks other to glorify him! This is what urges God’s church to honor and to give praise to the Lord’s saints, for she glorifies God’s grace that works in them. The church also focuses on the Savior who lives in them.

❖ The fear of the Lord surpasses everything else; fear the Lord and keep His commandments, because is the entire man².

St. John Chrysostom

¹ Plumer, p.205.

² In 1 Cor. Hom. 29: 5.

- ❖ Even if he were an emperor, a governor, a bishop or a priest, whoever this man may be – if he is a doer of evil he will be as nothing in the eyes of the saint. But if he sees someone fearing God, then he honors him even if he is beggar in bad need¹.

St. Jerome

6. “He who swears to his own hurt and does not change” (Ps. 15: 4) .

He proves his faithfulness to them. “He who swears to his neighbor and does not betray him”. In the New Testament, the believers are asked not to swear at all. Rather, their word is counted as a covenant or an oath, for they behave in the Spirit or Truth, and carry their Christ inside them. they say the word and fulfill it in the lord without any betrayal or deceit on their part.

7. “He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent” (Ps. 15: 5).

Usury was and still is a detested matter to God and people. The idea of usury here means when a rich man lends a poor one for his great need or for being in a trap. The rich one exploits his need and imposes on him high interest. This is why it is said, (Ex. 22: 25) “if you lend money to any of My people who poor among you, you shall not be like a money lender to him, you shall not charge him interest”. (Lev. 25: 35, 36) “if one of you brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him, but fear your God, that your brother may live with you”.

This concept is totally different than lending commercial or industrial institutions, not for their need; but rather for work and gain. This is a working company and not lending when in need.

Some fathers think using God’s words not as an inward treasure that the soul is blessed with in its fellowship with God and sanctifying the heart, and supporting man in his thoughts, his words and deeds; rather for boosting of it in hypocrisy before others, and lending money for usury; in that case he is harvesting the vain glory and people’s praise as a temporary interest.

- ❖ ‘He does not give his money in usury’, this is he who scorns God’s words for his love of people’s praise. It has been said, (Ps. 12: 6) “the words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times”. Such a one offers his money for interest, and thus he deserves to be punished².

Father Nestorios

- ❖ Do not lend your money with interest. If a Christian has money it is an obligation he gives it to someone in need, and he should not expect it to be given back to him, or at least, he is to take back only the amount of money he lent. In this way of dealing he will gather something not to be taken lightly – it is the eternal inheritance. If he acts differently, he rather cheats and give no support; for is there anything more cruel than to offer your money to someone so badly in need, and then take it back doubly? If the borrower is unable to repay what you have given him, then how can he repay you doubly³?

¹ Hom. 5.

² Cassian: Conf. 14: 17.

³ Ep. 19 to vigilius, 4.

St. Ambrosios

In such a way, it is befitting the ones who wish to live eternally in God's house, not to give their money in usury and not to be bribed on account of the innocent. Rather, let his heart be filled with love and justice. In this way what the psalmist concluded his psalm with will be fulfilled, "***He who does these things shall never be moved***".

prayer

- ❖ Lord, open the door of your house before my face,
And make my heart a dwelling place for You,
So I be blessed by living in Your embrace eternally!
- ❖ Who can dwell in Your holy house?
Grant me Yourself in righteousness, in justice, in love
So I be clothed in the wedding garment and live with You!
- ❖ Your Word is my silver and my treasure
Grant me that I possess it inside me,
Let me not lent it in vain glory as a lost usury!

Psalm 16

God is my Sufficiency and my Joy

David was meditating on the fulfillment of satisfaction that he finds in God, and the completion of joy granted by God alone. In this song of confidence, the psalmist is protected in the temple, and he expresses his trust in the Lord who reigns over the land of his people.

What proves that David is the writer of this psalm is what is mentioned in its title; also, what was said by St. Peter the apostle on the fiftieth day concerning the Lord's resurrection (Acts 2: 25-31). Moreover, what St. Paul declared when speaking to the people of Antioch (Acts 13: 35-37). Some scholars, though, think that Levi is the writer of the psalm, because he says, "*O Lord, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup*" (Ps. 16: 5); because the Levites had no position in the land, but their inheritance was in the Lord. David the prophet, as well as every true believer, experienced the same feeling: that he has no position in the land, nor in the throne, but rather in the Lord Himself is his position, for there he finds his satisfaction. The psalmist speaks of every righteous person who has fellowship with the Lord, and his loyalty is in his love other the Lord. He furthermore, speaks of our honesty with the Lord, as well as God's loyalty towards us. David declares that witnessing the Lord and His presence are the mystery of our joy.

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The Title of the Psalm

This is the first of the Michtam psalms, which are six in number (16, 56-60). As for the meaning of of 'Michtam', this is uncertain¹.

- ❖ Some think this refers to the tune in which this psalm is sung.
- ❖ Others think it is derived from the word 'to cut' or 'to engrave'; meaning the psalm is engraved or sculpted on one of the precious and long-lasting pillars. As for the title according to the seventieth translation, this means 'engraved in God on the pillar'.
- ❖ Some think it may mean 'in secret', a song of deep intonation that could prophecy of the deep aim in the spiritual creed in its holy formation.
- ❖ Many think the word 'Micham' is derived from the word that means 'gold', which indicates that the psalm is 'golden', and it was translated as 'the golden jewel', because the psalm declares our Christ, the Risen One, for He is the obedient Servant in whom we obtain the glorious and risen life, and thus we accept our Father as our portion and our share.
- ❖ Others think the word here is 'Michab' that is found in (Isaiah 38: 9); also in many other passages in the Holy Book, and thus it means 'written'.

A Messaic Psalm

At least a part of the psalm speaks of the forthcoming Messiah (Acts 2: 25-28; 13: 35-37). Thus it is one of the Messanic psalms.

Gabelein says, "The sixteenth psalm is the third Messaic psalm. The second psalm declares his sonship, and the eighth psalm declares He is the Son of God. But in

¹ Plumer, p. 209.

this psalm, we can detect His being the obedient Servant on earth who relies absolutely on God the Father. He trusted in Him totally in life and in death, the death of the cross. The Lord has spoken of the resurrection, and all that followed after, such as being blessed with the divine presence, and sitting on the Father's right hand. David wrote this psalm as a prophet, and thus we have in this 'golden jewel' the voice of the Lord our God, in His deep humility"¹.

Our Lord Jesus Christ as our delegate and representing us, the section Adam, He is the obedient Servant who corrected our nature that has been corrupted by the disobedience of our first father Adam. Christ accepted the Father as a portion of His inheritance and His cup, and He asked for nothing else. In His obedience He went to the mire of death, He the only One, who alone knew no sin. This is why He saw no corruption in His death.

Christ's Resurrection

"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Ps. 16: 10).

The church fathers think our Lord Jesus Christ, who has become the good Servant is asking the Father for His resurrection².

By means of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus who saw no corruption, we have come to have the hope in the glorious resurrection (1Cor. 15: 1-4, 20-23).

- ❖ The Lord, in His passion and His death, He did not submit to the human law (that is, He suffered and died due to sin). Rather in His own free self-will, it was written about Him alone in this way; for He died according to the body, and He did not die according to the Spirit, because His soul was not left in Hades, "and His body saw no corruption". He himself says "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have the power to take again" (John 10: 18)³.

St. John Casian

- ❖ The fire had no power over Hananiah and his brothers' clothes, and neither on the bodies of the righteous. Also, at the end, fire will have no power over those who believe in Jesus⁴.

Father Afrahat

- ❖ It appeared as if the body is susceptible to corruption. But He did not remain like this in His nature; for, when He was clothed with the Word He remained with no corruption. Because He came in our body, and was similar to us, this is why we receive Him, and share the immortality that springs from Him⁵.

Pope Athanathius the Apostolic

- ❖ He came forward to speak with them confidently about David the father, that he was a prophet. He knew that God swore to him that out of the fruit of the lions, there will come Him who will sit on his seat. When he prophesied this, he was speaking of Christ's resurrection. He will not be left in Hades, and His body will see no corruption⁶.

¹ Gaebelin: Psalms, p. 72.

² St. Hippolitus of Rome: Expository Treatise against the Jews, 3.

³ The institutes, 3: 3.

⁴ Select Demonstration, 21: 19.

⁵ Four Discourses against the Arians, 3: 57.

⁶ Adv. Haer. 3: 12: 2.

2. God's Blessings

God keeps his believers by means of His love to them

"Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust" (Ps. 16: 1).

The worshiper begins his prayer entreating God to protect him and take care of him. This prayer is suitable for David the prophet and the Lord Jesus. David had overcome the mighty Goliath, and the women went out to meet Saul, singing "Saul thousands and David beat numberless of people" despite all of this, David's life was constantly threatened and endangered by Saul and his men. There was no one to keep his life safe except God alone. As a Shepherd, he knows how to embrace the weak sheep and take him in his arms, and He carries him on His shoulders. Here, he can find greater care from the Shepherd of the talking sheep. As for the Lord Jesus, in His incarnation, He offered prayers and pleadings in a loud voice, and in tears, to Him who is able to save Him from death (Heb. 5: 7). In the book of Isaiah, the Father's promise came to the Lord Jesus, that He would keep Him safe "Thus says the Lord. In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and give You as a covenant to the people" (Is. 49: 8). This has been fulfilled, as manifested in the farewell prayer of the Lord Jesus, since He is our Intercessor, and the chief heavenly priest. By Him, we are protected, for He says, "Holy Father, keep through your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are one" (John 17: 11).

For our sake, our Christ entered the hardships to cry out as our representative, asking of the Father to keep Him. Because He has been heard, due to His divine righteousness we have been kept safe too, for we are members of His body.

Some scholars think the psalmist did not write this psalm so as to face a particular disaster for difficulty he wished to get rid of. It is rather the fruit of a test of piety by which means the psalmist realizes, as well as every other pious worshiper, that his protection is in God. The believer experiences this on the basis of being blessed with God's divine presence in the temple or sepulcher¹.

"O my soul, you have said to the Lord, "You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You" (Ps. 16: 2).

When the soul encounters God, the source of its protection, it starts what is like a covenant. It says 'You are my Lord'; the soul speaks to Him, and proclaims its confidence in Him, for He is its Lord. The soul does not possess itself, neither is the master of itself. Rather, it has yielded its life to him for He is its Lord and the leader of its life.

Once we trust in Him, he keeps us in him as our own refuge. He deals with us, for we are His own, and He is ours, for He is our Lord. (Job 22: 2- 3; 35: 7- 8 Luke 17: 10). He does not need our goodness for we are unable to offer the Almighty God anything of use to Him. He asks for our hearts and our love, for we are His children. By means of this love He reveals our weakness, not to condemn us, but rather to correct our nature.

Even with Christ Jesus, being our representative, He did not become incarnate and die so as to show His love towards the Father, but rather towards sinners. He thus revealed the Father's love and His Son's love to them. The goodness He offered was for the sinner's account, and not for the father's account against whom we sin for He

¹ Weiser, p. 173.

says, “for God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 13: 6).

❖ God does not need our righteousness; rather we are in need of his righteousness. As the prophet says, “*My goodness is nothing apart from You*” (Ps. 16: 2) ¹.

St. Gregory bishop of Niscus

❖ The psalmist moreover says, “My goodness is nothing apart from You”; therefore, you tell me, of what is God’s use if I am righteous and just? How will He be harmed if I am wicked? Isn’t His nature incorruptible? Isn’t His nature unharmed, and above any kind of pain? The slaves, however rich they may be, have nothing of their own. What they have, only belongs to their masters².

St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom thinks the speaker in this psalm is the Lord Jesus Himself, for He says, “It is written that the Lord said to the Lord ‘*you are My Lord*’”. Here he is referring to the Trinity of the same essence. We do not understand the existence of two different trigason, but we understand the Trinity, all of the same nature³.

2. God reveals His Mysteries to His Saints

“*As for the saints who are on the earth, "They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight"*” (Ps. 16: 3).

The word ‘saints’ is derived from its original meaning, the concept of the ‘holy people’ that God has chosen for Himself and has selected for Himself. He chose those people to declare God’s sanctity and His glory to the world by mean of God’s dealings with them and their testimony of Him⁴.

The scholar Oreganus says the believers who seek sanctity, these are called ‘saints’, due to their advanced saintly life, even though they have not reached it to perfection. They enjoy a holy life by means of the fellowship with the Holy Lord Jesus. They are washed with His blood from all their sins and their infirmities. They get clothed with his righteousness and His sanctity by the work of the Holy Spirit in them.

These saints live in His land or earth, they live in the same world and one the same land in which the wicked ones do. But the saints see in this world and in this universe God’s fingerprints, the Maker of the impossibilities, all made for their sakes. They therefore realize they are in God’s land, like those living in their Father’s protective house. With this, they can see themselves in His holy church ‘the Savoir’s land, and thus their spirits rest until they are exalted to His heavens so as to see Him face to face.

Indeed we are badly in need of realizing we are under our Savior’s shelter who sanctifies our world in spite of what the evil ones do. We need to be blessed in living on God’s land, or His church.

The Lord manifests ‘his wonders’ in our life, and He changes even the most wicked things to our won good. He brings out of the eater food, and from the bitter He brings out sweetness. At this point, when we are in His land, we not only come to know His will, but He also performs His will in us, for the psalmist says, ‘He made in them all of His will’. He has fulfilled all of His salvation plan in us so we be blessed with the fellowship of His glory.

¹ *Comm.. on Canticle, serm. 4.*

² *In 1 tim. Hom., 16.*

³ *In 2 tim. Hom., 3.*

⁴ *See weiser, p. 174.*

What are the wonders of His will in His saints other than His work of salvation, particularly His resurrection and His ascension and His second coming? These are issues proclaimed to His saints. They are His loved ones to whom He grants Himself, so they be blessed by His risen life as a new life, and thus their holy will is in harmony with His will. They are keen on being ascended up to Him and being blessed with the glory of the great day of the Lord.

Who are those saints who are in the Lord's land?

- ❖ The saints who gladly put their trust and hope in the land of the living, they are the dwellers of the heavenly Jerusalem, who have their spiritual history firmly set in the anchor of hope in this city that is truly called God's land, even though they still live physically speaking, in this earth. These saints are Christ's disciples and the Marys and others who have been blessed with the apparitions of Christ, the Risen from the dead. The crucifixion was in public, for the Jews as well the Gentiles witnessed the crucified Christ, and this is why there is no excuse for them. as for the resurrection, this is granted as a divine gift to him who seeks the eternal life, and Christ the Risen would thus become their portion and their inheritance "***O Lord, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup***" (Ps. 16: 5).

St. Augustine

In this way the Lord our Savior uncovers the mysteries of His resurrection in the hearts of his saints, so they be blessed as their portion and their inheritance. He satisfies their souls with the eternal joy, and sanctifying even the land they walk on, so it be counted as His land. It is as if He grants His saints His resurrection as a life risen for them, and He takes their land, or their bodies, to be attributed to Him. in other words, our Lord begins a reciprocal love with His saints, by means of which what is ours becomes His and what His becomes ours. But as for the evil ones, it is said "***Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god***" (Ps. 16: 4).

The Lord permits them to have sorrows and pain, for they might realize their inward disease by means of their physical ones. Then they would hasten to the Savior, the only Physician of the bodies and the souls.

- ❖ 'Their sorrows shall be multiplied' this is not to wipe them out, but rather, so they cry out asking for the Physician.

St. Augustine

The Lord answered saying, "I tell you even until seventy times seven times", because even the prophets, after being anointed with the Holy Spirit, they sinned in their words. **St. Ignatius the apostolic and the martyr** wrote daringly, "the Lord chose apostles who were more sinners than anyone else". Due to their hasty change, the psalmist says, "Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god"¹.

St. Jerome

Hardships are allowed to the wicked ones for they might search for repentance, and turn to God as the Physician and the Savior. The Lord allows these hardships for his saints so they be distinguished and grow and be glorified.

St. Cyril the great thinks this prophecy has been fulfilled when the Gentiles accepted the faith in the Lord Jesus, as the Healer to their wounds.

- ❖ They had many infirmities, but they hastened after another god. Their disobedience was endless by which they were accused; these are they which He called gently 'infirmities'. They were lost in their sins, and were greatly of many terrible crimes, not in one way but in many ways. But they were quick to go to the faith, and were

¹ *Against the Pelagians*, 3: 36.

not slow to accept Christ's commandments. In readiness, they were converted to the faith. This is why Christ's net caught them and He is teaching you by one of the saintly prophets' words "Therefore, wait for Me says the Lord, till the day I rise for plundering; because My judgment is to gather the nations" (Zeph. 3: 8)¹.

St. Cyril the great

If God declares his mysteries to his saints, and at the same time He asks the wicked to return to Him for He is the Physician who heals the wounds of their souls, the saints therefore, on their part, avoid the sharing of the wicked in their wickedness, particularly in their worship.

"Their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, Nor take up their names on my lips" (Ps. 16: 4).

It was the atheists' custom to drink a cup of blood as an oblation, or a kind of worshiping. The psalmist may have also meant by 'the blood' here the offering of the human sacrifices' blood, as part of the atheist rituals. As for the mentioning of their names, for it was said "make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth" (Exodus 23: 13). "You shall out down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place" (Deut. 12: 3). "For I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more" (Hos. 2: 17). it is as if God wished his people to be absolutely sanctified, and would not have their mouth defiled even by mentioning the names of atheist gods.

Under the difficult circumstances, David the prophet was obliged to flee to Gath where he stayed there (1Sam. 27: 3). He also went for a second time to the land of Moab (1Sam. 22: 3, 4). His enemies found this an opportunity to accuse him of sharing the atheists their life, their assemblies and their worshiping, and that he has been defiles with their iniquity. This is why the psalmist justifies himself of this accusation; for even though he resorted to them, yet he did not share them their bloody assemblies, and neither did he defile his lips by mentioning the names of the gods. Some think those atheists may have suggested to David that he share them their worshiping, as is clear when speaking to Saul when he met him wilderness of Zef "Now therefore, please let my lord the king hear the words of his servant: if the Lord has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering. But if it is the children of men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day from sharing in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods(1Sam. 26: 19)".

3. God Gives Himself a Cup and a Portion for us

"O Lord, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot" (Ps. 16: 5).

The wording of this verse and what follows is undoubtedly due to the division of the land of Canaan, since each person obtained his inheritance portion by means of lottery. Lines were set to put limits to the site. So, by lottery the land division and distribution was done. As for the priests and the Levites, there had no portion, for God himself was their portion and the inheritance of their lot. This is why David, who was of the Judah's tribe, but he was not preoccupied with the land inheritance, this is why he says that God is his portion. He confirmed this in other places as well (Ps. 119: 26), Asaaf also confirmed the same matter (Ps. 73: 26)².

¹ Comm.. on Luke, hom. 36.

² Plumer, p. 212.

This is beatitude of enjoying the fellowship with God. The cup here may mean the cup of God's feast that used to pass around those attending a banquet of worship those shares in the feast. It is a symbol and an earnest of God's grace for salvation¹.

Satan thought that he is able to overpower man by promising man that he would be given all the kingdoms of the world if he only worshiped him (Matt. 4: 8, 9). But the Son of Man rejected this, because He did not come to rule the world, but rather to rule over the hearts. He preferred the Father to be his portion and His inheritance and His cup, for He said "Let it be thy will, and not Mine", though He is One in the same divine will. Christ rejected to receive the cup from the enemy's hand, so He might drink the cup of the cross. He obeyed until death; the death of the cross, for it is the cup of obedience to the Father, and the cup of love to mankind.

❖ Let others choose portions for themselves, portions that are vain and earthly, so they might enjoy them. as for the saints' portion, it is the Lord, an eternal portion.

Let others drink of the fatal drinks' but as for my portion and my cup, it is the Lord.

"The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places" (Ps. 16: 6).

The lines for dividing my portion in Your glory are as in a lottery. In this way just as God is the possession of the priests, the Levites and their portion (Num. 18: 20).

St. Augustine

❖ Obey the Lord's commandments 'Follow Me', and take the Lord of the world a possession and a portion to you, so you give praise with the prophet "The Lord is my portion". The Lord does not rule with anything else². If he possesses anything with Him, then the Lord is not his portion³.

St. Jerome

❖ The cup contains all the strong liquor. It is moreover, "a mystery" in which Christ manifest Himself⁴.

St. Mar Avraam, the Syrian

❖ When we obtain the title 'Levi', which means 'he himself belongs to me' or 'he is mine', then our honor becomes greater. For God tells man 'You are Mine', or, as St. Peter was told about the piece of money that was found in the mouth of the fish "Give this for Me and for you" (Matt. 17: 27) ⁵.

St. Ambrosius

"The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance" (Ps. 16: 6).

David seemed to have been very happy with his portion in the Promised Land which is the down-payment for the heavenly Canaan. Even the waters of his city, this seems to him better than any other water anywhere else (2Sam. 23: 15; Job 11: 17). The true believers who experience the gift of salvation feel very happy now for what they have been blessed with from God; Also, because of their expectation in age to come. By means of faith, they could witness here the lord Jesus dwelling in their hearts, and giving satisfaction to the church, and there they would see Him face to face. Our eternal inheritance rejoices our hearts while we struggle in this world, for

¹ Weiser, p.175

² Ep. 118: 4.

³ Ep. 52: 5.

⁴ Hymns on the Nativity, 3.

⁵ Duties of the Clergy 1: 50: 255.

we are blessed with the earnest beginning inside us, as an inward glory for the king's daughter.

Our inheritance is firmly ours, and it cannot be taken away from us, for it is "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1Pet. 1: 4).

4. God Grants us Wisdom and Understanding

"I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons" (Ps. 16: 7).

Pope Cyril VI often said this statement, and would write it to his beloved sons. Wisdom and understanding are the most precious things God can offer man for the Word of God Himself is 'the Wisdom'. We are not to be surprised to see the Gospel testify about the Lord Jesus that He was joyful in the Spirit and glorified the Father because the simple church has been blessed with the spiritual understanding. For it is said "in that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed it them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your right (Luke 10: 21)". the Word of God rejoiced for the church to be blessed with the hidden heavenly understanding than those who believed to be wise and knowledgeable! The Father is pleased with His wise church in the Spirit and the Truth.

We have previously mentioned more than once that the school of Alexandria counted the spiritual knowledge of 'gnosis' a divine gift granted to believers by means of the life of meditation, and the practical application of the commandment and the spiritual church attitude, or the good righteous life in the Lord¹.

St. Clemendos the Alexandrian called the spiritual Christian 'gnosis' – which is the knowledge, and knowing the issues pertaining to the present, the future and the past as certain issues to be assured of. The Son of God grants this, for He is the 'Wisdom'², and he declared it. He also showed that the Lord Jesus grants 'gnosis' when reading the Holy Book in a churchlike Spirit³, so we do not misunderstand its meaning as heretics do. In such a way we are made perfect by our perfect Gospel attitude. He also confirms that the baptism makes 'gnosis' possible for us, by our inward eyes being enlightened⁴.

The real knowledge is linked to the spiritual work, particularly that of repentance. The psalmist says, "**my heart also instructs me in the right reasons**". Repentance is usually fulfilled at right when all is silent. Man returns to himself and he discovers his sins, and relies on God, the Lord of glory as the Savior of sinners. Just as the kidney purifies the blood, likewise does the constant repentance purify the soul to prepare it for the eternal inheritance that is sinless. The night may refer to the darkness of sin, for by repentance we come to feel the bitterness of our darkness. We look up hopefully to the Sun of Righteousness who shines in his splendor in our very depths.

It is most probable that man uncovers his depths at the silence of midnight. The evil ones find the nighttime a good opportunity for making all evil and conspiracy. The saints on the other hand, find the nighttime a good opportunity for prayer, meditation and the soul's release in love towards the heavenlies.

¹ للمؤلف: أبناء مدرسة اسكندرية الأولون، 1980، ص 77

² Stromata 6: 7.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. 4: 21.

- ❖ When **Organus** commented on the psalmist's words "my heart also instructs me in the night reasons" he said "if a saintly person like almost reaches perfection, he is released from the human drawbacks even at nighttime, and he is not tempted by any evil thought"¹.

St. Jerome

St. Clemendos the Alexandrian speaks of the link between the true spiritual knowledge with that of repentance and struggle, saying, "The gnosis person is pious and cares primarily about his own salvation. After that, he is concerned about his relative so that everyone would be really righteous. The son, for instance, gives pleasure to his good father by proving himself to be as good as his father by proving himself to be as good as his father. We are able to believe and to obey"². Knowledge is not only by means of the mind alone but also by the life experience that we live by, so we be in the image of God our Father. St. Clemendos says, "The gnosis person is a truth-lover of the real One, and he is a perfect man, God's friend, and he is counted a son"³.

5. God Grants Us to see Him continually

"I have set the Lord always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Ps. 16: 8).

God has granted His believers the true knowledge so they are blessed with His love and live according to His will. The aim of this practical knowledge, therefore, is to see Him here in faith, as a preparation to seeing Him visually in the life to come. We are able to see Him here in everything, day and night, when walking and when sitting down. We can see Him in all that we do, and in all the pain we endure.

To see God before us is a sign of His leadership to us and His guidance, just as He used to appear as a pillar of light in the wilderness leading His people. We can see Him on our right, as a mystery of our strength, and thus be not move.

- ❖ The Christian directs every piece of work, big or small according to God's will. He fulfils it meticulously and very accurately. He keeps his thoughts firm in the Only God who has given him the job so that he finishes it. in such a way, the words are fulfilled that say, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved"⁴.

St. Basilious the great

The expression 'at my right hand' refers to strength. This is why it was said at Christ's ascension that He sits on the right hand of His Father, that is, that he has the strength of the Father has a left and right in a materialistic or place-like manner.

- ❖ Therefore, sitting on the right does not mean that the Father is on His left⁵. But all what is on the right of the Father and is precious, this is also for the Son, who has said "all things that the Father has are Mine" (John 16: 15). Thus when the Son sits on the right, the Father is seen also on the right; for because the Son has become man, He says, "I have set the Lord always before; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved". This, moreover, reveals that the Son is in the Father, and the Father is in the Son, because the Father is on the right and also the Son is on the right. And as the Son sits on the Father's right, therefore, the Father is in the Son⁶.

¹ Ep. 133: 3.

² Stromata7: 9.

³ Ibid 7: 11.

⁴ The Long Rules Q. 5.

⁵ Cf. August. De Fid. Et Symb. 14. does this passage of Athan's shew that the Anthropomorphites were stirring in Egypt already?

⁶ Plumer, p. 214.

6. God Stands Beside Us and We Shall Not Be Moved

We are sure of his love, whatever the danger or the hardship may be like. We are sure of His guidance and His will so that we take the right decisions.

7. He Grants Us the Hopeful Rejoicing

“Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16: 9, 10).

God, being the source of the human soul’s satisfaction, He offers us ‘rejoicing’ that is a gift from Him to those who are in fellowship with Him. Therefore, our hearts are filled with joy and gladness, for we feel the safety as long as we are in God’s embrace.

The heart inside is joyful and the outer tongue is rejoicing. It is as if all of man’s being – inwardly and outwardly – is responding to God’s grace in joy and gladness.

The body and the soul are praising God. Though the body impedes fasting and abstinence, and what may seem as deprivation and tiredness, yet it lives in the hope of the resurrection. The body is aware though in the midst of suffering, that it is crossing till the tomb, so as to rise a spiritual body. As for the soul, it realizes its eternal wedding with its Savior who grants it the constant immortality.

As the beginning of the book, we saw how this phrase referred to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Someone may say, “If this phrase is a prophecy of the Savior’s life, then why are we speaking of the joy and the wedding?” Indeed, most of His life on earth consisted of tears and sorrows; But He also rejoiced in the Spirit for what the church is blessed with concerning the knowledge, the understanding and the wisdom in Him (Luke 10: 21). Amidst His intolerable suffering, there was a mysteries awareness of the goodness that will follow by means of His cross. For the sake, therefore, of the joy set before Him, He counted the measureless pain as nothing. Christ scorned the shame (Heb. 12: 2), and when the heart rejoices, it is blessed with the inward glory, and thus man’s tongue signs in praise¹.

8. He shows us the path of life

“You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16: 11).

The phrase *‘the path of life’* is mentioned only once in the Book of Psalm, and has been repeated three times in the Book of Proverbs (Prov. 2: 19; 5: 6; 15: 24). This is an expression identical to the ‘abyss’ or ‘Sheol’ and ‘death’. It could not be understood except that it be ‘the life we live’ in fellowship with God, and that continues after death.

The psalmist has previously spoken of the Lord Jesus’ resurrection in the verse ahead. And now he is declaring ‘the path of life’ or ‘the path of eternal glory’ by means of the ascension. There we shall see God’s face and he filled with joy, and live with the lord Jesus on the right hand eternally. The Lord has ascended and sat on the Father’s right hand; thus opening the way of heaven and glory to His church, so it be exalted with Him as a queen. The church will see Him and will sit on his right hand. In this way, the temporal church sorrows will be changed to the cause of eternal glory.

¹ Weiser, p. 178.

My God You are my Sufficiency and my Joy

- ❖ Lord ...You are my portion and my cup You are the secret of my satisfaction and the joy of my soul.
You have possessed me with Your love that has shed for me,
Teach me how to own you and I will ask for nothing else beside You!
- ❖ Grant me that I be happy with fellowship of the saints, as much as You are blessed with them.
Permit me not, to share the wicked ones their opinions or words or attitude!
- ❖ You are my Leader I rely on You alone, and thus You keep me.
You reveal Your mysteries to me, and You fulfill Your will in me.
You grant me the beginning of Your inheritance, and take me to Your secret glories!
Grant me wisdom, You divine wisdom!
Declare Your divine presence in me, so I be not moved!
Show me the strength of Your resurrection, and carry me to your heavens, just as in the royal way of life!
I am eager to see Your face, and so praise You forever, joyfully with your angels.

Psalm 17

Discipline Leads to Visualizing God

This psalm is a lamentation written by someone unjustly accused. He therefore took shelter in the temple waiting for the verdict in his case¹. David may have prayed it when his enemies gave him a hard time, and he has recorded it when he was in the Maoon wilderness, when Saul and his men rose against the Lord's anointed (1Sam. 23: 25).

C. Stuhlmueller says, "We need psalm 17 just as much as our need in our secret suffering when we are innocent. This is not to be release to what is behind the earth horizon and this reach eternity only, but so as to go in Jesus' heart who was accused wrongfully (John 8: 46) whereas He was innocent. "For He made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us" (2Cor. 5: 21). When we say psalm 17, we also pray for the times when we ourselves have misjudged and wronged others. We pray for all the victims of injustice²".

Some think this psalm is similar to psalm 16, and they count them both as twins.

This psalm reveals to us what happened to David the prophet. He was as if thrown in a cauldron of fire, but instead of perishing, he came out of it not only unharmed but he as also sheltered under the Lord's wings, and could see the glory of His divine face!

Messaic psalm

Some think the Psalms 16-24 represent a complete Messaic collection. Each psalm of these offer a clear prophecy about the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The most beautiful of these prophecies is what has been mentioned about the cross and the glorious suffering of the lord in Psalm 22.

Gaebelein says about Psalm 17, "when reading this precious prayer, man feels immediately that it concerns the lips of One greater than David. He wrote this prayer by the Spirit of God, as with all the other prayers, including the prayers of the curses against the enemies. The characteristic of this pledge addressed to God, does not concern David. Its wording, in the first place applies to Christ. He is the perfect and the righteous One, and He is the Intercession for His people, for He is the One who calls them through his own righteousness and perfection. The Father listens constantly to His intercession"³.

St. Jerome applied all what was mentioned in this psalm on the Lord Jesus, and some other fathers such as **St. Augustine** counted all what came in this psalm as concerning the Lord Jesus and His people. **St. Augustine** says, "we should attribute this psalm to our Lord in Person, our Lord who is united to the church that is his body".

The Title

"**David's Prayer**" There is four other psalms that have the same title. These are (Psalms 86, 90, 102, 142). They are called prayers because they are charged with pleadings, and they are all characterized by this and the essentials properties of the psalms⁴.

David the prophet excelled in the art of prayer, to the extent that he called himself 'prayer'. He knew how to constantly resort to it, particularly because he was a man of

¹ *The Colledgeville bible Comm.*, p. 758.

² *C. Stuhlmueller: The Psalms*, p. 123.

³ *Gaebelein: Psalms*, p. 78.

⁴ *W. Plumer*, p. 220.

affliction and agony. He feels he is in need of God as a refuge to him from his wicked enemies and from his personal infirmities and failure, so he would be fit through God's mercies to be lifted above any discipline to the joyful heavenly life.

The General Frame

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. Resorting to God so as to assure his innocence | 1-5 |
| 2. A pleading for mercy's sake | 6-12 |
| 3. Entreating against the wicked | 13-14 |
| 4. Praising God | 15 |

1. Resorting to God so as to Assure his Innocence

The opening words of the psalm are a prayer to his justification (Ps. 17: 1-5) followed by an assurance of this innocence (17: 3-5). The psalmist begs God to show him as being innocent, He is sure of God's righteousness, for He is not partial to faces, and David relies on his good conscience.

"Hear a just cause, O Lord, Attend to my cry; Give ear to my prayer which is not from deceitful lips" (Ps. 17: 1).

The psalmist asks God to listen to him and to attend. He repeats three times in this verse that the Judge supports him. This repetition is not falsely said, rather, as a proof of emphasis and eloquence, and going to no other good than Him.

David was righteous and blames. He followed truth and justice on his part, and he was innocent of the wrongs he was accused of. The characteristics mentioned here, of his justice, his innocent, and undeceitful lips, all of these apply first and foremost to Jesus Christ, for He is the absolute perfect righteous One, and His lips have no deceit (1Pet. 2: 22). The Lord intercedes by His own righteousness for the sake of His people, and the Father listens perpetually to His intercession.

The Lord Jesus is the One who entreats; He prays as the Head for his body's sake, the church. He regards the case of His people as His personal case. He intercedes for the sake of His saints because "in all their affliction He was afflicted" (Is. 63: 9). He told Saul, "Saul, Saul, why are percuting Me?" (Acts 9: 4).

We, too, as members in the body of Jesus, it is appropriate for us to live in righteousness, because the Father cannot deal with us unless we are absolutely honest with him, having the righteousness of Christ. He knows our real motives; we may deceive ourselves sometimes, but we cannot deceive God.

We notice in this psalm the following:

a. We cannot understand the defenses by righteousness here as a naive expression about the personal righteousness. It is not merely a confirmation on the part of the worshiper of being free from sin. It is actually an attempt to justify man of certain unjust accusations¹. By our saying, *"Hear a just cause, O Lord, Attend to my cry"*, this does not mean we are sinless; we rather mean that the voice of the Lord's blood and its worthiness is far greater than the voice of false accusations against us, and greater than the voice of sin that testifies against us. His voice in us is stronger, because it is the voice of Christ's righteousness, the divine truth.

In Christ's righteousness, we hear the apostle's voice "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and

¹ Weiser, p. 180.

six month” (James 5: 16, 17). it is as if with Christ’s righteousness we carry the keys of heaven, and the Father answers us Himself.

b. By the words “*Give ear to my prayer which is not from deceitful lips*”, the psalmist declares he does not utter his prayers with mere lips, but rather through the harmony of the lips with the inward heart’s loyalty and the integrity of work. It is as if the psalmist declares that his prayer comes out of his entire being! The inward thoughts or the heart’s intention, and the words together with work.

The one of undeceitful lips has inward loyalty and truthfulness in his apparent behavior, and thus he does not fall under God’s rebuke “You have harlots’ forehead ... Will you not from this time cry to Me. ‘My Father, you are the guide of my youth? ... Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, as you were able” (Jer. 3: 3-5). The deceitful lips are despised by people, so how much more so will they be hated by the Lord? God does not ask for prayers from the deceitful lips, He only asks for the soul’s outpour (1Sam 1: 15) and the heart’s outpour (Ps. 62: 8).

c. When the psalmist resorts to God, he finds his rest in God’s divine presence. The psalmist then asks God to take over the case Himself, and to declare His judgment openly, because the judgment is just and correct.

“Let my vindication come from Your presence; Let Your eyes look on the things that are upright” (Ps. 17: 2).

❖ May my vindication not spring up from cheating lips that belong to the wicked but rather may it spring up from Your glorious presence, so I do not speak any different than what I discover in You.

I wish the eyes of my heart witness the upright matters.

St. Augustine

What does the psalmist mean by the Father’s face other than the Son who has told us of the Father? He has declared by means of the cross, the absolute divine love. By means of the salvation work we are blessed with the spender of God’s face. It is our right, then, to come to the Fatherly embrace, and witness all what is true and upright.

d. Straightening its internal life

“You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night; You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress” (Ps. 17: 3).

The word ‘tested’ is used to express the testing of gold with fire (Zech. 13: 9). This is a process that surpasses the regular inspection to the deep investigation inside the human soul.

The psalmist, by this pleading, may have meant to offer his heart at night when he leaves all those around him, and uncover to the Lord the depths of his heart and his good intention, away from people’s deeds, and his being preoccupied in talking to them. God can then see sincere integrity inside him that has no hatred or spite or injustice even against those who maltreat him. God could see in his heart real eagerness so the psalmist would not be preoccupied with people’s words, even though they have not separated themselves from him physically. The psalmist speaks to them and deals with them, but he is like a stranger, and he wishes to speak of God’s deeds and not those of the people.

The psalmist may have wished to declare how easy it is for people to judge against him, by their misunderstanding his words or his deeds. But as for God, He judges

according to his depths. It is as if he is saying with St. Peter the apostle, aft denying the Lord “Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You” (John 12: 17).

We are truly in need of yielding our hearts at nighttime and thus Christ shines on us, and He changes our darkness to His glorious Light.

He may say ‘I have given praise to Him at nighttime’ because the night is the thermometer of the spiritual life, in which the hearts are unfolded. The person whose heart is kindled with love all day long, when night falls, he finds his pleasure in prayer and studying the Holy Book and having spiritual meditation. When he puts down his head he keeps reiterating in his heart “Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed, I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord” (Ps. 132). (Prayer of the night time). He puts his head on the pillow and his thoughts roam in what is heavenly, where his heart is, and there his treasure is to be found. But he who is disturbed with worries of the world, he will find no pleasure at night. He will rather suffer from insomnia and his worries are increased. Thus nighttime will not be a time for rest, but rather an experience of the intolerable hell. He who spends his daytime in physical pleasures and looseness regarding his sensualities, whenever night falls, he gets more soaked in the daydreams that are exciting to his body and thoughts. In this way nighttime reveals to man his inner state.

At night, the heaven is opened before the psalmist’s eyes, and so he is enthralled in God’s love, and he prays for his brethren’s sake.

e. The control of his tongue:

“I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress” (Ps. 17: 3).

The psalmist has become absolutely prepared to offer his thoughts, his words and his deeds for an accurate examination from God. At the same time, he realized the exaltation man enjoys, who cries out to God so He grants him a perfect heart, word and work.

- ❖ “I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress”, that is lest I speak sinfully. Let my lips speak all what is appropriate to Your glory and give You thanks, and not as the disobedient people and those who resist Your will.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Do not disturb yourself with matters of the world, of which you profit nothing good to your life, for it has been written “I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress”. A man which is keen on speaking about sinners and their works quickly becomes aroused with the passion for recklessness. Rather, you have to be preoccupied with the life of the righteous ones, for this will be profitable to you¹.

- ❖ I have leaned to pray so I do not speak of the evil deed².

St. Basilios the great

- ❖ Do not search in your thoughts for others’ mistakes. Do not defile your tongue by accusing your neighbor. The words ‘Do not let my mouth speak of people’s deeds’ is a grievous matter³.

Father Babbi the Syrian

¹ Epistle 41: 2.

² Epistle 244: 7.

³ From the six century: Letter to Cyriacus, 55.

The psalmist by saying, “*I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress*” may have meant according to the Hebrew script, that even though a thought of judgment crosses his mind, even if this person is an enemy, yet this thought should not be uttered by his mouth. That is, the thought should not be changed to words and consequently to a deed. Let it be imprisoned and crushed by God’s work in him; for God has put a protection to his mouth, and a door of protection for his lips so his tongue does not transgress.

f. The walker in God’s narrow way:

“*Concerning the works of men, By the word of Your lips, I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer. Uphold my steps in Your paths That my footsteps may not slip*” (Ps. 17: 4, 5).

David the prophet spoke of his good heart, then of his tongue and finally of his deed. Concerning his deeds, he kept himself safe from the evil ways so he walks in God’s way, that is, to live according to the divine will. This has not been fulfilled by his own personal capability, rather, by God’s guidance and his support so his feet would not slip”.

In this psalm, the psalmist unfolds the words of the evil ones, and the words of the righteous ones, as well as the words of God. The lips of the evil ones give out scandal and false accusations against God’s children. this is why the psalmist resorts to God so He justifies him in these things, the lips of the psalmist, or the righteous, are careful about people’s deeds, so they have no deceit, and rather, these deeds would imply truthfulness, loyalty and harmony together with the heart’s integrity and the deeds that go with righteousness. As for God’s lips these keep His children safe, for His words lead them to divine way that seems difficult, but they do not fail or fall. God’s lips guide us and give us strength and fortitude on the way. The words of His lips are only God’s covenant and his promises to us, which are able to make us firm in Him forever.

❖ “Uphold my steps in Your paths”, until the Church reaches the absolute mercy by means of the narrow paths that leads to your rest. “that my footsteps may not slip”; till the prints of my trips be engraved as the footprints in the mysteries and in the apostles’ writings that are indelible. Let these footprints be apparent, and noticeable to all those who follow me. Or, these words could mean that my feet have walked these hard ways and have fulfilled the struggle in your narrow ways, so I may live eternally in the everlasting life.

St. Augustine

God’s way is narrow and bumpy, but it is a straight one. if my feet slip, this is due to my infirmity and my sin, for many stumble in God’s commandment so much as in their tribulations. Therefore, I am in need of God’s support not only to go on the way but also that I may be firm in Him till the very end. It is He who begins, and He who continues, and He who makes me reach the end. This is what urged the psalmist to cry out to God who waits our question so he may answer.

2. A Pledge for Mercy’s Sake

The psalmist trusts in God’s mercy as a divine support for him.

a. God’s coming down to us

“*I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God; Incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech*” (Ps. 17: 6).

The cry of David the prophet springs up from his old experience with God. He is eager that God hears him so He might answer.

What does the psalmist ask for in his cry? That God might incline his ears? The Father's ear that is inclined to me is only the Son of God, the incarnate One, who has come down to me, to hear my voice, and to answer. Due to our sin, we despair and are unable to pray. But our Lord, who represents us to the Father, he cries on our behalf (1Cor. 1: 30; Rom. 8: 34) and thus the Father answers. In this way, the doors of hope are open before us.

The Lord Jesus is the Father's ear by which He could hear my voice. Thus the voice comes justified, and acceptable to the Father, and pleasing to Him. he comes down to me, because my voice by itself is unable to be lifted up to the Father.

b. His salvation and His mercies are declared to those on his right

“Show Your marvelous loving-kindness by Your right hand” (Ps. 17: 7).

Because our Christ has come down to us, He declares God's amazing mercies by means of His precious blood. He grants salvation to those who believe on Him and rely on Him in their practical daily life. Through Christ Jesus we have come to be the Father's right hand, and we have come to carry His strength. This provokes the adversary and so he resists us fiercely. It is here that God's mercies are manifested, which change resistance to victory.

That we are blessed by being God's right hand, this does not take away the war waged against us, rather, this provokes war all the more. in wartime, we ask for God's blessing and grace, all the more so as to obtain victory and be crowned eternally.

c. His protection to us is like the apple of the eye.

“Keep me as the apple of Your eye” (Ps. 17: 8).

There is no member in man's body that needs care and keeping safe as much as the eye does, and God has placed it in a safe place; for it is nested between the protruding bones as a siege to it. It is as if the eye is placed in Jerusalem surrounded by mountains on every side. the purpose of the eye is to be blessed with the truthful version so the entire body is provided in the right position. The eye warns the body of any danger to come, and reveals the way to it. in this way God keeps the soul as the eye, and He surrounds it with His words as strong bones, or as the holy mountains of God. When the soul or the inward vision is sanctified, man walks in God's way blamelessly.

God surrounded the eye with the eyelid covering, and the siege of the eyelashes. In this same way, the Lord besieges all around us with His grace, and He keeps us safe from the evil turmoil.

The psalmist here behaves as a child does having fragile feelings towards God, for he sees himself as the loving eye, embraced by God, and taking care of by God Himself.

The eye is able to shut itself from the world passions, and its vain pleasures, for it cannot endure the least dust or dirt. In this way it is appropriate for the Christian to despise the least sin defilement.

The apple of the eye is what directs the vision, and it enables us to distinguished light from darkness.

The true servant, who works in God's Spirit, sees God's people as the apple of his eye, as the light of his eyes, and he cannot miss them. we are not surprised to hear **St. John Chrysostom** saying,

“There is nothing dearer to Me than you; no not even the light

I wish to offer my eyes very happily, many, many times if possible, for the sake of your souls salvation and repentance.

Your salvation is very dear to me, more than light itself; because of what use to me are the sun beams if grief darkness my eyes because of you? ¹,

d. His protection of us under His wings

“Hide me under the shadow of Your wings, from the wicked who oppress me” (Ps. 17: 8).

Love and mercy are God’s wings; and as **St. Augustine** says, “Let your love and your mercy protect me for they grant grace as a shield”. God’s wings have always been similar to the mother bird (Is. 49: 2; Hos. 14: 7; lamentations 4: 20), or a reference to the cherubims’ wings that overshadow the arc of the holy covenant, for the divine presence of God with His people (Ex. 25: 20-22). This is where God was manifested on the cherubims, and where he was sitting on His throne there.

❖ It has often been referred in the Holy Book to the wings of God (Ps. 17: 8; Deut. 32: 11; Matt. 23: 37). God’s wings symbolize God’s strength and his blessings, and his incorruption, as well as other symbols. All of these divine properties have been found in man when hardware resembles God in everything. But our diversion to sin has taken off our wings, and consequently, God’s grace was declared to us, and enlightened us. By rejecting corruption and the worldly passions, our wings of righteousness and sanctification grow all anew².

St. Gregory, bishop of Nicus

e. His protection of us from the evil enemies

“They have now surrounded us in our steps; They have set their eyes, crouching down to the earth, as a lion is eager to tear his prey, And like a young lion lurking in secret places” (Ps. 17: 11).

David the prophet sees himself as a city surrounded from all sides by enemies. They shut any opening for him to escape from, and they desired to destroy his life totally. There was nothing else for him to do except to lift up his eyes to find help from God above. He could see himself and those with him as a prey chased by the hunter, or as prey the lion plots to devour up.

The prophet spoke first in the single person manner, and then followed the plural one. This is a symbol for the lord Jesus declaring that the adversary does not desire Christ the lord alone, but he also desires to devour the entire church of Christ.

Some of the fathers think the enemies here are those who have crucified the Lord Jesus, whose hearts were thick with greed and pomp, and were shut up from knowing the truth. They had the flat and narrow heart. As for their mouths, they uttered arrogance instead of praising God’s name.

❖ In this way their tongues scornfully said, “hail, King of the Jews” (Matt. 27: 29).

From their city they expelled Me, and there they are surrounding Me when I am on the cross... “As a lion is eager to tear his prey” “and like a lion lurking in secret places” (Ps. 17: 12).

¹ *Comm.. on Canticle, 15.*

² *In Acts, hom 3.*

They are of Satan's seed, and they are humans. It was said of them "You are of your father the devil" (John 8: 44). This is why they plotted their conspiracies so as to chase the righteous and devastate him.

St. Augustine

Briefly speaking, these wicked ones are:

a. They do not aim at my personal benefit, but rather, to destroy others' life for no reason.

b. "They have closed up their fat hearts"(Ps. 17: 12) this is an expression that refers to arrogance and luxury. They have no cares in their vain and spoilt life and they narrowed the horizon and the heart due to their cruelty and their lack of love.

c. They are proud even in their talking, because from the outcome of their hearts, their tongues speak.

d. They plot traps so as to catch others, (Ps. 17: 11).

e. The persecutors are fearful beasts, and St. Paul called Nero 'a lion' (2Tim. 4: 17).

f. Their enmity and their violence is not due to any need, because God does not deprive even the wicked ones from His earthly gifts. On the contrary, they had a life of luxury, their bellies were full of God's prosperity, and they leave what remains to their children (Ps. 17: 14).

3. An Entreaty against the wicked Ones

"Arise, O Lord, Confront him, cast him down; Deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword, with Your hand from men, O Lord, From men of the world who have their portion in this life, And whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure. They are satisfied with children, And leave the rest of their possession for their babe" (Ps. 17: 13, 14).

The psalmist compares between the portion of the saints and that of the evil ones. The portion of the saints is the Lord Himself. They see Him face to face. They are satisfied by meeting Him, and they become like Him, for they are blessed by sharing Him in their hearts, as a deposit for the eternal kingdom. But as for the portion of the wicked, this is division in their life:

a. God Himself is the One to fight for his saints *"Arise, O Lord, Confront him, cast him down; Deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword, with Your hand from men, O Lord, From men of the world"* (Ps. 17: 13).

The enemies surrounded the psalmist as devouring beasts. But he realizes that man's help is useless, and he has no hope unless God manifests Himself.

b. God's sword (Ps. 17: 13) is his Word that is used as a disciplinary weapon.

c. To see God, or to see his face is a divine gift that we obtain through His righteousness that make his believers just like Him.

4. Giving Praise to God

"As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (Ps. 17: 15).

To see God on earth is fulfilled by faith and in heaven by seeing Him face to face. Here we can witness the Lord's glory as in a thick and darkened mirror, as a deposit for seeing Him in His glory in the vision of immortality.

- ❖ He, who shares in the godliness, constantly returns to it hungrily. The hungry one obtains talents and gifts without becoming disappointed, and as the wisdom promised “The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish” (Prov. 10: 3). Also in “I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread” (Ps. 132: 15). We moreover hear our Savior’s voice saying “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5: 6) ¹.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

In this way the psalmist concludes the psalm by seeing God, and by becoming satisfied with His divine glory. For this is the goal of our faith: to see Him and to share in His glories.

- ❖ To contemplate and see God face to face has been promised us, for this will be the end of our struggle and the topmost of our delight.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Every mind, according to its gradation, will be enlightened by a measurable amount of Light.

St. Isaac the Syrian

¹ *Pascal Letters 7: 6.*

prayer

- ❖ By you alone am I justified, and without You do I perish, o may Savior!
- ❖ Take care of my heart by night, so I know no sleep nor carelessness
Lighten my heart with Your Holy Spirit, so I be not a son to night or darkness!
- ❖ May the words of Your lips support me, and Your divine promises lead me on
So I go through your safe and narrow way, and cross to the Father's embrace!
- ❖ I thank you for You keep me safe as the apple of the eye, from the world dust around.
You shelter me with the shadow of Your wings from the enemy's blows.
- ❖ You lion coming from Judah's tribe, crush down the fangs of Satan, the lion lurking
to prowl on me.
- ❖ Show me your face, and fill me with Your divine beauty!

Psalm 18

The Grace of Royalty

This psalm is identical to (2nd Samuel 22), and it is a psalm of royal thanksgiving. It is not due to a military victory the psalmist has obtained once, but rather, due to a great deal of God's interventions that are filled with mercies. This is for the sake of a perfect life, rich in the experiences of God's merciful love. It is a poem of victory recorded by David at the end of his lifetime, after he had rested from all his enemies. Saul, was on the top of the enemy list, and the lord delivered him from Saul's hands; for although David was faithful to him, yet Saul did not cease to chase him mercilessly.

When writing his psalm, a long time has lapsed since Saul's death, about thirty years. Despite this, David speaks of this incident as if it were quite recent. Likewise, it is appropriate for us not to forget our sins, nor God's mercies to us, with the passing of time¹.

This psalm does not only represent a major part in the temple liturgy regarding the royal celebrations, but it also offers a good opportunity to know one of the basic poems, well known, written by King David. Even though it was written as a personal song of gratitude, yet it quickly became in the possession of an assembly, used in prayer and worship².

This psalm reminds us that every personal spiritual conflict, even that which takes place in our inner conscience, in addition to every conflict that occurs in the world for justice sake; it reminds us that it touches the foundation of God's eternal kingdom in our inward life.

A Messianic and Royal psalm

St. Paul made use of this psalm, quoting it twice since it concerns the Lord Jesus (Rom. 15: 9; Heb. 2: 13). Some interpreters apply the entire psalm to the Lord Jesus. It is categorized as a Messianic psalm, because David showed clearly that his kingdom was only an image and a symbol of Christ's kingdom. He has realized that the real salvation is not fulfilled by Saul's destruction and his men, but rather by the destruction of Satan and his spiritual legions, through Christ's victory, His death, His resurrection, His glory and His kingdom. He has raised us spiritual kings (Rev. 1: 16).

This psalm contains the peak of messianic gratitude. Weiser calls this psalm '**the royal grace**'. In his opinion it is a military anthem concerning the Warrior, the Lord Jesus, the King of kings. He fights as to establish His way, amidst a rebellious world, by means of the faith and love weapons. Then the Lord will come in His Kingdom and will embrace everyone to Him as spiritual kings. It is as if in Christ Jesus the church sings the praise hymns as a psalm of spiritual and kingly triumph.

Pope Athanasius the apostolic sees the psalm as comprising seven issues:

1. The Enemy's resistance of us
2. Asking for God's help
3. The coming down of Jesus Christ to us, so as to save us
4. The Lord's ascension to Heaven
5. God delivers man from the enemies

¹ Plumer: *Psalms*; p. 247.

² C. Stuhlmueller, p. 127.

6. The Jews Rejection: their loss of the honor of Sonship to God, and being regarded as strangers.

7. The acceptance of the Gentiles: their acceptance of the kingly blessing by means of faith through their listening

The Topic of the Psalm

1. According to the Hebrew text, “to the anointed psalmist, the Lord’s servant, David who spoke to the Lord the words of this anthem, on the day the Lord delivered him from the hands of his enemies, and from Saul’s hand”.

a. David calls himself ‘the Lord’s servant, and thus he speaks of ‘the royal grace and blessing’. This blessing uplifts him to the embrace of the King of kings; not to be puffed up or to practice authority and despotism, but rather to embody His humble and meek Spirit. He would then see himself a servant to the Lord, crushed down and in need of God’s help. The Lord has appointed him king over his people, so he might live a servant to the Lord, serving the members of His people in a spirit of love and dedication.

b. He says, ‘spoke to the Lord’: this praise song was set not to please people, nor to boast of his triumphs, but rather as a thanksgiving sacrifice to God, the Giver of constant victories. He is indebted to God for all of his success.

c. The psalm was set after obtaining numerous triumphs. He said it repeatedly on various occasions, whenever he recalled God’s loving hand. We are therefore not to be surprised when it is repeated in (2Samuel 22).

2. The title was mentioned in the seventieth translation ‘to the fulfilling David’, for he speaks of the salvation fulfillment that has come true by God’s Word who descended, His resurrection and the offered kingly grace given to mankind.

The General Frame

Some scholars such as Hans Shmidt divide the psalm into two separate prayers. They see the first part (1-30) speaking of the king's rescue from tremendous danger on his day of affliction (14). The second part (31-50) seems to be covering a greater period of time, and reminds us of several incidents and not just one (Verse 43 probably refers to conflicts occurring among the different groups of king David’s people). Other scholars reject this division. Weiser says “However, we do not follow the idea of splitting the psalm into two separate prayers; where the two major division represent one whole unity as shown in verse 43, and 48. the same measurement has been used in both parts. They are similar to two high cathedral towers. Therefore these two parts of this beautiful hymn of praise soar up in the sky, since they are a praise of thanksgiving to glorify God, who is manifested as a Supporter to the worshiper, or the psalmist, in the midst of his disaster (1-30). The Lord exalts him (46) so as to glorify the blessings of his King (5). Every part of the two sections of the psalm has its own characteristics that are appropriate to the subject discussed. But they do not offer the absolute impact in the perfect testimony of the living God’s royal power. The psalmist the king was confident and assured of God’s blessing, and he rejoiced in it, and thus the two sections of the psalm are regarded as one unit¹.

The First Section: the Salvation

1. Being delivered from the cords of death

1-5

2. The Power of Resurrection

6-18

¹ Weiser, P. 186-187.

3. The gift of the Glory **19-30**

The Second Section: the Royal Grace

1. Getting prepared for it **31-36**

2. The Enemies giving up **37-42**

3. Dominance over the Gentiles **43-45**

4. Gratitude and thanksgiving **46-50**

The Word for Guidance (the key word to the psalm)

The key word to the psalm is the word 'righteousness' that comes as the axis to the psalm (Ps. 18: 20). The psalm chants the justification of David. But David was not defending his personal righteousness; rather, it is God's grace that works in his life. As for our Lord Jesus Christ, He has struggled against evil till the shedding of His blood on the cross, so He gives us his righteousness. He strove against the cruel enemies such as death, the devils, the vicious world and iniquity (Rom. 7: 24-25; 1Cor. 15: 20-28). Our fight for the sake of righteousness is not against vice, it is rather against the evil spiritual hosts in the heavens (Eph. 6: 12).

The first section: The Salvation

1. Being delivered from the cords of death (PS. 18: 1-5)

This is our praise-song, when we know we are in Christ and thus we are able to cross from the cords of death to the fellowship with the heavenly hosts. Here we find a list that almost complete from the various metaphors used particularly to express God's power and His salvation mentioned in the psalms such as the Rock (that can never be climbed or attacked), and speed (that cannot be followed) the armor (as the soldier), the horn of salvation (as the strong beast) and the harbor (that is hard to reach).

“I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps. 18: 1, 2).

My relationship with God is a personal one. He is the One I love for he is my 'strength' in all what the word means. He supports me, and gives me courage, success and settlement.

I, all by myself, am unable to do anything. But God grants me enough protection, support and salvation. He is my Rock, the rock of my salvation (Deut. 32: 4, 15). HE is the Rock of His people (Gen. 49: 24). This name 'Rock' refers to solidity and strength and the unchangeable. He is my refuge (in Hebrew: my stronghold) and He is my Deliverer. The word 'deliverer' means 'he who carries me safely far away' or 'hardware who offers me a way of escape'¹.

Pope Athanasius the apostolic

❖ **“I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer”**

Yes, help me so as to love you; for you are my God, my shield, You are my stronghold. You are my sweet hope amidst my troubles. Let me cling to You, for You alone are goodness, without You there is exist no goodness. May You be all my happiness, You who are so righteous.

O, You Life; for Your glory every creature lives, You have granted me life, and in You is my life. By You, I live, and without You, I die.

I Beg You, tell me where are You? Where do I meet You? so I disappear in You entirely, and I be found nowhere except in You.

❖ **“I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies”** (Ps. 18: 3). I call on Him, not asking for my own glory, but rather for the Lord's glory. It is then that there is nothing to scare me from the foolishness of the enemies.

St. Augustine

Weiser says in verse three the nature of the praise-song change to a narrative one, and it goes on in this fashion till verse 19. The purpose of the story is to present the previous incidents in a liturgy form as the present events. In this way the events take us to the experience God's present presence, and the work of salvation in a robe of worship. This aim makes clear the usage of various verbs in an amazing way. the psalmist uses the past perfect then the incomplete past successively. The verbs keep changing throughout

¹ Plumer, p. 235.

the psalm for the purpose of expression, so as to show what has happened in the past, is a fact that has been fulfilled in the past, but it is active in the present¹.

The psalmist imagines himself as if he has actually passed away to the underworld, surrounded by the cords of death. He therefore says, "*The cords of death surrounded me ... The cords of Sheol entangles me*" (Ps. 18: 4, 5). In such a way, he portrays death as a monster that entangles its victims, or as a hunter who catches his prey.

The Hebrew word '**Chabel**' which is translated into 'birth labor' means 'to twist with pain', as a woman in labor. In this way, the psalmist says 'the travails have surrounded him as a woman giving birth, who is so helpless, and is exposed to the danger of death'.

Some think his words 'the labor of death' are a reference to the fact that death surrounds man even before being born, when hardware is still in his mother's womb in labor time. Death follows him in his childhood, his youth, and his old age, until he takes him to hell.

The verb 'encompassed me' was used first in (Hosea 6: 3, 6) when describing the besiege of a city for its destruction.

If the believer's soul is likened to a pregnant woman, then all what labor does is to take her pain of delivery so she gives birth to a new life and a blessed fruit. It is like a busy city the enemy wishes to transform it to poverty and ruins.

The role of the enemy is to destroy and to ruin, to kill and to put to death. But as for the work of the living God, it is to grant resurrection and to restore life all anew.

2. The Power of Resurrection

"In my distress I called upon the Lord, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, even to His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, Because He was angry" (Ps. 18: 6-7).

That God listens to prayers is not a new thing, for God is pleased to hear the cries of His believers the come from the bottom of their heart. God heard David from the temple, that is, from the tent where the ark is found, or from heaven itself, because the earthly temple is the symbol of the heavenly one.

When the enemy throws the cords of death as a net to catch the psalmist, and it pulls him to the tomb, then he is buried and does not rise again. But the Lord Jesus, the Risen from the dead, He answers his cries from the heavens. He comes down to him in the grave, carries him as booty, and ascends with him to His holy place.

In the psalmist ordeal, he may have seen with the prophetic spirit, the Lord Jesus, David's Son, in His crucifixion. He has cried out to His Father, and He was heard because of his righteousness. At this moment, the earth shook and the rocks were cracked, as the gospel writers narrate. Moreover, many dead saints rose physically, and entered the city.

The psalmist tells us of an amazing miracle: God has become manifested as if in His holy temple, on the Ark of the Covenant, so He delivers David from his ordeal. In this he symbolizes the Savior who went through the cross ordeal, so His powerful resurrection would be declared. What the Savior has offered in his personality is only for our account, as we too be blessed by the power of His resurrection, or in the same hymn

¹ Weiser, p. 188.

of praise; let us meditate and remember that we give praise when clinging to our Savior the Risen from the dead. We are never desperate, since we are blessed by the power of his resurrection. There is no such hardship except that He delivers us from it.

❖ ***“In my distress I called upon the Lord, to my God I cried for help”***.

St. Paul speaks of this cry to the Father, saying “In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears, to the One who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of his reverent submission” (Heb. 5: 7). His cry was heard by his being risen from the dead, and His obtaining the glory and the kingdom.

❖ ***“From His temple He heard my voice”***. He heard my voice from his dwelling place, inside my heart, “and my cry to Him reached His ears”. This cry of mine is not heard by any man’s ear. But when I utter it inwardly, in his presence, it reaches His ears.

St. Augustine

The psalmist says that death cannot break him down by despair, but Christ’s resurrection has offered him live and active hope. All he has to do is to call out and cry from the bottom of his heart, so as to find out his cry has pierced the jeweled doors of Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 21). The Cry reaches the note unreachable; thus God lends His ears to listen to those cries that come with the prayers and praises of the heavenly ones! At this moment all the earth shakes before Him and the mountain foundations get rocked back and forth. The earthly world lovers, that is, God’s enemies, are disturbed. These are the ones who assumed themselves to be strong, and believed no one could shake their being, and that they were as unshakable as the mountain foundation.

God who is so full of love, so humble, He declares Himself as consuming fire to the enemy, those who resist God’s glory and God’s poor people. Therefore, the psalmist says, ***“Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from Him”*** (Ps. 18: 8).

This image shows God’s wrath not as a vengeance reaction, but because of justice that accepts no injustice, and sanctity that tolerates no sin. St. Paul the apostle says “the work of each builder will become visible, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire” (1Cor. 3: 13-15).

God’s judgment and His justice is fire that makes gold and silver increase in their brilliance and purity, and it burns wood and bushes. Likewise is God’s Word; it is consuming fire that burns in us the choking thorns to the soul, and burns all what is evil, so it kindles the heart with the fire of divine love. Hence, not all the earth-waters would be able to put it out. The Holy Spirit has, moreover, come in the form of tongues of fire so He changes the disciples and the apostles to servants of God, kindled with fire. Thus they will enkindle all of humanity with the divine love fire, after they burn evil in the believers’ hearts by God’s Spirit, the Giver of sanctity. This is the aim of the Crucified, the Risen from the dead, who said, and “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Luke 12: 49).

Some scholars think the ascending of the foggy smoke means the psalmist is comparing God’s wrath against evil, as the foe that dims the atmosphere, as the dark

smoke coming out of the angry one's nostrils. Or, it is like the violent beasts that are like smoke choking the soul when angry.

❖ ***“Smoke went up from His nostrils”***.

People break into tears and make pleadings when they regret, due to God's threats against the evil ones. The aim of these threats is to make the evil people cease their malice, and thus they are not stricken with God's wrath”.

“And devouring fire from His mouth”. What follows repentance is the kindling of love by means of knowing God.

“glowing coals flamed forth from Him”, those who have gone ahead and have died, careless about the eager holy desire, or the light of justice...these were drowned in the chock cold, but they have become blessed in Christ in His wrath and His light, and life was being regained all anew.

St. Augustine

“He bowed the heavens also, and came down; thick darkness under His feet”
(Ps. 18: 9)

It was not possible for man, after sliding down to death, to be kindled with the fire of divine love, and be kindled with the sanctified coal unless the heavenly One descends to him. He bowed the heavens so He would meet us on earth and grants His fiery Holy Spirit. He came down to us in the flesh, and he hid the brilliance of His godliness, because if they had known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1Cor. 2: 8). This is what was expressed by the psalmist saying “thick darkness under His feet”. His glory disappeared and He was hidden from human eyes as if in dark smoke.

❖ ***“He bowed the heavens, and came down, thick darkness under His feet”***. The just One humbled Himself, it is He who bowed down for the sake of human weakness. “thick darkness under His feet”; those who were blinded by their own evil, those are the wicked ones who care about nothing else other than what is worldly, and thus were unable to know Him, because the earth falls under His feet tied to the feet below.

St. Augustine

The psalmist may have wished to declare the power of prayer and inward cries. If the enemy is similar to earth and the firm mountain foundation, then God does not only bent his ears to listen to the psalmist, but He also comes down to man in a hidden way, as if in smoke, so as to catch the enemy and make him go down to the psalmist's feet.

Some scholars think the psalmist's words here are very descriptive and beautifully portrayed the first divine appearance in Mount Sinai (Ex. 19: 8; Judges 5: 4; Hab. 3: 3-15), for there is no evidence that David has experienced what occurred literally. That is, he was not blessed in seeing the presence of God visually as did Moses, neither when he ran away from Saul's face nor in his wars and conflicts when he was a king. But he sees that his victory blessings were like a crossing, similar yet different in essence to the crossing mentioned in the book of Exodus in form. But it is similar to it from the aspect of its impact and effectiveness. The reality of salvation does not depend on the form that we adopt¹.

The believers' experience from the traditional stable form regarding the divine apparition in Sinai is that God is present with them now and before them. They could see

¹ *Scripture Union: Bible Study Books, The Psalms, p. 18.*

Him and hear Him. It is as if the tradition in its perfection is fulfilled with him as a present living event.

Moses saw God in the crossing over, when his people were greatly afflicted. He heard His voice in a palpable way amidst the fog. It was as if God has come down to him so He might support his people. In faith, David the prophet saw Him in his affliction when death was chasing him due to Saul despotic wrath against him. The coming down was fulfilled in absolute perfection in the fullness of time when the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ, came to save the world from Satan. His descent was surrounded with fog, and here He is ready to dwell in the believer's heart amidst his suffering, so he declares to him the power of the cross!

The divine manifestation of God seemed to be fulfilled in this way:

- a. With Moses when handed the law, in the shadows.
- b. With David, by faith, through being blessed by the constant victories, which are God's work in his life.
- c. With Christ Jesus, by being God's only begotten Son, who declared His Father, the co-essential with Him. This is the most absolute divine testimony!
- d. With the believers of the New Testament, in the new covenant, in their unity with the Son.

It is not amazing to find all the declarations fulfilled throughout the ages, and to find the divine presence glorified when the ordeals and hardships occur. When death seems to be inevitable and there is no way out, the Donor of the resurrection is glorified. Even our Christ – the co-essential with the Father – His glory was not declared except through the way of the cross.

With every ordeal, the believer is able to be blessed with Him who sits on the cherubim's throne, the Giver of salvation, for the psalmist says, "***He rode upon a cherub, and flew; He came swiftly upon the wings of the wind***" (Ps. 18: 10).

The cherubims were first mentioned in the book of Genesis 3: 24. it has also been repeated in Ps. 68: 4, 33; 104: 3. They go together with the cherubims on the cover of the Ark of Covenant. This name has been said regarding the two forms they were standing on (Ex. 25: 18-20). They stand on the throne of mercy, with a platform in between, where the constant presence of the Lord is proclaimed amidst His people. in Ezekiel 10, we have most complete description of the cherubims. They are heavenly creatures, a creation full of life, characterized by their speed, their strength and their courage. The sound of their wings is as the voice of the almighty when He speaks.

❖ "***He rode upon a cherub, and flew***". This means he rode far away beyond the boundaries of perfect knowledge. He shows no one could draw close to Him unless it be by love; because love is the fulfillment of the commandments (Rom. 13: 10).

St. Augustine

The cherubims are full of eyes, and each of them has six wings. Likewise, is the believer; he has spiritual vision and holy knowledge; thus he soars as if by wings of the Spirit towards the heavenlies. He becomes a divine chariot. Therefore it is said about him that the Lord has ridden as if on a fiery cherub. He is blessed with God's presence, and his knowledge of God is through an encountering experience that is a real one.

He says, "***He came swiftly upon the wings of the wind***" (Ps. 18: 10) This proclaims his swift coming so as to save His children, with no obstruction on the way; as

mentioned in “You make the clouds Your chariot, You ride on the wings of the wind”. (Ps. 104: 3).

“He made darkness His covering around Him, His canopy thick clouds dark with water” (Ps. 18: 11).

He came down to us so He saves us Himself, but he was hidden in the human nature, so we accept Him by faith. If the outer vision finds it hard to pierce the darkness around Him as a covering, so as to realize His mysteries, then it is by faith that our inward vision is enlightened, and is able to go deep and encounter Him and know His hidden mysteries. Isaiah the prophet says “Truly You are a God who hides himself” (Is. 45: 15). The psalmist also says, “clouds and thick darkness are all around Him” (Ps. 97: 2).

Darkness here refer to impotence; the earthly creation as well as the heavenly one, cannot see God’s nature or look upon its absolute perfection. All of God’s creation is able to see as much as it can, or as much as its spiritual level is able to, and not as He really is!

❖ *“He made darkness His covering around Him”*, for He has chosen the darkness of the mysteries. It is the hidden hope in the believers’ hearts, where He hides Himself without deserting them.

St. Augustine

❖ The arrogant souls wish recklessly and daringly to snatch in the dark. Bit by bit, they are surrounded by the wrong and thick tangible darkness.

Father Caesarius bishop of Arl

St. John Chrysostom thinks the clouds are the royal chariot that has been sent to the heavenly King, Jesus Christ, in His ascension¹. His ascension was hidden to the world. Only those who follow Him will have their thoughts exalted with Him secretly. The words ‘covering around Him’, could refer to his disciples or the church as a whole, because He is hidden in it in His ascension, as a covering for Him. He dwells in it without the world seeing Him.

There is description of God’s appearance in any part in the Holy Bible. But the Book speaks of God’s nearness to man, and His greatness that no one could come close to. All this is by means of symbols. Concerning His closeness, he speaks of the brilliance of His light; concerning His hidden greatness, he speaks of the clouds and darkness. God’s nature is incomprehensible, but it is known by means of its work and impact on man’s life.

❖ The revered **St. John** who has penetrated the brilliant darkness, says “No one has ever seen God” (John 1: 18). He confirms the impossibility of reaching the heavenly essence by any human means, and neither by means of any rational creation. Therefore, when Moses grew in knowledge, he declared he has seen God in the dark. This means he came to know what is godly, what is above all knowledge and awareness. The text came as “while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was” (Ex. 20: 21). What God? It is He who made the darkness His covering as David has said, who came to know the mysteries in the same inward holiness².

St. Gregory El Nissy

¹ *On the Acts, hom 2.*

² *Life of Moses, 163, 164.*

The cloud is the godly chariot (Is. 19: 1; Ps. 104: 3). He came down from heaven that is full of clouds, and that he bowed to the earth. He came down in a storm, riding on a cherub.

“Out of the brightness before Him, there break through His clouds hailstones and coals of fire” (Ps. 18: 12).

Some think the psalmist here is describing lightning that means God’s arrows that spread out and defeat David’s enemies. God is not at a loss to find the means of fulfilling His wrath, and spreading out His power for salvation. It is as if He is tearing the clouds into pieces, and that He is sending His arrows that are unobstructed by the clouds. These arrows rather, pierce the clouds as if it does not exist. The entire sky is opened as happens when there is lightning, when it seems as if the clouds are born apart. Lightning is usually accompanied by the cold and snow. God often punishes the vicious people by rocks of hail and fire (Ex. 9: 24; 25; Josh. 10: 11; Ps. 78: 47, 48; Ps. 105: 32; Hag. 2: 17) ¹.

It is as if God, who is hidden in the clouds, He opens the doors of heaven to strike the wicked who are insistent on doing evil, by throwing on them stones of snow and fire.

From another point of view, if the clouds refer to the saints (Heb. 21: 1) among whom are the prophets; for God has sent His prophecies through them as hailstones and firebolts, then the adversary Satan has become destroyed, and salvation has become fulfilled to the believers. This is why the psalmist goes on to say ***“The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice”*** (Ps. 18: 13).

In this way we receive God’s Word, particularly the prophecies that have previously spoken of salvation as lightning falling from heaven. When God speaks, heaven and earth shake, for He speaks with his words as well as with His deeds. For Him, there is nothing difficult, and nothing is impossible, nothing is too difficult for Him². Who can stand before Him? Who can bear His voice that thunders?

His words, ***“the Lord also thundered in heavens”*** refer to the Lord’s ascension, for it is said “God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of trumpet” (Ps. 47: 5). Through this ascension, the divine promise of sending the Holy Spirit as being springs of water, this has been fulfilled. The believers are blessed with Him through the baptized water. The pure apostles and the saintly disciples have shown themselves to be the foundation of the new universal construction (Eph. 2: 20), for the palmist says ***“Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were uncovered At Your rebuke, O Lord, At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils”*** (Ps. 18: 15).

What are those channels of the sea that appeared other than the baptism, for Isaiah the prophet says “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Is. 12: 3). The water of baptism evokes joy and gladness in the believers’ hearts, and perdition to the adversary and all his wicked deeds.

In the baptism water the Lord’s voice thunders and He takes away the adversary’s kingdom in us; He then reign eternally in our hearts.

As for the world foundation, that is, the disciples, they lean on the Lord Jesus, the cornerstone rejected by the builders at the beginning, and has crucified Him, and this has become for them the salvation of God’s church, and her construction on a heavenly level.

Some scholars believe this verse (13) has some hint to Red Sea miracle that has split in two, showing the depth of waters. Thus the foundation of the universe was

¹ Plumer, p. 239.

² Ibid, 249.

revealed! The psalmist seems to be saying that God delivers him for certainty, and in a very clear fashion. He has previously done so with his people when they fled from Pharaoh's face and his soldiers. Other scholars think the psalmist counts himself as if buried in the deep waters as he mentions in Psalm 144: 7. He prays, asking God to save him from the many waters, and to deliver him from the hands of strangers. Thus the psalmist continues in this psalm saying, "***he reaches down from on high, He took me; He drew me out of mighty waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from the who hated me***" (psalm18: 16- 17).

Even if the world waves and its currents seemed to have swallowed me up, yet He came down from heaven to take me in Him, and to carry me to His heaven. He shatters the doors of hell with His cross, and He delivers me from death, and from the power of darkness who hate my soul, and who ask for its eternal perdition. Even if Satan and all his hosts are strong, yet there is the One who delivers me from their hands, and who exalts my soul with Him on high.

The psalmist sees himself as being attacked by the strong enemies, and he has become as someone in many waters. In his human incapability, it was impossible for him to be saved. But God gave him victory over the mighty Goliath, and then he overcame Saul and his men, as well as overcoming the Philistines, the Syrians and other nations. He finally achieved victory over his rebellious son Absalom. This was all a symbol for what David's soul suffered from when he realized that the doors of hell were chocking him by means of the real enemies such as Satan and his hosts, by iniquity, and his being condemned to eternal death. This salvation cannot be salvaged by anyone else other than by the Lord Jesus, the death Conqueror, the One who delivers the souls from Hades the freedom of paradise.

3. The gift of the Glory

"The Lord was my support; he brought me out into a broad place, He delivered me because He delighted in me" (psalm18: 19).

God manifests His love to man, and His wish to possess him, when he intervenes divinely in time of hardship. He permitted that Joseph lives for a while as a slave in the house of Pharaoh, and even as a prisoner in the jailhouse. But the Lord was his supporter, and gave him grace in the eyes of all those around him, even in the eyes of the jail manager. God delivered him so he might live in luxury in the palace, he and his parents and his brethren. God is his support because He 'wanted' him and 'delighted' in him, so he might be a symbol of Jesus Christ our Lord. Likewise was David in the cave of Adlam, running away from the despotic Saul and his men, so David might be exalted to the throne. The Lord wanted him and he even delighted in him. How wonderful it is to live bountifully after experiencing hardship. It is not because of the luxury itself, but rather, for experiencing the fingerprints of God's love and his awesome care for us. The Lord delights in His children, and his aim is in their ordeal as much as in their being blessed bountifully.

Our Christ takes us to sharing His suffering; so He might cross with us to the splendor and bounty of the resurrection. He takes us to cross from the narrow Hades to the bounty spaces of paradise. In His love, He delivers us from the narrow isolation of our selfish hearts, to take us in splendor to God and to the heavenly, and to all mankind, in true and sanctified love.

The enemies judged him wrongfully to undergo affliction, thus the psalmist cries out to God, saying, ***“The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His judgments were before me, and His statutes I did not put away from me. I was blameless before Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity”*** (Ps. 18: 20-23).

What does David mean by his righteousness and the cleanness of his hand? Of his knowing and keeping the Lord’s ways, and being with the Lord blamelessly, keeping himself from iniquity? His enemies accused him of rebellion, of treason, of looting and thieving, of provoking betrayal and disobedience, of being savage and many other despicable deeds? Here David is proclaiming his innocence of all these accusations. The Lord has put him on the way to the throne, and yet David left everything in God’s hand, and took no evil measures to fulfill this¹.

❖ What cleanness is this that is in God’s eyes?

He asks us for sanctification that God’s eyes could look open².

St. John Chrysostom

These words are also the Messiah’s prophecy, because the Lord Jesus is the only Son of Man in His perfection; He is the Incarnate GOD who obeyed the Father till death. This obedience till death, urged Him on to the glory. “Therefore God also highly exalted Him, and gave Him the name that above every name” (Phil. 2: 9).

God is true by his nature, for He is ‘Love’. This truthfulness works in different ways, according to man’s response to Him. The righteous one could be blessed with God’s love through his own love to God. God’s promises are therefore fulfilled in the life of those who misuse the divine commandments of God, and disobey them; God seems to them to be their Opposer. They see Him as an adversary to them, because then He faces them as disobedient ones, He fulfills His judgment and carries it out.

“With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; With the blameless You will show Yourself blameless; With the pure You will show Yourself pure; And with the crooked You will show Yourself perverse” (Ps. 18: 25, 26).

In His love, God wants all people to be saved. But He does not give everyone the chance to realize his grace. The merciful is blessed with God’s mercy. The kind one is blessed with His divine kindness. The generous one experiences God’s generosity. But he who persists in his cruelty, he will be left to his actions, and will deprive himself of God’s mercy and tenderness. In this way, God will seem to seem to him as cruel and merciless. In “If you continue hostile to me, will not obey Me, I will continue to plague you sevenfold for your sins” (Lev. 26: 21).

In this way the merciful responds to God’s mercies, understands them and is blessed by them. The sanctified person understands God’s sanctity, the source of every sanctification, and he realizes that God is the Holy One.

❖ “With the saint you be holy”

“the inequities of the wicked ensnare them, and they are caught in the toils of their sin” (Prov. 5: 22), in truth, God does not harm anyone.

St. Augustine

¹ *Ibid*,241.

² *Hom. On Eph. Hom. 1.*

The merciful comes to know God's mercy, and he interacts with it. Likewise, even in our relationship with each other we interact together. He who is close to the merciful ones is blessed with the merciful life. He who is close to the merciful ones is blessed with the merciful life. He who is close to the saints is blessed with them in sanctity, which is God's gift to them. This is why **St. Clemendos the Alexandrian** says, "We have to be close to the saints, because he who sticks to them becomes sanctified¹".

It is as if the secret of our glory is our interaction with God and His saints through the chaste and merciful life. This is by means of a humble spirit, and obedience to His work of divine grace.

"For You will save the humble people, But will bring down haughty looks" (Ps. 18: 27).

What was mentioned in verses 25 and 26 concern God's dealings with persons. Now He applies the same principle on God's people in general. because they yield together in the spirit of humility to God's will, they experience God as their Support. But those who are puffed up in vain admiration, God brings them down. it is God's² nature and His plan to grant salvation to the needy ones, the humble and the meek, whereas He detests arrogance in any being.

By humility, the believer receive God's grace, the giver of enlightenment.

"For You will light my lamp; The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness" (Ps. 18: 28).

The psalmist's heart overflows with gratitude and confidence, and he confesses that God lights his lamp. This means that God grants him the real life, for there is no division between enlightenment and life. When David was exposed in the end of his days to killing, his men advised him not to go to war so Israel's lantern would not be put out (2Sam. 22: 17).

The psalmist was aware of the fact that he was only a lantern that CD not light up by itself. Rather, he needs the oil of the divine grace of God; he needs the Lord Jesus, the 'Light of the World' to manifest Himself in him as the Light that breaks up all fatal darkness, and granting him life anew. It is as if with every affliction, he cries out to his Savior so the road of tribulation might be widened for renewed joy, and a new taste for a life of unity with God. This will motivate him to practice more righteous deeds³.

❖ ***"It is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God, lights up my darkness."*** (Ps. 18:28)

Our light does not shine from us; it is You O Lord who lights my lamp. We are in the darkness of impurity, but O my Lord, You light up my darkness.

St. Augustine

❖ I only watch one lamp, and with its light I can see. Now I am amazed, I rejoice spiritually, because inwardly I have a source and a spring of life. It is He who is the aim of the world, the Untouchable.

❖ Carry the yoke of your Lord with your heart. His amazing greatness is constantly in your mind. Pour in yourself your Lord's light that is so bright, for it lights up your heart.

St. John Saba

¹ *Stromata*, 5: 8.

² *Weiser*, p. 194.

³ *Weiser*, p. 194.

❖ O You true Light, that Tobia was blessed with when teaching his son, even though he was blind!

O You Light, who made the blind Isaac declare to his son the future.

O You invisible Light, for You see the depths of human hearts.

You are the Light that lit up Jacob's mind, so that he revealed to his children the various issues.

You are the Word who said "Let there be light," and there was light. Say the word now also so my eyes be enlightened with the true light. Let me differentiate between it and other lights.

Yes, away from Your shine, reality flees away from me and iniquity draws closer to me. I get puffed up with arrogance and the truth runs away from me!

St. Augustine

When the Lord enlightens the soul, the ground of spiritual conflict, the adversary is unable to face Him, even though Satan is the source of inward darkness. The psalmist thus says, "**By You I can crush a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall.**" (Ps 18:29)

According to the Hebrew text, "**because by You, I have overcome an army, and with my God I have leapt barriers.**" The believer is weak indeed when alone, but he climbs walls and jumps up on them. These walls are set up by the adversary as barriers against the confidence in God. With God, the psalmist overcomes every tribulation and hardship in renewed triumphs. He crushes down the fortified cities of the enemy.

❖ It is not by my own personal thought, but by Your power alone am I able to overcome tribulation. With God's help and not by my own strength, do I leap over the wall, set up by iniquity, dividing man from the heavenly Jerusalem.

St. Augustine

❖ It is written, "**With my God I can leap over a wall.**" It is the wall of evil that separates brothers and provokes divisions among them, and that misleads them away from the truth. –Pope Athanasius the Apostolic¹.

❖ The psalmist knew that the believers' strength lies in giving thanks to God. In their joy they jump over the enemy walls. This is just like what the saintly ones say, "With my God, I can leap over the wall."

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

Our God lights up our life. He exalts us above every tribulation, and so we are not crushed down. He leaps with us above all barriers. His way is a narrow one and difficult to walk in, but it is sweet and full of security. This is what the psalmist says, "**This God, His is perfect; the promise of the Lord proves true; He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him.**" (Ps 18:30)²,

The Lord's way is narrow, yet pure. He who enters it realizes the perfection of this way: regarding the love, the mercy, justice, sanctity, righteousness, security, assurance and success. We have to begin going on the divine way, and wait so we may see its end. God, in His dealings with His people, collectively and singularly, is far away from any iniquity, for He is true to His promise. He is able to fulfill His promises at the crucial moment and He grants assured victory to those who rely on Him.

¹ *Paschal Letters, 19: 7.*

² *Paschal Letters, 3: 5.*

- ❖ When someone declines his personal will, he instantly looks up to God's way, for it is flawless and it has no obstacles. But if someone clings to his personal will, then he will not be able to see the Lord's way as being flawless, or having no barriers¹.

Fr. Doretheus from Gaza.

- ❖ He supports all those who rely on Him. All who rely on Christ and not on their own ego, they overcome the ordeal safely, because faith begets hope.

St. Augustine

¹ *On Consultation.*

The Second Section: the Royal Grace

1. Getting prepared for it:(31-36)

The second part of the psalm begins with a declaration sung by a group of hymnners in a collective worship. They praise God in a rhetorical question, “***For who is God except the Lord? And who is a rock besides our God?***” (Ps. 18:31) Here the psalmist compares between God, “Jehovah,” and the other Gods that are worshipped by the Gentiles. David praises His high exaltation.

In verses 32-36, David was prepared to be exalted to his position, where he will obtain the royal grace.

God is the Teacher, and the Defender of the hero King David; for He grants him unconquerable strength and quickness of action. He strides over hilltops in big strides in full trust of God (Deut. 33:29; Amos 4:13; Micah 1:3). It is God who trains the king and thus he excels in weapon usage. He is given the protection by God’s power, and thus his strength is not declined, God supports him with His divine strength, His ‘right’ hand. The fact that the psalmist was being blessed with the royal grace, and the power of victory, this does not wage him to arrogance and conceit, for he knows the weakness of his human nature.

“The God who girded me with strength, and made my way safe. (Ps. 18:32)”

When God establishes man as a spiritual king, He girds him with strength. Thus a man is filled with liveliness, truthfulness and sanctity. He walks in God’s royal way that is flawless as if it is his own way. Man carries God’s strength that works in him, as well as in his righteousness and sanctity. In such a way he goes ahead to the battlefield fearlessly, for Satan the adversary has no place in his heart. Sin that has snatched from man the royal dignity and its authority, this sin is destroyed by God the Savior, to give man back the full and victorious royal grace.

“He made my feet like the feet of a deer, and set me secure on the heights.” (Ps. 18:33).

The deer, or the gazelle female, is amazingly agile and swift. It can jump big distances, and runs swiftly. Though it is shy by nature, yet when provoked to fight, it turns into a wonderful fighter with the usage of its hinds. The reference here to the swiftness of the animal is used by David the prophet not only to declare what swiftness God has granted him in action, and thus he would not fall in the enemies hands, but it also refers to his attack on the vicious enemy¹.

We notice here in the royal grace, that man does not just stand to defend himself against the enemy, but he attacks him as well, because he is a righteous officer for the account of God’s kingdom. ***“The attack is by constant love and prayer against wickedness, not against the sinners’ souls”***. The psalmist has expressed the prayer that attacks, and the love that overcomes, by saying ***“by my God I can leap over a wall”*** (Ps. 18: 29). This means that he jumps in love and prayer to the enemy’s city, so he crushes down evil, and saves the souls in bondage.

By means of the grace of royalty, the believer moves as a swift moving deer in Christ’s love, and in his witness of Him, and in practicing every virtue that concerns the

¹ Plumer, p. 243.

love of others. At the end of every motion, God sets him high on His heights, and thus Satan will not be able to reach him or touch him.

❖ ***“He made my feet like the feet of a deer.”*** God made my love complete and perfect; thus I can leap over the traps of this world that are so thorny and vicious. ***“He will set one secure on the heights,”*** that is, he will make my eyes focused on the heavenly dwelling till I reach the full stature of God (Eph. 3:19).

St. Augustine

With every loving step and struggle in the Lord, He exalts me with His divine comfort, just as if taking me to His holy mountain, where He proclaims to me the awesome glory of Himself in me inwardly. Then I start all anew, to begin a new spiritual conflict ***“For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*** (Eph. 6:12) The psalmist therefore goes on to say, ***“He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your right hand has supported me.”***(luke18: 34- 35).

❖ God teaches me to be skillful in fighting the devils that keep resisting me. They aim at setting a barrier that hides the heavenly kingdom from me.

St. Augustine

It is a never ending chain of wars followed by consecutive victories, and renewed blessing by God’s overcoming power by us, and in us. The apostle says, (2 Cor. 10:3-5) “we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.” The psalmist also says, ***“A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.”*** (Ps. 91:7).

2. The Enemies giving up :

With every new experience, the believer’s heart is strengthened to struggle through the grace of royalty till the very end saying, ***“You gave me a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip. I pursued my enemies and overtook them; and did not turn back until they were consumed.”*** (Ps. 18:36-37)

❖ When I am strengthened by Your power, I utter the following words boldly, “I pursued my enemies and overtook them; and did not turn back until they were consumed¹.”

St. John Casian

The wide distance of steps, or the standing place, gives courage that nothing else could ever move them.

St. Gregory, the bishop of Niscus thinks St. Paul is similar to David the prophet in his fighting the enemy, and how the enemy used to flee from before him. In this same way was St. Paul; he was a swift fighter, quick to act and agile. David used to take big strides when following his enemy. Also the groom in the book of Proverbs, he is similar to the gazelle, running swiftly on the mountains, and skipping on the hilltops (Prov. 2:8-9) ².

¹ *The Institutes, 12: 17.*

² *The Beatitudes. Sermon. 2.*

The Amalekites (giants) assumed they had won and triumphed because they fled away taking the prisoners of war and the looting after they had set fire to Ziglog. But David the prophet took the Lord's advice, and followed them till he overtook them. He defeated them and regained what they had taken (1 Sam. 30). Likewise, when we follow the Lord's counsel and rely on His rich grace, sin disappears and the devils' hearts melt from before us. We overtake them and regain all what we have lost.

By his words, "***I did not turn back till they were consumed,***" the psalmist declares he has not ceased when obtaining a certain victory or even a number of victories, but he rather struggled on till he obtained the completely perfect victory, until the enemy is absolutely destroyed. This situation has not been fully fulfilled by David, but by the Lord Jesus, David's son. He has overcome the kingdom of darkness, and granted this victory to His believers. With His cross no trace of sin would be left in their hearts, their thoughts, words or deeds. Everyone would then chant, "The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet." (Rom 16:20)

- ❖ Do not cease to follow me till my iniquity is consumed, and I return to my first man, who will give me my wool and my flax, my oil and my flour, and who will feed me with the best food. It is He who has put a siege round me, and has shut my evil ways till I find Him, for He is the real way who said in the Gospel "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" ¹.

St. Jerome

- ❖ It is not only the wrestlers alone who sometimes knock out each other to the ground, and at times they themselves fall down. The devils also fight and wrestle against us. Sometimes we are thrown down, and at other times we are the ones who knock them down. The psalmist says, "***I have wounded them, So that they could not rise***" (Ps. 18: 38). Also, it said, "When the evil ones draw near to eat my flesh, those who frustrate me and my enemies, those have weakened and fallen down"².

St. Ogris from Potius

- ❖ When you pray against your affliction and your vicious desires, and against the attacking devils, remember the one who said "***I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and did not turn back until they were consumed. I struck them down so that they were not able to rise, they fell under my feet***". You say these words at the crucial moment when you are armored against your opponent by being humble³.

St. Ogris from Potius

- ❖ "***I beat them as fine as the dust before the wind***" (Ps. 18: 42). I turn them to dust, because they rejected the pouring of God's grace on them. They are conceited and puffed up in arrogance. Thus they are deprived of the firm and immovable hope. They have become as dust pushed away from the firm and solid earth.

St. Augustine

The psalmist has declared that God is the mystery behind his strength and his victory. He did not flee from the battle field, but he rather attacked sin and waged war against the devils. He destroyed their tall fences and wiped out their energy. He followed

¹ Ep. 122: 1.

² Praktikos, 73.

³ Chapters on Prayer, 135.

their footprints till they were absolutely consumed. Now the psalmist reveals the weak points in the conceited enemy, the arrogant one even towards God himself.

The psalmist portrays the enemy's situation as follows:

a. They are fleeing before him in extreme weakness "The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways" (Deut. 28: 7).

b. One after the other fall down, till all are consumed and the Lord uproots them (Ps. 18: 41).

c. They are humiliated under his feet.

d. They cry out, but there is no one to save them or even answer them (Ps. 18: 42).

e. They become like dust, having no value or settled place, and everyone wishes to get rid of them. The psalmist treads on them as on the muddy streets. But the believer becomes as the high and well-founded mountain, the exalted towards the heavens, whereas the enemy is as filth in the streets under the feet.

3. Sovereignty over the Gentiles

"You have delivered me from the strivings of the people; You have made me the head of the nations; A people I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they obey me; The foreigners submit to me. The foreigners fade away, And come frightened from their hideouts." (Ps. 18: 43-45)

These words cannot be fulfilled unless it be by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David in His own person, for He has become King over all the believers of Gentile origin; He is the King of kings (Rev. 17: 14). The people mentioned here are the new covenant church, but as for the sons of the aliens these are the Jews who have become foreigners. The Lord Jesus wished to renew them through the New Covenant, but they clung on to the old man (John 8: 34-59). Thus they are no more called God's people, nor a blessed nation, but they are called judges of Sodom and people of Gomorrah. They have even surpassed Sodom's iniquity, and so it has been said of them, "Sodom is justified before Me" (Ezek. 16: 48, lamentation4: 6).

❖ *"As soon as they heard of Me, they obeyed Me"*, their eyes did not see Me at all, but by their receiving the preachers' words, they obeyed the first call of my name.

St. Augustine

❖ *"Foreigners lost heart, and came trembling out of their strong holds"*, children who are not worthy of being attributed to Me. they are rather, foreigners and are rightfully to be called so. These sons have become strangers, these are the ones I wanted to renew their youth according to the New Testament provision, but they held on to their old man. They were crooked in their ways, crawling on one leg as if crippled, and thought the Old Testament was enough for them. They rejected strongly the new covenant, and thus they became crippled. Even when following the Old Testament, they preferred their personal traditions rather than God's traditions. They thought not washing hands a crime, and other such trivial things, ignoring the way of God's commandments.

St. Augustine

❖ Indeed it is amazing that though they were raised up knowing the books of prophecy, and have heard Moses daily telling them thousands of times about Christ's coming, and many other prophets to follow; though they witnessed Christ Himself daily

performing miracles amongst them, devoting all His time to them alone, for He did not yet permit His disciples to go preach to the Gentiles, or enter the city of Samaria, neither did He Himself go there; though He proclaimed He was sent for the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10: 5); despite all of this, their witnessing the signs and their hearing of the prophets, and how Christ constantly reminded them – despite all of this, they made themselves absolutely blind and stupid, and all of these things still did not bring them to the faith in Christ (Matt. 15: 24). The Gentiles, though, were not blessed with any of these matters; they did not hear the voice of the divine inspiration at all. As someone says, they did not even dream of it, for they were accused with their frivolous poets, worship of the idols and graver stones. They possessed nothing meaningful or good, either in their creed or in their speech. Though they fell to the depth of evils, yet, suddenly, as if with some automatic power, they appeared before us shining from above, from the highest peak in heaven¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ The prophets heralded the proclamation; but what are these ‘people’ who had no knowledge of God other than our won people who did not know God in the past? These are the people who turned their attention to God when their ears heard of Him. we turned to Him after we had deserted the idols².

The Scholar Trillian

In this way the Jews were called upon to be blessed in being God’s children. But those who rejected Christ and denied the prophecies, these became Satan’s sons. As **St. Irianus** says, “those who do not believe, and do not obey God’s will, these are children to Satan and his hosts, for they do his own malicious deeds. This is the situation God declared in “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me”. (Isaiah 1: 2) Once again He says that those children have become foreigners’ sons, and lie unto Him. According to nature, they are sons, for they were made to be as such, but according to their deeds they are no more children of His³” (Ps. 18: 45).

4. Praise and Thanksgiving

The spiritual war offers new experiences for victory in the lord, which promotes the entire heart to a life of praise-giving. It is as if the Lord’s thanksgiving and joyful praise is only fulfilled through the spiritual war. Thus the struggling between says with psalmist “*The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted. It is God who avenges me, And subdues the peoples under me; He delivers me from my enemies. You also lift me up above those who rise against me; You have delivered me from the violent man. Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, And sing praises to Your name. Great deliverance He gives to His king, And shows mercy to His anointed, To David and his descendants forevermore*” (Ps. 18: 46-50).

In this way, David the prophet praises God who has granted him the grace of royalty, and has supported him in consecutive victories. Here he is praising God and is singing to His name. He is telling us of His amazing and bountiful deeds that exalted him to attain the throne.

¹ Hom. On John 9: 1.

² An Answer to the Jews, 3.

³ Adv. Haer. 4: 41: 2.

At this point we have David the king admitting that he is 'God's king', contrary to Saul who was rejected by God.

I wish we rejoice in God who has given us the grace of royalty. It is He who has anointed us with His Holy Spirit so we become His own kings.

The Grace of Royalty

- ❖ I thank You, my Savior Jesus, King of kings. The enemies have risen against me till death, but You have given me life and triumph!
You have enthroned me with glory and honor, and given me the royal grace, you have appointed me king, and given me authority, and I shall no more live in bondsman and slavery humiliation.
- ❖ Be my support; with you, I chase Satan the enemy, and all of his wicked deeds, till I overtake them, and by You, I consume them!
Grant me strength that is Yours, and so I attack, the enemy, and leap, and leap on his walls to crush him down!
- ❖ With every combat, grant me victory that makes me joyfully praise you!
So I praise You all the days of my life, and testify of You before everyone.
- ❖ Let me attract strangers to You, so they become like me of God's household!

Psalm 19

God Declares Himself

A writing opportunity

David may have been contemplating the beauty of the heavens at dusk, when he was inspired to write this psalm.

Some scholars think the psalm includes two separate praises¹ (1-6) and (7-14). Others, though, think the psalm is one inclusive unit. The psalm shows God's declaration of Himself in presenting three books for the culture and knowledge of His children. These books are the creation, the Holy Bible, and the daily experience or God's dealings with us every day.

The creation declares God's power and His glory. As for His Word, it informs us of God's loving salvation for the sake of sanctifying us, that is, it declares His holiness. By means of our daily experience, we discover the personal relationship between God and every member in the church that is fulfilled through His divine grace.

This psalm is praise-giving to the God of the universe (Ps. 19: 1-6) who manifests the reverberation of His mysterious word and the glory of His divinity in heaven and on earth. The psalm praises the Lord Jehovah, who has a unique relationship with His people that enlivens every aspect of their existence and overflows them with splendor, for they are His one church (7-11) and are members in it (12-14).

Stuhlmüller says that psalm 19 implies a spiritual optimism, and a strong universal trend:

1. It implies a special appreciation of the universe in its totality; our world is infiltrated with God's glory.

2. The mystery of the universe is not to be interpreted or applied only on our daily life through the natural laws, for it is essential that His mystery is not to be lost or diminished with the precession of life. The psalm asks us to keep the faith mystery in all of our teaching and our interpretation of the universe.

3. There should be an echo or an interaction between the universe liturgy and the temple liturgy, as if nature has its testimony of God's work that is inseparable from our church worship.

4. Sin is not always the outcome of an evil intention. But it could overshadow even the values and goodness in man's conscience who is oversensitive².

The General Frame

1. The Declaration in the Creation	1-6
2. The Declaration of the Holy Bible	7-11
3. The Declaration of the Daily Life	12-14

1. The Declaration in the Creation

God's amazing creation implies a testimony of Him as the Creator. St. Paul says "Even since the creation of the world His eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things He has made" (Rom. 1: 20). The creation is the first witness of God to mankind, it is His own creation. It is the language understood by a child, and is delights the philosopher and the scientist. There is

¹ Sabourin: *The psalms*, Vol. 1, p. 185.

² C. Stuhlmüller: *Psalms*, p. 137.

no poetic material that implies proof against atheism more overwhelming and better than what is mentioned in this psalm. On Napoleon's return from Egypt through the Mediterranean he heard one of his officers speaking in words of atheism. Then Napoleon pointed to the stars, and said 'Who has made all of this?' and there was no answer for atheism to give¹.

God's work in the creation testifies of God, not only because of his almightiness and his entire wisdom, but also for being the Father who takes care of little and big things.

It is said that our God has produced two books: the book of creation in which we read the Creator's power and his divinity, and also of the Holy Book that informs us of God's will².

The greatest fear in the first ages was that man, in his weakness might think of nature as a god, for he did not know how to control it. But nowadays, man thinks he is able to do so, and thus he makes himself a god. But the psalmist realizes clearly God's power and his wisdom over nature³.

Verses 1-6 are the 'Psalm of Nature'. It is similar to psalm 8 with a greater focus on showing God's manifested in creation. In Ps. 8, the reaction in the author's thoughts is implied more so in the relationship between the Creator and his creation. As for (Ps. 19: 1-6), it has focused more on God's declaration in His creation. All of the creation is in God's service. Its duty is to give praise by thanksgiving to God, and it has to be a device for proclaiming Him. The heavens, the snow, day and night – all of these are witnesses that were given the power to speak of the divine majesty, and the overwhelming work of the Creator; for the master is known through his work⁴.

❖ God, by means of His Word, gave the universe its planning and its provision, so that mankind may come to know Him in some way or another by means of His work, since He is by His nature is invisible. The artist is usually known by his works even if not seen by anyone⁵.

Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

❖ The heavens may keep silent, but contemplating it produces a sound louder than that of the trumpet. This contemplation educates us not by ear-listening, but rather by using the eye. This latter one offers knowledge that is of more assurance and accuracy than the former one⁶.

St. John Chrysostom

'God' is not mentioned in this part except once. The name 'El', meaning the Almighty, has been used for it is God's name as the Creator. But in the following parts of the psalm, in which God declares Himself through His Word and our daily experience, the psalmist uses the name 'Jehovah' the particular name for Him as God establishing a covenant. Gabelin rejected the theories stating there are writers for the five books of Moses, who used the name 'Elohim' for God, whereas others have used 'Jehovah'. It is as if there are at least two writers for each book, or two different sources for the one

¹ Plumer, p. 254.

² Matthew Henry, Ps. 19.

³ Scripture Union: Bible Study Books, *The Psalms*, p. 18-19.

⁴ Weiser, p. 197-198.

⁵ *Contra Gentes*.

⁶ *Concerning the Statues*, 9: 4.

book, one is Elohimy and the other is Jehovish. This provoked critics in the denial attempt that the writer of these books is Moses the prophet. Gabelein says “In the first chapter of the Holy Book that contains a historical documentation of the creation, God’s name ‘Elohim’ came in the plural form, whereas in the second chapter, where God is seen with man, His creation, the name ‘Jehovah’ was added¹.

“*The heavens declare the glory of God*” (Ps. 19: 1), the heavens are the book through which the entire world could come to know God. The science of astronomy reveals some of the marvels in heaven that are indescribable. The little that we know about the millions of stars and solar planets, reveal God’s majesty. It also provides us with joy, for God created the absolute universe for our sakes alone. We, who are the creation of dust, look up above towards the heavens, contemplating God’s work and give glory to Him. We do not live as animals do, looking downwards towards the ground.

❖ Do you not hear the heavens when it produces a sound by means of vision? That is, it speaks to us by means of our looking up to it; whereas the amazing system in everything speaks out more clearly than does a trumpet.

Do you not see the hours of the day and night related to each other incessantly? The overwhelming system for winter, autumn, and other seasons, as an assured fact? How the seas are committed to their boundaries despite the waves and whirlpools? In this way, all matters are related systematically in marvelous beauty, proclaiming the Creator as loudly as could be².

St. John Chrysostom

❖ The wonderful harmony of the heavens proclaim the wisdom shining in the creation and it portrays beautifully God’s majestic glory through the visible matters³.

St. Gregory, bishop of Nicus

❖ If the creation is that great, how much more so would be the majesty of the Creator be like? If the things made are so beautiful, how much more so would be the beauty of the great Engineer, the Maker of the universe be like⁴?

Theodore, bishop of Korosh

The psalm begins with the heavens; **St. Augustine** thinks the heavens are the missionaries and the apostle who change our earthly life to a heavenly one by the power of the Holy Spirit. The firmament that proclaims His handwork is the heavenly life the faithful are blessed with.

The heavens are the real and sanctified church where the heavenly Savior dwells. The church shares in the angelic hymns chanting, and in partnership with the heavenly ones. With her heavenly life, the church carries the strength of testimony for her Savior, that has a greater impact than any kind of argument.

❖ ‘*The heavens are telling the glory of God*’(ps. 19: 1). The saintly evangelists, in whom God dwells, just as in the heavens, declare our Lord’s glory, or maybe the glory the Son offered to the Father in His life on earth.

❖ The heavens are the saints who hover above the earth, carrying the Lord.

¹ C. Stuhlmueller, p. 89.

² In. Rom. Hom. 3.

³ Life of Moses, 168.

⁴ On Divine Providence, disc. 4: 3.

- ❖ “For we are what He has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph. 2: 10). Indeed, God has created us, and we did not make ourselves. We are not only humans, but we were also created righteous people, for we are as such.

St. Augustine

Isaiah the prophet says, “Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because He is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing” (Is. 40: 26).

- ❖ If you doubt God’s care; ask earth and heaven; ask the sun and the moon; ask the senseless creatures and the plants; ask the rocks, the mountains, the hilltops and the sand dunes; ask the night and the day; for God’s care is clearer than the sun and its sunbeams. Everywhere you go, ask the wilderness and the inhabited places, on earth and in the seas. Wherever you go, you can hear a verbal testimony of this tremendous care¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ For real, the heavens with its beauty and majesty, and so many other things, you are overwhelmed when we look at them. We admire fervently the amazing Creator. As for the night and day, can they offer us the same thing? For sure they do not provide the same thing; but what they provide is not any less than what the heavens offer, such as the harmony and the accuracy that they follow systematically².

St. John Chrysostom

“*Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge*” (Ps. 19: 2).

All the days and nights are sources that overflow with God’s glory. They declare God’s mercies and his renewed care to us in our life. They open our hearts in love that responds to God’s love. Thus we hear His divine voice to us, with a word that concerns us, and we are enlightened in our minds with spiritual knowledge.

With every new day, when the Sun of righteousness shines, the believers speak new words that show their constant renewal, and their experience with the Holy Trinity. Their life becomes a spring of water, incessant overflowing of living water.

Not a day passes without God showing a clear testimony of His power and His tenderness. Every day shares in providing new evidence of God’s fatherhood that is so tender to us. On our part, we testify of our Lord day and night, I mean in joy or hardship. We thank God for His gifts and we pray to Him in confidence when we are inflicted with hardship. Both day and night speak together of God’s love in our life.

We may also say we praise our God day and night; for day is the symbol for work and night is a symbol for meditation on God. We praise Him with our struggle in his grace, and also in our meditation on His mysteries, even though work and meditation represent a one integrated life.

St. Augustine thinks daytime refers to the spirituals, and nighttime refers to the physical. With live faith, God is glorified in both of them.

- ❖ “*Day to day pours forth speech*”, announced for the soul of the spiritual “wisdom of god is the variable in the perfection, and that the word was with god from thw beginning was god.(john1:1).

¹ العناية الإلهية للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، ترجمة مداد عابدة حنا بسيطاً، ص 19.

² Concerning the Statues, 9: 5.

“the night to night shows the note” This body that is prone to death that offers the faith to those who are unspiritual, it cries out to them as if they are standing from afar, away from the knowledge that follows the faith.

St. Augustine

“There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.” (Ps. 19:3-4)

The church testifies of the gospel by her life more than she does by her words, for God’s Word dwells in our inner life and He speaks to others even when we are silent. By our sanctified life in Christ, we declare the joyful news through silence as much as by words.

- ❖ Every race and every tongue, hear the day and night declaration. One tongue differs from the other, but the nature is the same, and it offers the same lesson, by day as much as it is by night¹.

Theodore, Bishop of Korosh

- ❖ Who hasn’t heard the apostles’ voices preaching the faith in every tongue?

St. Augustine

- ❖ At the time David was preaching the law from Dan to Beer Saby, nowadays, “Their voice has gone to all the earth.” (Rom. 10:18; Ps. 19:3) Thus the Gentiles came to worship Christ, and by Him they came to know God².

St. Athanasius the Alexandrian

- ❖ The apostles’ voice reached the entire world, and their words to the farthest end³.

St. Jerome

- ❖ He was heard of in all the countries of the world, and they have come to believe in Him, as the prophet had previously said, “Their voice has gone to all the earth⁴.”

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Whom did the nations of the world believe in, except it be in Christ who has actually come⁵?

- ❖ One more time David says in the psalms, “Come to me, O you cities of the Gentiles.” This is undoubtedly due to the apostles’ preaching that reached the entire world⁶.

Give to the Lord glory and honor; give to the Lord sacrifices in His name; take sacrifices and enter His dwelling place

- ❖ You have a prophecy about the work of the apostles: How beautiful it is to have the preachers come heralding the Gospel of peace that brings the righteous news, and not the news of war or any bad news. “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” This means their words contained the law given from Zion, and God’s Word that sprung from Jerusalem, these have spread out, as was

¹ *On Divine Providence, disc. 4: 4.*

² *De Sententia dionysii, 11.*

³ *Ep. 125: 11; 58: 3.*

⁴ *In 1 Tim. Hom., 9.*

⁵ *An answer to the Jews, 7.*

⁶ *Ibid 5.*

written, “Those who were afar from My righteousness, have become close to My righteousness and to the Truth¹.”

Tretilian the Scholar

“In the heavens He has set a tent for the seer, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy and like a strong man runs its course with joy.”
(Ps. 19:5)

In Hebrew as well as in Aramaic, the ‘sun’ is in the masculine form, and thus it is compared to the bridegroom. The Lord Jesus, the heavenly Groom, is the Sun of Righteousness who shines, and the healing is in His wings (Mal. 3).

In the heart of heaven, the sun has set its tent, and seems to be walking as an overpowering king, in an open world procession. It shines in glory on the east and the west of the world. The sun is similar to a traveling king who sets up his tent but he soon uproots it and travels to another place.

The sun shines with its beams and sends its heat to grant life. In this same way the Sun of Righteousness came to shine on His believers’ souls, in the east and west, to grant them enlightenment and spiritual warmth, and a perpetually renewed life.

❖ It is He who sets up His tent, his Church, in the sun, to be seen by everyone.

St. Augustine

❖ Though the sun appeared in such a way, yet the believers appear even more gloriously. The sun shines to light the world with natural light; whereas they light the world in a different way, I mean they light it spiritually².

St. John Chrysostom

Darkness in the Old Testament represents absolute sin and confusion. Therefore the sun, in particular, shared in pointing out God’s overcoming. However, the sun has no godly meaning; it is one of God’s creations about which He cares.

❖ In the psalm it is said, *“It comes out as a bridegroom from his wedding canopy.”* We have found and engaged a bride for him in our re-birth secretly. We who were like a maiden who committed adultery with atheists (Ez. 23:37). He has changed our nature to virginity that is incorruptible. The matrimonial rituals have not been fulfilled yet; the Church has been wedded to the Word. As St. John said, (John 3:29) “He who has the bride is the groom.” She has entered the circle of the secret marriage, and now the angels are awaiting the return of their King, who will lead the Church to this blessedness, befitting her nature³.

St. Gregory, bishop of Niscus

The Sun of Righteousness sends the warmth of His Holy Spirit to our hearts so He kindles them in divine love.

It is appropriate for us to notice the psalmist seeing the heavenly Groom as an overpowering man, hurrying joyfully. He grants His believer the eternal joy, whereas He appears overpowering to the wicked evil ones who cannot encounter Him or see those who scare him. But as for the believers who unite with the Groom, these share Him His qualities. Their life becomes sweet indeed and joyful. At the same time they obtain strength and authority for overcoming the enemy, even death itself. In our worship, we

¹ *Against Marcion, 22.*

² *In Eph., hom. 8.*

³ *Comm.. on Canticle, serm. 11.*

are blessed with our Groom who is closely linked to our inward lives, for we are united with Him, and at the same time we worship Him in fear.

St. John Chrysostom says \when the behavior is blessed in being adopted by the Father; he is like the only Begotten Son. He sends forth spiritual beams in this world, by Christ who dwells in him.

- ❖ What has been said about the sun: “*It comes out as a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,*” we can rather say it now about the believers who send out beams of greater shine than the sun¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ They called out the Truth itself, concerning His ascension to the place He descended from, and that no one could ever run away from his just judgment².

St. Irianus

Our Christ is the Sun of Righteousness; He sends forth the warmth of love and its beams in our hearts, so the ice melts our inward dryness, established by sin in our inward self. This does not concern God alone and people, but it also concerns our souls in their essence, and so we do not care about its growth, its glorification and its eternity.

- ❖ The love of many grows cold because of the increasing cold sin. These people become as cold as ice. However, when the warmth of divine mercy dwells in them, they melt³.

Father Caesarius, the bishop of Arl

- ❖ The psalmist says “*like a strong man runs its course with joy...like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy*”. This points out two integrated aspects about the salvation work of the Lord Jesus. These are the joy and the strength. He is glad as a bridegroom is, who offers His life shed for the sake of the entire world, so He establishes with His loving beams His bride of every nation and tongue. This over-active joy is only the victory over the adversary and iniquity. He wages the war so that He leads His believers to an overcoming life. By being united to our groom, we embody the Spirit of joy together with that of triumph, for he establishes inside us an overwhelming paradise and a joyful kingdom. At the same time He places us as honest soldiers who never cease to resist Satan and his wicked deeds, by our using the Spirit’s weapons that give us authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and every hostile power of the enemy.

2. The Declaration of the Holy Bible

Even though man is unable to live without the sun that God has created for man’s sake, and He even created the entire universe for his sake, yet man finds in God’s Word what is greater and more important. Nature speaks to man as a creature who occupies the most sublime position on earth. But as for God’s Word, this declares man’s position as God’s son. In the praise of the old law, the psalmist praises God Himself, the transfigured in the old law.

The first three verses (7-9) are similar to a piece of liturgy. It praises God’s law for being a divine gift that enlightens and leads on. God’s Word is perfect, honest, straight-forward and chaste.

¹ *Hom. On St. John. 26: 1.*

² *Adv. Haer. 4: 33: 13.*

³ *Sermon 101: 3.*

The psalmist gives six titles to God's Word. He may be referring to the six working days: this may be appropriate to us in our daily struggle to be blessed with God's Word as if with a new title, and in a new taste. God's Word will never get old. As for the seventh day, that is, on the Sabbath or the day of rest, in it we encounter God's Word Himself face to face in an unutterable way.

The six titles for God's Word mentioned in this psalm are: the Lord's law, the Lord's testimony, the Lord's ordinances, the Lord's commandment, the Lord's reverence, and the Lord's judgement.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.” (Ps. 19:7)

St. Paul says “For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin.” (Rom 7:14) God's Word retrieves the soul, for it unfolds the sins and points to the way of being saved from it, by God's free grace. From another aspect, it gives the simple believers wisdom from above. “and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim 3:15).

If we have become corrupted by sin, then there is no more in us, that is, in our bodies, anything righteous. As St. Paul the apostle says the Lord's law or God's Word is blameless. It carries the corrupt soul to the cross, so it takes of the redeeming blood, and thus it too becomes blameless.

Behind the written Word, our Christ hides who is alone sinless. He is blameless, and we unite with Him by His Holy Spirit. We thus carry His qualities in us, and are counted in the Father's eyes blameless, for He sees the image of His only begotten Son imprinted in our depths.

St. Mark, the hermit, says that the Lord Jesus ‘God's Word’ is hidden behind the commandment. He who enters the commandment with his active life, he only meets Christ Himself.

❖ God's law is nothing other than the Lord Himself; it is He who came to fulfill the law, and not to controvert it (Matt. 5:17).

St. Augustine

❖ The saints knew the soul is purified and the mind is enlightened by keeping the commandments¹.

Father Dorotheus of Gaza

God's will is proclaimed in the law so it teaches and saves. This is why the law is the foundation of firm confidence in God's tender love. Thus we find the echo of the joyful assurance for God's children in every phrase of the psalm.

“The decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.” (Ps. 19:7).

The Lord's Word is true; it is called ‘the decrees of the Lord.’ It speaks of the bitterness of sin, and of God's true promises of salvation, offered to the confident souls in the Lord. It is like the simple children's trust in their parents, who lean on their parent's chest as a rock of love, and are blessed with His divine and truthful promises.

“The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes.” (Ps. 19:8).

¹ On Renunciation.

The Lord's Word is not commandments and prohibitions that cause bitterness to the soul. It is rather a sign of love between God and man, and brings inward joy. Notice how the psalmist begins with the soul's return to God, retrieval of the soul, followed by the children's teaching, and lastly, the heart's joy. When the Word leads the soul, it retrieves it in repentance to the Father's embrace. He thus learns as a little child how to trust in his father's will. He rejoices inwardly by fulfilling his Father's will in him. The joys of the world stop within limits at the lips, and for a short time. But as for the Lord's joy, this shakes the inward soul's depths. This is why he said 'the heart rejoices.' The Spirit's comfort in man's depths overflows when he finds that with God's Word he has returned to the fatherly embrace. His nature from its roots has been changed, and he has become blessed with God's mysteries through being united with Him.

If sin has dimmed our inner vision, and God has seemed to us fearful and scary, and we run away from Him as did our first forefathers when they heard God's voice walking in paradise, then God's Word for salvation rejoices the heart, and takes away the fatal sorrow, and enlightens it with the Spirit of joy and hope. Thus we can see the Savior in God our Lord. The vision, therefore, is opened not to know righteousness and evil, but for realizing and experiencing the deposit to the new heavenly life and the eternal inheritance. This is why David the prophet chants saying, "the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes." This means the commandment grants the eyes new distances when visualizing. It lifts up the eyes to heaven itself to see the invisible matters.

"The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." (Ps. 19:9).

David calls the Lord's Word 'the fear of the Lord' or revering Him in awe. As we have previously said the fear of the Lord here does not mean the fear of slaves, but it is the spirit of righteousness. The divine Word of God carries us to be united with God in His Son, the incarnate Word. We thus obtain, in the baptismal water, the sonship to God; we obtain the reverence children have toward their tender and caring father, those who do not wish to hurt their father's feelings. With fear and reverence, we are careful not to make a mistake. We stop committing sin by the work of divine grace. Thus we are formed in the eternal Word, and we become one with Him and by Him immortally. We therefore live with Him in His heavens forever.

St. Clemendous the Alexandrian thinks fear keeps us from committing sin. As for love, it motivates us to practice righteousness spontaneously, as children who love their holy and righteous Father.

❖ Concerning those who are motivated in fear and are turned to the faith and righteousness, fear remains with them forever. Fear generates ceasing to do any evil. As for love, it urges on practicing righteousness by spontaneous building up, till the Lord's words are heard, "I do not call you slaves, but loved ones." At that point, man can approach prayer in confidence¹.

St. Clemendous the Alexandrian

Lest fear is misunderstood, and someone might think God's Word provokes fear in the soul that destroys any joy, or any commitment that makes the soul lose the feeling of human freedom, the psalmist thus pointed out the believer's eagerness for the Word. He appreciates the Word and feels the sweetness, for he says, "***More to be desired are***

¹ *Stromata* 7: 12.

they than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.” (Ps. 19:10-11)

The divine Word that testifies of the Father’s care is not an obligation imposed on us. Rather, it is firstly ‘a heart’s desire’ the depths ask for; for it finds its true satisfaction there. It is the real riches, better than any gold or precious stones. It is sweeter than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Besides all of this, there are tremendous rewards that are offered. These are eternal and are indescribable. They are more than any world riches or world pleasures and earthly values.

When the believer is linked to God’s Word that is way better than gold and precious stones, he comes in his turn gold and precious stones tested by fire. He is kept as God’s hidden treasure. He loves God’s Word and His ordinances more than he loves himself or his temporal life. He prefers God’s will to his own personal one.

❖ *“Sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”*(ps19: 10). When the soul turns to be pure honey, free of any vain life-links, it awaits in expectation the blessings of the divine banquet. It becomes as a honeycomb, coated in this life as if in the wax cells of honey that fill it without her being wax her. In this, the soul needs the support of God’s hand that presses out, not to destroy, but to drip honey. God’s ordinances to such a soul would be sweeter than the soul’s own existence sweeter than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

St. Augustine

❖ Is there anything more glorious and more sublime than the divine knowledge? What can be sweeter and more joyful than the Lord’s words, which are sweeter than the drippings of the honeycomb and honey?

❖ The manna of God’s Word provides to your moth the taste you desire. However, if someone receives this in no faith, then he eats worms, for he hides it instead of eating it. Do you assume we go as far as thinking that God’s Word becomes a ‘worm?’ I wish you do not get worried on hearing this, but listen to what the prophet says on behalf of God, “But I am a worm, and not human,” (Ps. 22:6) for He Himself has become a source to the perdition of some, since they refused to believe in Him whereas He has come to be the means of the resurrection of others. Thus He came to be the ‘manna,’ the sweet honey to the believers, and a ‘worm’ to the unbelievers¹.

Father Caesarius, Bishop of Arl

He has previously spoken of God’s Word as being the fear of the Lord, the sweet and firm forever. It grants the soul Christ’s sweet perfume and eternal immortality by His active resurrection in us. Now he is speaking of the love that is inseparable from the fear of the Lord. The Word grants love which gives sweetness to the soul. Thus it loves God’s word more than her earthly life.

❖ When the word blends with the love, our passions are put out on the spot. We are thus cleansed from our sins. The words sweeter than honey concern, in that case, the Word².

¹ Sermon 102: 3, 6.

² Paed. 1: 6.

- ❖ Sweet is the Word that gives us light. It is more precious than gold or precious stones, and sweeter than honey and the drippings of honeycomb. How can't we desire it? for it enlightens the mind that has been buried in darkness, and it gives acute vision to the soul enlightened with it¹.

St. Clemendous the Alexandrian

- ❖ When someone sings the psalms and is only concerned with the sweet voices and the word arrangement, without paying attention to the meaning, it is only his ears that are delighted. But as for God's Word, this does not penetrate his heart. It is as if he is chewing on pure wax, but does not taste the sweetness of honey in the least bit².

Father Caesarius, bishop of Arl

Christ, God's Word

When we speak of the law or God's Word, we have to appropriately realize that our Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God, the immortal Truth, who declares to us the divine mysteries.

- ❖ Accept Christ, accept the inward vision, accept your light so you can see God and people well. "The Word is sweet that gives us light. It is more precious than gold and precious stones, and is sweeter than honey and dripping of honeycomb³".

St. Clemendous the Alexandrian

- ❖ Christ's words do not mean the words He said when it became man and embodied us. The Lord Jesus has spoken prior to this with Moses and the prophets⁴.
- ❖ Our Savior is God's invisible image. If He is compared to us, we to whom He declared the Father, then this is the picture that brings us to knowing the Father. This is the knowledge only pertaining to the Son, and which pleased the Son to proclaim⁵.

The Scholar Oreganus

- ❖ Do you love pleasure and thrill? Look up to the Lord's commandments for, to the sensible person, it is sweeter than honey and the dripping of honeycomb⁶.

St. Basilious the great

3. God's Testimony in our Daily Experience (Ps. 19: 12-14)

This section is merely prayer and lamentation. Because the psalmist came to know the divine law as the light, he has come to be more sensitive to sin, even that which springs up unintentionally or unwillingly. Man then discovers with God's Word the darkness inside him, the more the light, the clearer the dimness.

The psalmist revealed the great reward to those who keep the commandments. But who can be justified before God? Who can flee the errors committed? Every day, we experience God as merciful Savior for all of our weakness, and the forgiver of iniquity. This is what the psalmist assures us of in saying.

¹ *Exhortation to the heathen, 11.*

² *Sermon 75: 2.*

³ *Stromata 5: 12.*

⁴ *De Principiis, pref. 1.*

⁵ *Ibid, 1: 2: 6.*

⁶ *Ep. 8: 8.*

“Moreover by them in Your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back Your servant also from the insolent” (Ps. 19: 11, 12).

St. Basilios the great speaks to us of the reward in keeping the Lord’s commandments. He says “There is a great reward to those who keep the commandments, a terrific reward, a crown of justice, a permanent dwelling place, an endless life, an unutterable joy, places that are incorruptible with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the true God in the heavens. It is a face to face encounter, harmony in the company of the angels, the fathers, the prophets, the apostle, the martyrs, the confessors and all those who please God since the beginning¹.

This is overwhelming glory that will be manifested in us as God’s children, who keep His commandments lovingly. But who can keep the commandment? We are weak and helpless when by ourselves. We are in need of the working experience of God’s love, daily performed to us. We, therefore, witness His tremendous forgiving grace for iniquities in our life, the psalmist says, *“But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back Your servant also forum the insolent”* (Ps. 19: 12). It is as if he is saying, “You, O Lord, find in me the sins that have got lost in me. There are so many sins that secretly fight me as strangers, and kill my soul without my being aware of it, but Your mercies are all around me. My daily experience is to encounter my Savior, the Forgiver of sins with His redeeming blood.

❖ In such a way, the saints know that man’s righteousness is weak and incomplete, and so they keep asking for God’s mercies forever².

Father Theonas

❖ “Who is able to understand his sins? If you are able to see darkness, then you are able to understand sin. Now, when we repent our sins, it is at this moment that we are finally to be blessed with the Light. If man is cloaked with his sins, it is said that his eyes are dimmed, and his eyes are extremely blinded. He cannot see his sin, as the same situation with his physical eyes anything due to the bandage covering.

St. Augustine

❖ Who can understand his own wrongdoing? Job presented good deeds and sacrifices for sin that are unknown. For job is well known for his extreme patience. Those sacrifices were rather for the sins of his own sons, assuming they may have committed iniquity and may have blasphemed against God in their hearts (Job. 1: 5). We also recall the very wise St. Paul when he writes “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me (1Cor. 4: 4)”³.

St. Cyril the Alexandrian

❖ *“Do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transition”* (Ps. 19: 13).

Do not be scared if you are a Christian; do not be scared of anyone’s authority over you. But fear God constantly. Be afraid of the evil inside you. Rather, it is of your own making God has created for yourself an evil master in your own heart. Indeed, you

¹ *On Ascetical Discipline.*

² *Cassian: Conf. 23: 17.*

³ *Comm.. on Luke, Hom. 76.*

have become worthy in yielding to evil. You are equipped to yield to the master you have created for yourself, since you have refused to yield to Him who has created you.

❖ *“Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression”*. What transgression is this? Surely it is pride. There is no greater and more dangerous sin that separates man from God, for transgression has begun in man by means of pride.

❖ Because if I am not justified from the great sin, my words would be admired by mankind, but not in your sight, O God. An arrogant soul wishes to shine in man’s view. But as for the humble soul, this shines secretly, where God sees it.

If someone pleases people by his good deeds, let him be happy for them, that is, those who are happy for the good work, but he is not happy for himself. That is, he does not boast of himself. Actually, practicing good deeds is satisfying in itself, and man does not need to please others.

St. Augustine

In this way, **St. Augustine** thinks great sin is the love to please people with the good deeds. They may be pleased with this, and so are we. But let us not boast, or admire their being pleased, for God is the One who works in us. What pleases us is not the people’s pleasures, but rather the good work granted by God’s grace in us. With this, we are pleased and are happy, for the psalmist says *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer”* (Ps. 19: 14).

In this way the psalmist concludes the psalm happily manifested by the mouth and the heart through the open and secret praise, because God is our support in every good deed, and our Savior is the One to forgive sins.

Accept my Life a Witness to You, O Lord

- ❖ Establish, O lord your kingdom in me, declare your heavens in one!
Grant me to speak of Your love and Your work of salvation through my love and my life.
- ❖ O You Groom, the strong sun of righteousness
Grant my soul your joy, and let not the world take away Your joy in depths.
Grant me strength so I struggle with your grace against Satan and his darkness.
- ❖ Plant Your ordinances in me, so my soul is satisfied, and is enriched by You!
I find you more precious than the entire world, and sweeter than any thing else.
- ❖ Cover my sins, the hidden and the apparent ones, keep from the estranged adversary.
Grant me Your righteousness so my tongue overflows in praise, and my heart rejoices.

Psalm 20

God Saves the King

The Occasion for the Psalm

This psalm is a royal one, liturgic, and Messianic. It concerned the temple rituals for royalty, particularly in war time.

David wrote it to pray it on the success of his campaign against the sons of Amon and Araam. They had come in great numbers, chariots and horses so as to face David (2Sam. 10: 6, 8; 1Chron. 19: 7). In other words, David set the psalm as a cry for war. With it, he urges himself and the people, and motivates them to prayer¹.

The psalm may have been chanted in a liturgical method, as part of the sacrifice liturgy. This is performed before the king's going to the battlefield. It was customary for the people to assemble in the temple to pray, so that God would grant victory to the king and his army (1Sam. 7: 9; 13: 9; 1Kings 8: 44; 2Chron. 20: 18)². As for Psalm 21, it is read as a thanksgiving service after obtaining victory.

The king is seen in the sanctuary offering sacrifices (Ps. 20: 3) whereas the people are assembled in the outer hall in prayer for his sake. It is the duty of the people to pray for the Messiah the king to prosper. This is the prosperity of His united church with Him as His body. He goes to the battlefield against Satan so He saves mankind. The Lord Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sake of the entire world. But it is the church duty as priests and congregation – to pray for the sake of mankind's salvation.

The Jewish Ben Ezra says some interpret this psalm as a psalm concerning the Messiah. Many of the church fathers think it is the prophecy of the Lord's passion and His deeds for salvation from the hands of our enemies, when the church will overcome with her Christ.

The triumphant king in the combat is the believer (Rev. 1: 6) who is called Christ's soldier. As St. Paul says "Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (2Tim 2: 3). He has to pray this psalm all day long, praying to God to grant him the spiritual victory in Christ's worthiness, the slaughters for us.

Some interpreters combine this psalm with a liturgical fixed one. It is the new year liturgy where God is glorified as King with every new year³. That is, the new year beginning is counted as a feast for God's coronation as King for his people, and in their hearts, as an overcoming King who has destroyed the dark kingdom inside us.

David the prophet was obliged to undergo many wars since his youth. With every combat he gained new experiences expressed in his offering more psalms. This became the secret of power, joy and hope for the believers in their fight against Satan. In this way God begets out of affliction, sweetness, not only for the believer alone, but for the entire church as well.

The Framework of the Psalm

1. Interceding for the King's Sake (1-7)

- ❖ The assembly or the priest's prayer for the king's sake (1) when he reaches the sanctuary.
- ❖ A hymn chanted by the choir who sing when offering the sacrifice (2-3).

¹ Plumer, p. 267.

² Leopold sabourin: *The Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 226.

³ Leopold sabourin, p. 226.

- ❖ A hymns chanted by the hymners (4-5) when the banners are carried in a memorable procession.
- ❖ The assembly prayer (5) when the king stands in the middle.

2. Prayer of Thanksgiving (6-8) that predicts the king’s victory

- ❖ Words uttered by the chief priest or a prophet.
- ❖ The king’s response (6). It is only at this point that the king speaks, for he has been encouraged by the people’s prayers. He is supported by the sacrifice offered on his behalf, as well as the choir’s praises. This is why he speaks in full faith of God’s assured work with him.
- ❖ The confirmation of victory (7-8) spoken by the chief priest architecture a prophet in presence of the king and his soldiers.

3. Conclusion

- ❖ La song of praise sung by the congregation (9). It could be repeated several times during the festival.

The General Frame

1. A prophetic prayer about Christ	1-3
2. Christ’s eager heart	4-6
3. The growth of Christ’s kingdom	7-9

1. A prophetic prayer about Christ

“*The Lord answer you in the day of trouble*” (Ps. 20: 1). It is the pleasure of the Father to answer His believers prayers, those who trust in Him. He grants them victory, safety, and joy.

Our life, in totality, has two integrated faces. It is ‘a day of trouble’, and at the same time ‘an inwardly joyful day’. It is a day of trouble due to the enemy who does not sleep. He fights us so he snatches us from our Lord’s hands. It is also a day of inward joy because in it we are blessed with the deposit for eternal life, through **our partnership with Christ, our treasure and our peace.**

David the king has learnt, with the experience he has as a man of war, to put his faith in God. This is not only by means of God’s prayer, when sleeping in his bedroom or even before the covenant ark, but also by praying for David’s sake by means of the priests and the congregation, also the offering of the sacrifices on his behalf. It is as if the personal and collective prayers are integral.

The greatest of people – even the apostles, the saints and the capable kings – are all exposed to pain and hardship. They need others’ prayers on their behalf, so God supports them Himself. In the Coptic liturgies, the priest prays for the people’s sake, as well as the people’s prayers for the priests’ sake. It is the praying church together – priests and congregation – and this is not belittled in heaven.

Every believer should, whether he be a priest or a member of the congregation, not scorn other’s prayer for his sake. He should rather ask for it seriously, even for those who seem to be of lesser social status, or any kind of aspect. Despite all of this, these prayers are of not much benefit, even when offered by saints, unless the person himself prays as well. for David was a king, a man of war, a judge...etc., and he had priests and prophets, and the entire congregation prayed for him, and despite all of this he did not exempt himself from praying.

What is this day of trouble? It is the day in which our Lord Jesus carried our sins. He endured death, the death of the cross, all for our sakes. The Lord Jesus underwent this day, and died on the cross, was buried in the tomb, and he rose again. He ascended to the heavens so He grants us the share in His glory. This is the day the Lord has made. It is the difficult day, yet it is the source of joy and gladness.

The present life is ‘the day for trouble’ or ‘the valley of tears’, because the church being a bride for the crucified One, she shares the affliction of her Groom. The church wrestles with His grace against darkness, and she struggles so that everyone be blessed with the grace of salvation.

“The name of the God of Jacob defend you” (Ps. 20: 1).

We have previously spoken of the importance of ‘the name’, since it represents the owner of the name, and implies his strength. We are blessed with victory not by means of an ‘unknown god’ as St. Paul the apostle saw when he was walking in Athens. We rather obtain victory through the God we have known. We know his name, and have experienced his qualities, and are blessed in sharing with Him through the cross.

God’s name is not a magical charm by which we obtain the overcoming and triumph. It is rather to be blessed with God’s divine presence that grants goodness and prosperity. Our repetition of His name only means our trust of His presence inside us. We are assured that He alone is able to redeem us.

As for mentioning ‘Jacob’ here, this means that God who works in us, and who is present in our life, he is Lord of the entire church, since Jacob is the father of all the tribes. It is as if the psalmist is saying, “If you have a personal encounter with God, be assured that the father of the church defends you personally. Abraham stands for ‘fatherhood’ and Isaac for ‘obedience’, and Jacob for ‘wrestling’. Thus God who freely supports you, He works in you when you wrestle against sin. He does not support the careless ones in their life, and those who are negligent in their spiritual struggle. He is the God of every wrestling Jacob.

“May He send you help from the sanctuary, And strengthen you out of Zion” (Ps. 20: 2).

The Lord’s holy sanctuary on earth is a symbol of the heavenly holies, or His very heavens themselves. There, God hears the prayers of His people rising as fragrant incense, and He answers them. The holy God who dwells in the heavens answers the supplications that spring from a sanctified heart, in compliance with his sanctified will. Thus it is said in the same psalm ***“He will answer him from His holy heaven”*** (Ps. 20: 6).

If the people pray for the king to be supported in time of war, then the Holy God, he fills heavens and earth; He offers the support of the king from His holy place or by means of the covenant of the ark. This is a response or a fulfillment to his divine promise and covenant with His holy people whom he loves. Now that the Lord Jesus has offered Himself a sacrifice, the doors of heavens opened before the church, so she lives in heaven itself during the Eucharist liturgy service. God’s Holy Spirit receive the divine help. This is what urges the hymner to say ***“and give support from Zion”*** that is, from Christ’s church, the heavenly Zion, where Christ the heavenly slaughtered One dwells.

If Christ the lord establishes His kingdom in us (Luke 17: 21) we become His holy sanctuary and the new Zion. This is why we offer our prayers to God who dwells in us, so we find His quick answer that springs in our hearts. We are then blessed with His support, for He gives us the victory in our fight against the adversary.

This saying has been fulfilled in a magnificent unique way with the Son of Man, when he bent his head, carrying our sins. He then started the affliction, and His soul was grieved indeed even unto death. The Father then sent an angel from heaven to declare what glory the Son has even at the most bitter moments of suffering and agony. His affliction was glory and victory to the King of kings, in which we obtain as kings, victory from holy heavenly Zion!

His words, “*and give you support from Zion*” the holy divine inspiration confirms the role of the sanctified assembly, and the impact of its prayers. St. Peter the apostle was blessed with the church prayers assembled in the loft that prayed fervently for his sake (Acts 12: 5).

“*May He remembers all your offerings, And accept your burnt sacrifices*” (Ps. 20: 3).

The psalmist refers here to the sacrifices offered during the praise-giving of this psalm before the king goes to war. The sacrifice offering refers to the secret behind the victory and how it lies in the reconciliation with God by means of blood. The burned sacrifices are a sign of trust and the deposit for victory, for they all offer their hearts as burning and kindled offering with the fire of the divine love.

The believer in his daily war, finds his victory in Christ’s sacrifice, and accepting His cross as the power of salvation. The apostle says “but we proclaim Christ sacrificed, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God...For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1Cor. 1: 23, 24; 2: 2).

Let us know that God accepts our spiritual burnt offerings, when He kindles in our souls the fire of divine love that burns our hearts inside us, by means of His Holy Spirit. There are no waters that could possibly extinguish it. He grants us inside the power of the resurrection and its victory over death and its everlasting joy.

❖ I wish the cross on which You offered Yourself as a full burnt sacrifice to God the Father, that it would be turned to the joy of the resurrection.

St. Augustine

In this way the psalmist spoke of the afflicted Jesus Christ, who went into an ordeal so He might carry us to his church, the Zion, offering His life a burnt sacrifice for us. This is to make us offer our lives as holy sacrifices. Now he is speaking of Him as the King, the Giver of salvation.

2. Christ’s Eager Heart

“*May the Lord fulfill all your petitions*” (Ps. 20: 5).

What is the heart’s desire of the Lord Jesus? It is mankind’s salvation that called for His sacrificing death, His resurrection and His ascension to the glories, so He reigns over hearts.

❖ “*We confess to You, O Lord, Your salvation*” we rejoice, because it was not possible for death to harm You in any way. this is why You prove to us that it cannot harm us either.

St. Augustine

Christ’s heart desire was mankind’s salvation, and it has been fulfilled by his resurrection, by our resurrection by Him and in Him. We thus become his crucified body, the risen from the dead, we share Him His inheritance and His glories. We too, when we

have our heart's desire of the Lord Jesus, the Father fulfills our heart's desire, and He grants us our life, as well as in others' life.

God has granted David his heart's desire, because his heart was similar to God's heart. David aimed at nothing except to please God. Likewise are those who live according to God's will and his guidance. God fulfills their hearts' desire and He fulfills their will, giving them the true joy.

“We confess to You, O Lord, your salvation” (Ps. 20: 5).

Those who look steadfastly on the Lord's salvation are not preoccupied with victory in itself, but rather with the Lord and His work of salvation. They rejoice in Him, and confess to Him his amazing deeds so full of love.

“In the name of our God we will set up our banners!” (Ps. 20: 5) this may mean rising the victory banners that flutter before the soldiers. It is as if in the blessing the king obtained before the battle, he declares joy by lifting up the banners for he is sure of God's work with him.

The raising of the banner came from an old tradition prevalent in the East. It is that in the case of homicide, the son of the dead victim or his family, they are terribly revengeful against the killer and his family. The desire for revenge is carried on for several generations. The sons of the victim and his grandsons feel they committed to take revenge, or else they lose their dignity and manhood. At times, the wanted person, that is the murderer of his son, he resorts to a certain city where he asks for shelter and mercy from someone prestigious. If this person accepts him and forgives, he begins reconciliation process with the victim's family. If this is fulfilled, a number of men assemble, and go about to city declaring this happy news sparing the life of the wanted for murder. This person who obtained the people would carry a banner on his head. He would call on the whole city to come and see the person who has obtained his freedom and was released from the death sentence. Likewise were we, under the death sentence, we have cried out asking for the salvation in the name of the good Christ. He thus granted us the forgiveness for our souls, and He saves from eternal death sentence. Therefore, we have a spiritual and social commitment to testify to the entire world this happy news. We are to confess and rejoice for His salvation and glorify His name because he has answered our pleading. Therefore, in the name of our God, we lift up our banner so all the world would come and see Him who in His name we live, and be blessed with the great salvation¹.

“Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven” (Ps. 20: 6).

Many of the church fathers think the attributed King to the Father 'His King' is Christ the Lord himself, the King of kings. **Pope Athanasius the apostolic** says, “God has saved Christ by raising Him from the dead²”.

3. The Growth of Christ's Kingdom

“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God. They have bowed down and fallen; But we have risen and stand upright. Save, Lord! May the King answer us when we call” (Ps. 20: 7- 9).

¹ *Boyd's Bible Handbook*, p. 234-235.

² *Fr. Lazarius: The Psalter*, P. 20.

This is a beautiful conclusion for this Messaianic psalm, for we have risen in it. we have become aware of the new life after the death of sin. We are blessed with uprightness through His goodness, thus His kingdom grows through our salvation.

The prophet's speech constantly declaring that God's will is not to make His people compete with other nations, and to put their trust in the best weapons of war such as chariots and horses (Deut. 17: 16; Hos. 1: 7; 14: 4; Micah 5: 9; Is. 31: 1; Zech. 8: 9; Ps. 33: 16 etc.; 147: 10). Rather, their weapon is the Lord Himself. The nations boast of their strength in chariots and horses and every attractive semblance. But s for Christ's church, she finds her strength in the heavenly Emmanuel who descended in meekness and humility to carry us in Him to his heavens.

❖ By prayers, they used to be exalted by the Lord¹.

Pope Athanansius the Apostolic

❖ When your Lord wished to enter Jerusalem victoriously, He did not even own a colt, as mentioned in the gospels. These have chariots and those came on horses, but in the name of the Lord our God we find our strength².

The Scholar Trillian

It is possible that the chariots get burned, and the horses die, and those relying on them collapse. But those who rely on the eternal Lord's hand and on His name, these never fail, and are not disappointed. They rather become blessed with the immortal salvation.

The psalmist began speaking of the Lord's affliction and our entering His church to be blessed with his work of sacrifice, so He reigns with his precious blood over our hearts, granting us victory and conquest in His name. It is not by any human measures. Now he is concluding the psalm by our victory in him and our uprightness through His righteousness.

¹ *Vita S. Antoni*, 39.

² *De Corona*, 8.

prayer

- ❖ You the true Leader, take us to the battle of the cross. Grant us the overcoming and the victory over the powers of darkness.
- ❖ Grant us to be blessed by Your cross, God's strength and His wisdom. Let us not rely on any human, but rather, on Your divine work!
- ❖ Reign over our hearts, O Lord, and establish your kingdom in us, and let the enemy have no place in us.

PSALM 21

SONG OF THE KING'S CONQUEST

A Royal Psalm:

It is a royal and a liturgical prayer for the sake of the king's conquest. Like psalm 20 it concentrates on the king, and may suit any royal celebration, or any memorial occasion that concerns the king.. According to some scholars, psalm 20 was sung before the battle, whereas this psalm (21) was a song of praise, sung after the battle, to thank God for responding to the prayer in the preceding psalm. It was written by David, in the climax of joy with the spirit of thanksgiving to God who has granted him conquest, probably on the people of Ammon in Rabbah (2 Samuel 12: 26-31).

According to other scholars, this psalm, like the one preceding it, reflects a celebration in the temple before going into battle, with a basic difference, that psalm 20 seeks help and success in war, while psalm 21 refers to the circle of the divine gifts as a whole, granted to the Lord's anointed.

Yet, according to Theodoret alone, this psalm was written to commemorate king Hezekiah's falling ill and his healing by a command of the Lord.

And to L. Sabourin: [This psalm was probably a part of the coronation liturgy of the king (See verse 4 – the Septuagint version); the priest -- in the presence of the king – recites the blessings in a worshipping way (2 – 7), and the prayer (9 – 13), while the congregation recite the verses 8 and 14 as an antiphon, like psalm 60: 6 ... According to him, this psalm is a special liturgy concerning the king's coronation like psalms 5, 16, 23, 27, 42-43, 61, 63, 84, 91, 101]

A Messianic psalm;

According to R. J. Clifford: {After the royal system came to an end in Israel after the sixteenth century B.C., the text of this psalm came to be used concerning the Son of David to come}.

And to Gaebelien: [This psalm is Messianic; The 'Tergom' (the Chaldean version of the Old Testament), and the 'Telmud', refer to the king mentioned in this psalm as the Messiah. This interpretation was accepted by Rabbi Soliman Isaac, known as 'Rachi', a great scholar in the 'Telmud' (born 1040 B.C.), who suggested that this psalm should be left to the account of the Christians, to use as a proof that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.

Before the Christian era, this psalm was certainly used in the temple worship. And for several generations, it was truly used by the liturgical Christians in the celebration of the feast of Ascension, as a memorandum of the return of our Lord to His glory, and to His role as our Greatest High Priest ...].

Although certain parts of this psalm (like verse 4), could never apply except to the Messiah; Yet, it was not quoted in the New Testament, other than two hints in Hebrew 2: 9; and 12: 2.

This psalm, called '**The song of the king's victory**', by which we sing a praise of love for the Messiah, the Glorious King of Kings, in whom we are granted the fellowship of glories; leads us to the next psalm (22), which is '**The psalm of 'The glorious passion of Christ**', leads us to the Mount of Golgotha, and brings us forth into the threshold of His throne.

This psalm exhorts us to dedicate our life completely to the account of our Lord Jesus Christ, in absolute obedience to the will of God; with a strong trust in God's faithfulness toward us.

A guidance word (a key word of the book);

The guidance word is “**strength**” (1, 13); and it is befitting of us here to refer, as well, to another word, related to strength, which came in verse 7: “*Through the **mercy** (steadfast love) of the Most High, he shall not be moved*”; which interprets the source of every strength found in the covenant between the Lord and His people; the strong bond of love; the faithfulness through the salvation blood of Christ.

The general frame:

- 1- The previous conquests of the King Messiah 1 - 7
- 2- The future conquests of Christ 8 - 12
- 3- Praise and thanksgiving by the people 13

1- THE PREVIOUS OF THE KING MESSIAH: (1 – 7)

This division (1 – 7) is a thanksgiving for the sake of the privileges given to the king; who, as we have already stated, is the Son of David, portrayed by the psalmist as a Warrior King who fights against the devil and his wicked hosts, to our account.

We, as well, being members of the body of Christ, have become warrior kings, drawing help from the King of kings in our spiritual war. Hence, several expressions of this psalm were used in the Latin liturgies, like ‘Desiderium cordis euis tribuistiei’

(1) Thanksgiving to God for His strength and salvation:

“The king shall have joy in Your strength, O Lord; And in Your salvation, how greatly shall he rejoice!” (1)

When Pilate asked the Lord Christ: “*Are You the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him: ‘Are you speaking for yourself on this, or did others tell you about Me?... You say rightly that I am King; ...For this cause I was born, “And I have come into the world, that*

I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18: 33 – 38). He is not just 'a king', but He is "**The King**", who was raised up on the cross, by love, as His throne, to set up His kingdom in the hearts and in the souls. We can say that the previous psalm is the song of the King in the garden of Gethsemane, as He enters into the battle of the cross – the day of tribulation – to deliver His life a burnt offering. The Father responded to His supplication and His atonement intercession on behalf of all His believers. Now, the praise of the resurrection is sung, being the song of the King, the Conqueror over death, and the Grantor of Joy to all those who enjoy His resurrected life.

David has not rejoiced in his own throne, nor in the strength of his army; but in the strength of the Lord, and in His free salvation. We, as well, being united with the Son of David, should reign upon our lusts, to live by His resurrected life, as conquerors and victorious; As according to St. Paul: "*Now, thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place*" (2 Corinthians 2: 14).

King David experienced that every salvation is realized by God, who once He presents salvation, all enemies are overcome.

Why does David rejoice in the salvation of God?

- a- The salvation of God is active. By it, all enemies appear helpless, and unable to cause any harm to us.

- + Seeing how the devil has got hold of mankind, and led them in all his ways, full of offenses; ... God, who dwells in everyone of us, by His limitless compassion, mercy, and un-perceived wisdom and love, intended to break down the pride and haughtiness of the devil, to show and expose his deception ... He came to us, healed, encouraged, strengthened, and gave us conquest ...; He gave us fellowship in His greatness, and lifted us up to His true and faithful kingdom.

(St. John El-Tabaiisy)

+ Now, by the resurrection of the Lord Christ, beloved brethren, ... The devil, that tyrant who is against the whole world is slain.

Now, eating the "Word" of the Father, and having our hearts anointed by the blood of the New Covenant, we get to recognize the grace granted to us by the Savior, who said: "*Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy*" (Luke 10: 19); The power of death no longer reigns; for life reigns instead, and the Lord says: "*I am the life*" (John 14: 6). Everything is now filled with joy and happiness; as it is written: "*The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice*" (Psalm 97: 1)..

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

The name "Jesus" has become the secret of the strength and conquest over the sin, the devil, and all the hosts of darkness. According to the scholar Origen: [By His name, demons are often driven out from men, if uttered in a sound way.... Amazing is the name of "Jesus". Which heals the physically ill, and the mentally disturbed, and drives out the spirits of darkness].

- b- Salvation is realized through unexpected ways.
- c- Salvation happens in the darkest moments. God never delays to present His mercies; However, He sometimes waits to the last moment.
- d- David rejoiced, not in his conquests, as much as in God's strength and salvation. He did not boast in his possibilities, and the conquest of his armies; but gave all glory and honor to His Savior.

e- The conquests of David were shadows of those of the Son of David, realized on the cross; As according to St. Paul: *“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrew 12: 2). As our representative, He suffered and was crucified to our account; In Him we were risen, and in Him our inner man was lifted, together with Him up to heaven (Ephesians 3). That is why the Lord Christ, Himself, exults in the salvation of the Father, consummated in Him, and in His redeeming work ... *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have an everlasting life”* (John 3: 16). ... Hence it is said: *“The king shall have joy in Your strength, O Lord; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice”* (1)... We, as well, having become kings, will rejoice in the fellowship with Him in His crucifixion, because, in what the King (Christ) rejoices, will bring joy to us as well. ... In Jesus Christ we exult, when we enjoy His redeeming work in our daily life, and when we see others enjoy the same grace together with us.

(2) Thanksgiving to God for responding to the request of our heart:

“You have given him his heart desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips” (2)

The psalmist starts by the heart's desire, then consummates it by the lip's request; the former precedes the later, and has to conform with it, for the inside and the outside to work together according to God's will ... For then, we shall find the sure and fast divine response to both the heart and the mouth.

Praying to the Father by His lips, our Christ said: *“Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You”* John 17: 1); And as His words came to conform with His heart's desire, they were responded to.

- + Christ desired to eat the Passover with His disciples (Luke 22: 15), and to lay down His life by His own power and will, and to take it again (John 10: 18); And His desire was realized.

(St. Augustine)

Our Christ proclaimed His inner heart's desire by both the secret and the manifest prayers; by the words, and also by the passions ... His heart's desire was realized, and still is in His church, until the strife of all the chosen is consummated, and they come to enjoy the inheritance together with Him.

(3) Thanksgiving to God for glorifying His Son:

“For You meet him with the blessings of goodness; You set a crown of pure gold upon his head” (3)

According to the Hebrew text it came as: “For You preceded him with the blessings of goodness”. On account of that the blessings of His goodness have been proclaimed even before His incarnation; “*Abraham rejoiced to see His day; he saw it and was glad*” (John 8: 56); And men of the Old Covenant have enjoyed the salvation through its symbols and shadows, and the hope for His death.

We, as well, in the New Covenant, enjoy the blessings of His goodness, having got a multitude of divine gifts, before even seeking or asking for them: like the grace of existence; the enjoyment of the Christian faith; the gaining of baptism and the anointment of ‘Myron’; the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, beside the many other things of no limits we were granted. ... As David was granted the throne for no favor on his part. No one has sought a Savior, Yet, out of God's love, the initial promise that the offspring of the woman will strike the serpent's head (Genesis 3: 15) was

realized. God's gifts to men were all initiated by His love and goodness; before we even existed, or came to recognize Him.

Seeing, by the eye of prophecy, our Christ, crowned on the cross as a King, David cried out, saying: "*You set a crown of pure gold upon His head*" (3). According to appearance, it was a crown of thorns and not of gold, set on His head, to pay the price of our sins; But inside, we were crowned together with Him, to enjoy precious heavenly crowns.

- + If the angels rejoice to see one sinner return to God with repentance, How could they not greatly rejoice when they see the whole human nature – in its Firstborn – ascending today up to heaven?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

"His glory is great in Your salvation; Honor and majesty You have placed upon him; For You have made him blessed forever" (5, 6)

For our sake He "*emptied Himself of His glory*" (Philippians 2: 7), and for our sake He was glorified; From the Father He has got honor and glory, "*the glory which He had with Him before the world was*" (John 17: 5).

Our Lord Jesus – the King of kings – sets royal crowns upon the heads of His pious believers by His own hands. No rank of honor however high it may be, He would not lift us up to it, if He so desires; "*He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes*" (Psalm 113: 6, 7), 'the spiritual kings'. He has taken David from among his sheep, and set him a king on the greatest throne on earth at that time.

In the worthiness of the precious blood, our Lord Jesus Christ granted us His Holy Spirit, who conforms our inner man to bear the fellowship of

glory and splendor in an exalted way

- + By the Holy Spirit, the Son makes those who receive Him, in His likeness.
- + When our image is renewed by holiness, through the work of this Spirit, we actually change to the image of God; according to the words of the apostle, saying: *“My little children for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you”* (Galatians 4: 19). Christ is (formed) in us by the Holy Spirit who renews our form according to God.
- + Christ is (formed) in us by the work of the Holy Spirit, who draws in our souls a divine image of righteousness and holiness.

(St. Cyril the Great)

(4) Thanksgiving to God for the sake of the resurrected life:

“He asked life from You, and You gave it to him, length of days forever and ever” (4)

The greatest reasons for giving thanks to God is probably our enjoyment of the new life, the conqueror of death. David probably gave God thanks, on account of that, from his youth until his old age, he has faced a multitude of tribulations, that brought him, according to human reason, on the threshold of death; and in every one of them, his salvation from death has been a gift from God, and not due to any human intervention. Hence David felt indebted to God by his whole life.... And if we set forth to the Son of David, we shall find Him obey even to death on the cross, to receive the resurrection from the Father, though He, Himself, is “the Resurrection”. By His own power, He laid His life, and took it ... By obedience He gained the will of the Father to resurrect. .. We, as well, having become members in the body of Christ, resurrected from the dead, shall gain this new life in Him.

- + *“He asked life from You, and You gave it to him”*; namely, the resurrection, as is clear in His words: *“Father, glorify Your Son”* (John 17: 1). *“You gave it to him, length of days forever and ever”*; Namely, the years lived by the church now, and will continue to live to the end of ages.

(St. Augustine)

The verse saying: *“length of days forever and ever”*, was interpreted in the later Jewish eras, and by Christian scholars as well, as being a Messianic blessing, referring to the everlasting reign for the seed of David.

(5) Thanksgiving for the divine blessings:

“For You have made him most blessed forever” (6)

The Lord Christ, the Source of every blessing, stretched His hands on the cross, opening His bosoms to all nations, for everyone to find his satisfaction and satiety of the divine blessings,.

(6) Thanksgiving for the sake of the gladness to see God:

“You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence” (6)

We give God thanks for the sake of His strength and salvation that fill us with joy and exultation; of realizing the desire of our hearts and the request of our lips in our prayers; of the glory we have gained inside us through our union with Him; of our enjoyment of the new life in Jesus Christ, and of the flow of His blessings. ... The crown of all that,

however, is our entrance into the kingdom of joy, through our enjoyment of seeing the face of our God.

2- THE FUTURE CONQUESTS OF CHRIST: (8 – 12)

The true thanksgiving, presented by the king and the people, is not, however, in glorifying the past, but rather for the sake of the trust in God's work for them in the future. The psalmist taught his people to look back at the past with joy, glorifying the work of God with them, so as to trust in God who grants them conquest over their enemies, however mighty they may be. God has saved them, is saving them, and will continue to save them in the future. ... And describing the enemies, their plans, and their destiny, the psalmist says:

“Your hand will find all Your enemies; Your right hand will find those who hate You. You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger. The Lord shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them” (8, 9)

Having, by His cross, “wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us which was contrary to us” (Colossians 2: 14), and having exposed the devil and all his hosts; On his ultimate coming, the Lord will utterly destroy their kingdom; He will make them as “a fiery oven” for themselves, “in the time of His anger”; namely, on the day He comes for His ultimate judgment..

He likened the enemies of the king, who were at the same time the enemies of God, to the dry grass, used as fuel for the fire in the oven. The word meaning “oven” came 15 times and the word meaning “furnace” came 5 times, in the Hebrew text; to express their complete perdition.

The word “fire” is sometimes used in the Holy Book to express the wrath of God (See Deuteronomy 4: 12; 5: 22-25; Psalm 18: 14); and the ‘eschatological day of the Lord’

(Amos 4: 14; 2: 2-15; Malachi 3: 2; 4: 1); And according to the book of Revelations about the wicked: *“The smoke of their torment ascends forever”* (Revelation 14: 11).

The wrath of God does not imply any hate or a desire for revenge, but it is the wicked who, choosing for themselves to be grass, and refusing to enjoy a place in the divine bosom, they set themselves by their own will to reject the mercies of God to partake of His glories.

“Their offspring You shall destroy from the earth, and their descendants from among the sons of men” (10)

The word ‘fruit’ in Hebrew came as “offspring”, a very old way of talk (See Genesis 30: 2; Deuteronomy 7: 13; 28: 4; Psalm 127: 3; 132: 11; Isaiah 13: 18; Lamentations 2: 20; Hosea 9: 16; Micah 6: 7). In our Lord Jesus Christ, the offspring of the devil and all his hosts will be destroyed; namely, the sins which lie in the heart, as well as in the earth. By the grace of God, no trace of them will be left in our hearts, minds, or emotions; to say together with the prophet Moses: *“Not a hoof shall be left behind”* (Exodus 10: 26)

As the Lord turns our hearts to heaven, the darkness of the devil and all his works will be scattered; No more dust or earth on which the enemy will be able to run; hence it is said: *“Their offspring You shall destroy from the earth”* (10).

By “the earth” he probably means the body; The enemy will have no more fruit in our body, nor in our mind; for man will be wholly sanctified: body and soul together.

“For they intended evil against You; they devised a plot which they are not able to perform” (11)

However strong the enemies of Christ are, yet before Him they are too weak. However craftily they devise their plots against Him and His church; yet they fail, *“they are not*

able to perform". They are like a viper bearing venom, yet with a crushed head; and like a lion, yet in a cage.

According to father Caesarius, bishop of Arle, this prophecy was realized when the evil soldiers who were guarding the tomb of the Lord, claimed that His disciples came and took His away while they were asleep. ...How could they know what happened if they were asleep? By so saying, they unknowingly confirmed the resurrection.

3- PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING BY THE PEOPLE: (13)

"Be exalted, O Lord, in Your own strength; We will sing and praise Your power" (13)

The end of this psalm came to a great extent like its forward, and like the end of the Doxology of the Lord's prayer. ... So, our sufferings, will come to an end, by the proclamation of the joyful glory of God in our life, and in our eternal encounter with Him.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 21

YOUR HAND, O LORD, ALWAYS WORKS IN THE LIFE OF YOUR CHILDREN

- + You saved, are saving, and will save, until You bring us all into the fellowship of Your glories;

- + Receive, O Lord our thanksgiving, and exultations, for You came and saved us;
You hear the pulse of our heart, and respond to the words of our lips;
You pour Your splendor upon us, to make us worthy of a kingdom;
You grant us Your life, the secret of resurrection, un-destructible by death;
You flow upon us with a non-drying fountain of blessing;

And finally, You proclaim Yourself to us, to recognize, and to see You, face to face;

- + Destroy, O Lord, the (offspring) of the enemy in us;
Set Your kingdom in us;
And be glorified in us forever.

PSALM 22

THE GLORIOUS PASSIONS OF CHRIST

FROM PASSIONS TO GLORIES:

For the Christians, this psalm is considered as “the Holy of Holies”. Our Savior used its first words in His prayer on the cross. In some detail, it tells us about the crucifixion, the resurrection, and establishes the spiritual kingdom of Christ among the Gentiles.

In this psalm, we hear our Lord Jesus – through the mouth of the prophet David – sing the praise of passion, to turn our sufferings into praise! And according to St. Paul: *“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrew 12: 2)

A MESSIANIC PSALM:

The frame of this psalm is unique in its kind; seen by some as a lamentation of special strength; while by others as a combination of three separate psalms, or of two psalm at least: one a lamentation (verses 1 to 21); and the other a thanksgiving (22 to 31). These two psalms or divisions are distinguished from one another, as far as the psyche, thoughts, and style, of the psalmist are concerned. According to some scholars, these two divisions were separately written after the psalmist went through a bitter and horrible experience, then were combined together to be used in the temple worship. Then were interpreted together as a prophetic psalm bearing a Messianic conception.

The fathers of the church see it as a Messianic psalm, which with harmony, parades the painful events of the crucifixion, side by side of the joyful events of the resurrection, and

the good news of preaching the gospel among the Gentiles, to establish the Church of Christ, His glorious kingdom.

No Christian could read this psalm without an active and strong encounter of the crucifixion. "Prophecy", is probably the only subject of this psalm (1 Peter 1: 10-11; Luke 24: 25, 26); It is counted as one of the most complete prophecies about Christ's passion, humility, and His glorious, and limitless kingdom among the Gentiles.

In the New Testament there are 13 quotations from this psalm, of which 9 in the episode of the crucifixion alone. The disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ used it as a material for preaching the message of salvation through the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of the Lord Christ.

Despite his feeling of being completely isolated and deserted, yet the psalmist lived in a kingdom of peace. While suffering, you never find him even hinting to a certain sin, trying to proclaim his innocence, defending himself against vain accusations, nor spitting wrath against his enemies. You never find him directly mention his enemies, nor seeking a curse upon them, as it was common in most lamentations.

THE TITLE:

To the chief Musician, Set to 'the deer of the dawn'. (Aijeleth Sahar). A psalm of David.

What is the meaning of the expression: 'the deer of the dawn'?

1- It likens the redeeming work of the Lord Christ (The passion and resurrection of the Holy One), to a wounded innocent deer, on which

dawn comes with healing and release. So our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and was wounded on the cross, to proclaim His glory by

resurrection at the dawn of Sunday... Our Christ is likened to "a young stag on the mountains of spices" (Song 8: 14); "as a loving deer and

a *graceful doe*” for all believers (Proverbs 5: 19); who utters nice talk like Naphtali, “*the doe let loose*” (Genesis 49: 21).

2- According to the old Jewish tradition, this expression refers to the ‘Shaknah’, namely, the glorious cloud that used to appear in the midst of the people of God.

According to the tradition, the lamb was offered as a morning sacrifice, once the watcher, from the top of the temple, seeing the first rays of dawn, cries out, saying: [Behold, there shines the first rays of the day]. So is the shining of the holy redemption, realized through the passion of the Lord Christ, we see in this psalm.

3- According to others, this expression refers just to the tune used in praying with this psalm.

The general Frame::

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| 1- The suffering Christ | 1 - 21 |
| 2- The glorified Christ | 22 – 31 |

1- THE SUFFERING CHRIST: (1 – 21)

Here came a perfect narration of the horrible episode of crucifixion, completely and literally realized through the passion of the Lord Christ.

a- The first words of the psalm came to proclaim the price paid for our redemption.

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?” (1)

Some may say that the first words of this psalm contradict themselves; as how could anyone say: “O My God”, to the God who has forsaken His servant?! ... Yet, we do not usually feel forsaken by strangers, but we would rather have such a feeling toward those closest to us.

It is a cry of despair, quoted from this psalm by our Lord on the cross, showing that He is experiencing what came in this psalm. Our Lord -- as a representative of humanity – was counted as forsaken by the Father for some time; “*He became a curse for us*” (Galatians 3: 13); “*For He made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us*” (2 Corinthians 5: 21); so that we would not be eternally forsaken by the Father; According to Isaiah: “*For a mere moment, I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer*” (Isaiah 54: 7). Our Savior partakes of our bitter experience; when we feel that God has forsaken us; He wrestles even to death to make out of Himself a bridge that leads us out of our tribulation, and sets us forth to the bosom of the Father. On the cross, He showed us how far we came to be from God, and how much we are separated from Him; He who is the Cause of our whole existence.

These words brings us forth, face to face, into the depths of Christ’s unperceived work, He who bears our sins, and upon whom the iniquity of us all is put; Jesus, who, for our sake has become sin; and in submission, has placed Himself under the wrath of the Father, and His hate of sin; “*Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief*” (Isaiah 53: 10).

+ Christ was not forsaken by the Father, nor from His deity, as some may think; Or He, fearful of passion, separated with His deity from His Manhood ...; But as I already said, He was representing us in Himself, we, who were forsaken and despised; but now, the suffering of Him, of whom suffering is not befitting (according to His deity), resurrected and saved us.

(St. Gregory the Neziarzen)

- + What does our Lord mean by saying that the Father has forsaken Him, when He Himself is God? Why did He use those words, unless we are in Him, as the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1: 23). By saying: "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" He is drawing our attention, saying to us: 'This psalm is written about Me'.

(St. Augustine)

- + That prayer He uttered is not a prayer of a righteous man, but is befitting of Him who bore our sins.... He who so prays, is He who nails to the cross our old man, who did not even know why God has forsaken him.

(St. Augustine)

- + When we are in the midst of tribulation, we assume that God has forsaken us. Being a Man, bearing my fears, He so prayed; He got depressed, He wept, ... He so prayed, and was crucified.

(St. Ambrose)

- + Christ cried out on the cross, to teach us that, up to His last breath, He honored His Father, and has never been against Him.

(St. John Chrysostom)

The crucified Savior, Himself, answered this question, by saying: "*Your are Holy*"
(3). ... The answer to our question is the

“divine Holiness”; For He had to pay the price of sin in full; the price which we cannot perceive.

The Holiness of God reveals the vast difference between the greatness of God and us. Through the cross we came to be attached to God, who is unapproachable; having got the fellowship with the Son, who is our righteousness and holiness, and in whom we become saints.

b- The psalm reveals the portrait of the cross with its sufferings and reproach.

The psalmist says that his fathers trusted in the Lord (5, 6); but his case is hopeless, for he is *“a worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people”* (5, 6).

Those were the words uttered by the Lord Christ on the cross, He who became a reproach and despised by the people; in whose eyes, He was despised by God, like a worm trodden under feet.

The Hebrew word for “worm” is used for a tiny insect (coccus), from which the scarlet or purple dye (used in the tabernacle of meeting) is extracted. The Lord Christ so died, that our sins that were like scarlet would become as white as snow.

+ *“But I am a worm, and no man”* ... Now, I do not speak as Adam, but as Jesus Christ, I speak in my own name ... I was born, bearing a body without human seed; so that, being a Man, I would be above men, and would submit the human pride through imitating my humility.

+ He said *“no man”*?... For He is God. ... But why has He so humiliated Himself to say that He is a Worm?... Is it on account of that the worm can

asexually regenerate itself, as the Lord Christ was born by the Virgin St. Mary? ... from a body without human seed?

(St. Augustine)

This verse was used by the scholar Tertullian in his debate against the followers of 'Velentian' who denied the Manhood of Christ, saying:

[They deny the Manhood of Christ, He who proclaimed that "*He is a worm, and no man*"; and who was described by the prophet Isaiah as: "*He has no form or comeliness, and when we see Him, there is no beauty, that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him*" (Isaiah 53: 2, 3)].

According to St. Basil the Great, the words of the psalmist: "*I am a worm, and no man*" are a call for humility; saying: [If it so happen that someone despised, and did not esteem you, just remember that you are created of dust (Genesis 3: 19)... If he calls you lowly, and of no value, just say to yourself: 'I am dust and ashes', I am not greater than our father Abraham who so called himself (Genesis 18: 27); and say together with David: "*I am a worm, and no man*".]

In such humility, we may perceive the truth of our weakness; So that, by faith, we could enjoy the honor of our humble Christ, and be counted as children of God, honored even among the heavenly creatures.

+ "*A reproach of men, and despised of the people*" (6). My humility made me an object of reproach among men, who say with a spirit of scoffing and ridicule: "*You are His disciple*" (John 9: 28); by which they provoke the mob to despise me.

“All those who see Me laugh in scorn. They shoot out the lip, they shake the head” (7). Muting their hearts, they uttered only by their lips.

(St. Augustine)

Shooting out the lips, and shaking the head, imply scorn and ridicule (Matthew 27: 39; Mark 15: 29). They counted Him evil, a blasphemer against God, a breaker of the Sabbath, a drinker of wine, a false prophet, an enemy of Caesar, and an ally of the demons.

+ *“But You are He who took Me out of the womb”* (9); the psalmist refers to that the Lord was born without human seed from the womb and body of the Virgin Mary; a way of birth different from that by which men are regularly born through matrimony.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

c- *“For there is none to help”* (11); *“He has trodden the winepress alone”* (Isaiah 63: 3)

d- In this psalm, more than in any other psalm, His adversaries appear as the cause of His passions (6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18). The psalmist, in an allegoric way, describes His adversaries, and the wicked leaders of the Jews who persecuted the Lord Christ, as raging and roaring lions, and bulls; and those of lesser ranks, as dirty dogs, who did not cease to despise Him.

The devil, the true enemy, is the lion: *“Save Me from the lion’s mouth”* (21). That dangerous adversary, who has the authority of death, was destroyed by death (1 Peter 5: 8; 2 Timothy 4: 17; Hebrew 2: 14).

+ I, Myself, has been a prey of the lion, held and led to death by those crying out: "*Crucify Hi, Crucify Him!*" (John 19: 6).

(St. Augustine)

+ "*Many bulls have surrounded Me, strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me*" (12). Those were the people and their strong leaders.

(St. Augustine)

He was surrounded by wild bulls of Bashan, a land famed for its fertile pastures and strong breeds of sheep and bulls (Deuteronomy 32: 14; Amos 4: 1).

e- "*You have brought Me to the dust of death*" (15). The death He chose, was according to the will of the Father, as a work of obedience on His part.

f- - This psalm describes the death of the Lord Christ on the cross, a way of execution not previously known by the Jews, but introduced by the Romans. Portraying for us that horrible way of death:

-- He refers to the "*darkness*" (2), that covered the earth, at the time our Lord was crucified.

-- "*I am poured out like water*" (14). ... When the side of our Lord was stabbed, blood and water came out of the wound.

-- "*All my bones are out of joint*" (14). Hanged on the cross, the Lord Christ's muscles were strained, and His joints were dislocated.

- + No words could describe how the body of the Lord Christ was stretched on the tree of the cross, more than the words: "*I can count all My bones*" (17).

(St. Augustine)

According to the scholar Origen, those "*bones*" symbolically refer to the disciples of the Lord Christ and the congregation of believers, who were scattered in weakness at the moments of the crucifixion; But, with the resurrection, they gathered together again as one body, of which not a single bone was broken.

- + "*I can count all My bones*" (17). Although His bones were not scattered, and not a single one was broken; Yet, as the resurrection of Christ, the whole Truth, was realized, the members of His body – the true believers -- who were at the time like dry bones, were gathered together, every bone got attached to another, were bound together, to reach the full measure of the stature of Christ; Then the members, although many, would become one body.

(The scholar Origen)

According to many fathers, the true believers – the bones of the Lord Christ – even if they become weak in the moments of tribulation and martyrdom, Yet the grace of God would support them, and no one of them would be broken.

The bones of the Lord Christ, are our inner faith in Him. We often moan when the temptation gets stronger, and cry out from our depths: "*How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in*

My soul? Having sorrow in my heart daily?” (Psalm 13: 1, 2). ... But God will soon work in us by His grace; to make us cry out with the psalmist: *“My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation”* (Psalm 13: 5); proclaiming that His bones in us would never be broken, even though they may get scattered for some time.

g- *“They pierced my hands and my feet”* (16)

- + Having heard the prophecies concerning His death, you may ask: How about His crucifixion? ... *“They pierced my hands and my feet, I can count all My bones”* (16), is a kind of death only realized through hanging on a tree, on a cross;

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + *“He was wounded for our transgressions”* (Isaiah 53: 5); *“They pierced My hands and My feet”* (16), *“He was bruised for our iniquities”* (Isaiah 53: 5); to heal our wounds by His wounds, and to save us from reproach, by enduring it Himself.

(St. Ambrose)

h- *“My heart is like wax, it has melted within Me”* (14)

His heart is His gospel; or rather His Wisdom treasured in the Holy Books which was before sealed shut, and not easily understood

- . But, once our Lord was crucified, the Holy Book melted like wax, and even the weak in the church could enter into its meanings. That is why *“the veil of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom”* (Matthew 27: 51), for what was concealed before has become manifest.

(St. Augustine)

“My heart is like wax”. It melted to have printed on it the image of God’s wrath on the sin borne by the Lord Christ for our sake. My heart melted, and I became like a dead man, to take away the hardness of the heart, and to grant it the softness of compassion.

I- *“My strength is dried up like potsherd”* (15)

J- *“And My tongue clings to My jaws”* (15)

K- *“They look and stare at Me”* (17)

L- *“They divide My garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots”* (18)

+ Now we know, and read in the gospels, how He suffered: ... how His bones were counted and scattered; ... how He was scoffed; ...how His garments were divided, and for His clothing they cast lots; and how He was surrounded by men full of rage.

(St. Augustine)

As nakedness is a direct fruit of sin, Our Lord Jesus was bared naked when He was crucified, to cloth us with the garment of His righteousness, and to cover the shame of our own nakedness.

“Deliver Me from the sword” (20): It is the flaming and turning around sword of the holy wrath of God.

e- THE GLORIFIED CHRIST: (22 – 31)

This division constitutes two integrated songs of thanksgiving (22 – 26; 27 – 31). In the first, the psalmist glorifies the Lord, and calls the poor to partake of the sacrificial banquet (the sacrifice of praise). Whereas in the second, he prophesies the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. They both, at the same time reveal the extended life of the psalmist; as his lamentation turned into a prayer of thanksgiving among the great congregation of the “poor”.... They proclaim the power, glory, and joy, of the resurrection of Christ; as the dominion of the darkness is destroyed (1 – 21, the feast came; the joy prevailed, and the limitless kingdom is realized.

As the first words of this lamentation (1) were used by the Lord Christ on the cross; those words of the song of conquest have been clearly referred to the Lord (Hebrew 2: 12)

In this division, the psalmist refers to the satiety and the conquest granted by the Lord in His passion, through proclaiming His presence in the midst of His church, filled with joy and satiety:

- 1- The church was set by declaring “**the name of God**” (22). In His farewell prayer, our Savior said: *“I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me, may be in them, and I in them”* (John 17: 26). We recognized Him through His divine love on the cross.

In all her worship, the work of the church is to enjoy the divine knowledge, and to give it to the believers. As an example, “baptism” is called “the Sacrament of enlightenment”; and in the Sacrament of the “Eucharist”, we gain a new practical knowledge.

- 2- Those invited (to the membership in the church of Christ), enter into an intimate relationship with the Lord Christ, to be called “His brethren”.

“I shall declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the congregation I will praise You” (22)

Although we found Him lonely on the cross, He is no more lonely, for He is now among His brethren. On the day of His resurrection, He gave the joyful message: *“Go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and Your Father, and to My God and Your God’* (John 20: 17). We hear Him address His disciples as His brethren, on His glorious day of resurrection, after passing through His passion. Having been sanctified by His salvation work (the passion of the cross), He is not ashamed, but is very pleased, to call us brethren (Hebrew 2: 11).

+ We are kinsmen of the Lord according to the flesh; Hence He says: *“I shall declare Your name to My brethren”* (Hebrew 2: 12; Psalm 22: 22). As the branches are one with the vine (the origin), and are from it (John 15: 1); So we are, as well, one body in harmony with the body of the Lord, *“and of His fullness we have all received”* (John 1: 16); And we have this body as the origin of our resurrection and salvation.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

3- This church is a congregation of joy, thanksgiving, and praise; We sing to the Father with the voice of Christ Himself, who dwells in our hearts; He who grants us a life of thanksgiving and praise; saying: *“In the midst of the congregation I will praise You”* (22). The Lord

Christ, the subject of pleasure to the Father, who is pleased to hear His voice through His church.

+ With Joy, I shall declare Your glory in the midst of My church.

(St. Augustine)

4- The church is a congregation of love, on account of that its members are the brethren of the Lord Christ. At the same time, it is a congregation of those who fear the Lord (23). If the Lord Christ calls us His brethren, yet we count ourselves His servants.

Love and fearing the Lord are integral in the life of believers; By them the believers are counted as the descendants of Jacob, the offspring of Israel (23); and on them will dwell the blessing of Abraham.

5- These holy brethren who have the love, together with the fear of the Lord, are committed to join the great congregation (25), namely, the (catholic church). Being the kingdom of God, it is befitting of the church to extend to the ends of the world (27, 28)

Prophesying about the salvation of the Gentiles, the psalmist said: "*All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You*" (27).

The 'catholicity, as the topic of this psalm, is inspired from psalm 18: 44 in short, and from psalm 87 in more detail.

+ All the races of the world will worship Him within their hearts; for "*the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations*" (28);

The kingdom is the Lord's, and not of the proud man; "*And He rules over the nations*".

(St. Augustine)

The personal salvation: Salvation is presented to the whole world, to be enjoyed by every member of the church, as his personal salvation.

+ My soul, that despises the world, which seems like dead in the sight of man, will forget herself to live in Christ.

(St. Augustine)

6- A *church* filled with satiety and joy: The Lord Christ – Head of the church – became poor for our sake, to grant us riches and peace. “*The poor shall eat and be satisfied*” (26). The poor in spirit will be rich with spiritual blessings, and the hungry will be satisfied with the goods, because the Lord Christ, Himself is their satiety.

St. Clement of Alexandria sees in the verse: “*Let your heart live forever*” (26), that the secret of satiety and life, is the spiritual knowledge granted to us by the Lord Christ.

+ Those who truly seek Him, praising the Lord, will get full of knowledge, and their soul will live. The soul is symbolically called (heart) on account of that, in it is the ordinance of life.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

7- A holy church, proclaims the goodness of Christ in her life (31).

8- It is befitting of the church to live forever along the generations, “*Let your heart live forever*” (26). For, in the resurrected Christ Jesus, we shall never know death, but will live forever in Him, and partake of His glories.

Whenever we sing this psalm, we meditate in the passions and the resurrection of Christ, we share His crucifixion, and we reach the power and glory of His resurrection, as the source of our conquest over death, and our enjoyment of the heavenly glory.



PSALM 23

PSALM OF THE SHEPHERD

Or

PSALM OF THE PARACLETE

A PRAISE OF TRUST:

This is considered the sweetest in the book of psalms, Its prevailing feature is the trust in God; as the psalmist cast himself, like a child, on the chest of God, in the time of peace and tranquility. In this psalm the trumpet of war disappears, and replaced by the harp of peace, which, no more produces a sad melody, but a joyful symphony of love, praising God as a Good Shepherd, a Wise Leader, and a Personal Friend of the human soul,

The Orthodox Jews love this psalm, and the Reformed Jews use it in their worship in their synagogues.

The early fathers of the church, as well, found in this psalm their gladness and exultation, seeing in it the care of the Good Shepherd for His flock. And St. Augustine did well by choosing it as a praise, sung by the martyrs.

According to many scholars, this psalm is one of the first written by the prophet David, its first part portraying the early stage of his life as a shepherd of sheep; and they see David as the most convenient person to author such a kind of psalm.

According to bishop Weiser, the author of this psalm, through the divine ministry, has experienced the blessings of fellowship with God. Remembering his early life, he sees how it passed under the watching and alert care of God, in the midst of all kinds of tribulations. ... Such divine care, namely, the leadership of the Shepherd, embraces every member of the people of God, and the whole people as a congregation..... And

this divine ministry could become a praise of thanksgiving to God, the Shepherd who has led the people who enjoyed the covenant, and who brought them forth through the way of salvation, particularly through the conquest of the exodus, that has ended up with the people enjoying peace in the land of the Lord, namely the promised land (Isaiah 40: 11; 63: 14; Ezekiel 34; Psalm 95: 7; 100: 3)

A ROYAL LITURGICAL PSALM:

According to A. L. Merrill, this psalm describes the rite of the coronation of the king, implying a procession that started from the temple, and continued up to the spring; and probably constitutes, as well, going around the holy city (Psalm 48: 13 etc.). It was probably used in the enthronement of the king (the descendant of David); Firstly that this enthronement is a symbol of the care of the Lord Christ, Himself (the Son of David), the Shepherd King, the Lover of His people. And secondly, to let the people know, while enthroning the king, that the true Shepherd is not the king, nor the civil or religious leaderships, but it is God Himself, who cares for all, and for both the soul and the body.

And according to E. Vogt, this psalm is bound to the sacrifice of thanksgiving presented by a visitor to the holy places, for the sake of enjoying a specific blessing; to be as though have passed through a the valley of darkness (4), to enter into the house of God. Together with every gift we enjoy, we see the compassionate hand of God, and His exalted care for us, as He leads us through the valley of this world, to make us dwell together with Him eternally in His heavenly sanctuary (6)

ITS RELATIONSHIP TO PSALM 22:

In psalm 22 we see a magnificent portrait of the suffering Shepherd; While here in psalm 23, we see a joyful portrait of the rejoicing and satisfied flock. In psalm 22 we see the Shepherd hanged on the tree to carry the labors of His people, and to bring them forth through His cross to His glories; While here, in psalm 23, we see the Shepherd leading His flock to bring them forth, in the worthiness of His blood, to green pastures;

His paradise satisfactory for their Spirit; to bring them forth into streams of water running in the midst of the pastures; streams of His Holy Spirit, who waters their inner depths.

We would not have enjoyed this psalm (23) “**the Jewel of the psalms**” unless we receive the salvation work of the Lord Christ, and enter into the last psalm (22), being “the Holy of Holies”. We would not have experienced the sweetness of Christ’s care, unless we recognize His blood, shed for our sake.

The soul cannot sing: “*I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever*” (6), unless she hears the Savior cries out “*O My God, O My God, why have You forsaken Me*”? (Psalm 22: 1); ... He was forsaken even from the Father, with whom He is One in essence, equal to Him, and not separated from Him; so that we would never be forsaken by Him forever.

A SACRAMENTAL PSALM:

Behind the simplicity of this psalm, depth and power are hidden. Finding in it symbols of the holy and sacramental works of the Lord Christ, the early Christians made it an integral part of the liturgy of baptism. In the evening of the feast of resurrection (the Christian Passover), the newly baptized catechumens used to sing it after getting the two sacraments of Baptism and ‘Meron’, wearing white garments, and holding flames, and joyfully hastening toward the altar of the Lord to partake of the heavenly banquet.

Our Christian church still sings this psalm on a daily basis during the vesper of the third hour, as a memorial of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples at that very hour; the same Spirit who still works in the church, particularly in the holy divine sacraments.

ITS GENERAL FRAME:

This psalm presents the Savior Lord on three aspects: As a **Good Shepherd**; as a **Leader** who brings us forth to the ways of righteousness; and as a **Friend** who receives us in His holy house all the days of our life.

1- As a Shepherd: (1 to 3 'A'). Representing our Lord, 'the Shepherd Messiah'; 'the Shepherd Jehovah', the psalmist starts this psalm in its

first lines by shedding light upon the most popular portrait in the Holy Book -- the portrait of the Shepherd (Genesis 49: 24; Ezekiel 34: 11-16).

In the term 'Shepherd', David uses the most revealing analogies of the attachment of the Shepherd to his flock; nourishing, leading, guiding,

healing, and protecting them. In all these analogies we see gentleness and sweetness that pierce the hearts that get in touch with the divine

compassion of the grace of God. ... Nothing is sweeter than presenting God as a Shepherd!

2- As a Leader on the way of righteousness: (3 B – 4). As the flock may go on crooked ways, that would blemish the name of the Good

Shepherd; The promises and the holy will of the Shepherd would be realized through His care and protection, revealed by the psalmist; through which God proclaims Himself.

3- As a Friend and Host: (5 – 6). He set a family banquet, in which He present His own body a sacrifice, to satisfy me, and to grant me joy and gladness of heart.

MY SHEPHERD:

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" (1)

The Eastern countries used to call their rulers and kings "Shepherds".

When the Holy Book calls God: “our Lord”, “our King”, “our Creator”, etc., We usually feel His might, power, and glory, in fear and trembling. ... But when it calls Him “the Shepherd”, we rather taste His sweetness, gentleness, comfort, and His care for us; the same feeling we have when we call Him “Our Father”.

I shall no doubt, not want; For He Himself will be my food, drink, clothing, protection, peace, and all my help for a life full of joy. His presence, Grantor of graces in my heart, would grant me satisfaction and satiety.

Receiving the Lord as his Shepherd, to become a member of His flock, the Catechumen (who seeks baptism), partakes of His body and shed blood. ... What more would he ask for? ... The believer needs nothing more than he finds in Christ; or, in other words, He needs the Lord Christ Himself.

Those were how St. Ambrose felt, while seeing the church on the eve of the feast of the resurrection, like heaven, with the rows of Catechumen who gained the Spirit of adoption, hastening to join the rows of believers, praising and singing, on their way to the divine banquet, to enjoy what the angels would covet to see!

+ One lamb, You have borne upon Your shoulders – our human nature.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

In a sure language David says: “*The Lord is my Shepherd*”. He, who became a lamb to dwell among us, as one of us. Yet, in His limitless love, He is committed to care for us, if we unite with Him to become lambs and not wolves; as He is the Shepherd of lambs and not of wolves. With His precious blood, He paid the price of our acceptance of His care; ... By Him we become His beloved flock, on which He is the watching Shepherd.

Telling us about the exalted care of God, a perpetual, whole, and articulate care, that embraces everything, even the hair on our heads; And that for our sake, God cares even for the irrational creation, the scholar Origen says:

- + He cares for us on a daily basis, generally and personally, in ways hidden and manifest; even though we may not be aware of it.

- + With a firm and abiding doctrine, we confess that God cares for the mortal things; and that everything in heaven and on earth are under His care.

- + The divine care prevails upon the rational creation first; but it embraces, as well, the irrational creation, for the benefit of man.

- + Nothing haphazard happen in the life of men, but with an exalted and reckoned goal, that even includes the hair on their heads (Matthew 10: 3). It is not something that only concerns the saints, as some may think, but includes the entire mankind. The divine care include even the two sparrows that are sold for a copper coin (Matthew 10: 29); whether we understand that parable in a spiritual or symbolic way.

(The scholar Origen)

Now! What will the Shepherd present to us?

1- *“He makes me to lie down in green pastures”* (1)

He leads the Catechumen to these pastures, where they get prepared to gain baptism. And getting the Spirit of adoption, their souls are daily fed from the pasture of the Word of God that would never dry up; This pasture is the gospel of our salvation, which brings us back to the true paradise. There, the Lamb feeds

(which is an animal that eats a lot, then regurgitates what it ate to re-chew the cud).

- + The green pastures are the paradise from which we have fallen; then led back to it by the Lord Christ, through the “*still water*”, namely, Baptism.

(St. Cyril the Great)

The green pastures are not outer blessings, but rather an enjoyment of the dwelling, together with the Lord Christ in us, to grant us the ‘nature of satisfaction’ in our depths, to be in need of nothing. The richest of the rich could be the poorest, if he is denied the dwelling of the Shepherd inside him, and if feels an inner void that the whole world cannot fill. While the poorest believer could be the richest, having the Lord Christ, Himself, his own possession, from whose hands he receives the feeling of satisfaction and satiety; beside his joy to share with the Lord His poverty, hoping to share with Him His glory.

For our sake the Lord Christ became poor, so that by Him we would be rich. Yet, in His poverty He was never in need, but performed miracles and wonders for the sake of the comfort of His beloved, and not for His own comfort or glory. By such a spirit, every Christian should walk, bound to his Christ, being a member in His body.

Our Christ grants us His life as a pasture that will never dry up. Our earthly parents may die at any moment, whereas our Good Shepherd will never die.

2- “*He leads me beside the still waters*” (2)

After getting plenty to eat, the flock are led by the Shepherd to a stream of water, or to a fountain flowing with renewable fresh water, to drink and quench their thirst and revive their souls. Yet the flock cannot go to these fountains of water by themselves, but need the leadership of the Shepherd to provide His flock with their needs.

What is "*the still water?*" The temple was called "*a house of rest*" for the ark of the covenant (1 Chronicles 28: 2), or its "*resting place*" (Psalm 132: 8, 14). "*The still water*" (2) would, therefore, refer to God the Shepherd who receives the psalmist in His own house to water him and grant him comfort.

Baptism is without doubt the "*still water*" or (the water of comfort) that lifts up the burden of sin; as according to St. Augustine: [He leads us to the water of Baptism, where he sets us, and cares for us; ... the waters that grant health and strength to him who has lost them]. And according to St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa: [In this water we find our comfort]; where we are buried together with Christ in the likeness of His death.... Yet, we do not enter into death, but into the "*shadow of death*" (3).

There is also water which we put in the (font) of our souls, water taken from the "fleece" mentioned in the book of Judges (6: 37); and the water mentioned in psalm 23: 2; namely, the waters of the message of heaven.

I wish this water, O Lord Jesus, would come to my soul and my body, so that through it, the valleys of my mind, and the pastures of my heart, would become green. ... I wish drops of Your waters would come on me to grant me grace and eternity.

Cleanse the steps of my mind, so as not to sin against You. ... Cleanse the depths of my soul, to be able to wipe off the curse, and not to suffer the strike of the serpent (Genesis 3: 15) in the heel of my soul; For you commanded those

who follow You to trample with their feet on serpents and scorpions (Luke 10: 19). ... You, who have redeemed the world, redeem the soul of one sinner!

(St. Ambrose)

3- ***“He leads me in the paths of righteousness”*** (3)

While going from one pasture to another, He leads me, crossing over barren wild wilderness: He keeps me from falling into crevices that would probably break my legs; and keeps me from falling among thorns and thistles; doing all that for the sake of His name, for us being His body.

What are *“the paths of righteousness”*, but the righteousness of Christ; ... He leads me to Himself, being *“The Way”*; He draws me by the chords of His divine love; and grants me the fellowship of His nature: the holiness, purity, love, humility, etc.

Our Christ is the secure *” paths of righteousness”*, who carries us by His Holy Spirit to the bosom of the Father, without being harmed on the way, or being in need of anything; but to grow in grace and wisdom.

+ The growth in wisdom is got by those who seek their salvation; their desire would be realized through understanding the Truth in the divine Word, and their walk in the true Righteousness. This leads us to perceive how Christ is *“The Way”*.

On this path, we take with us no food nor garment; we carry no staff, nor wear sandals on our feet (Matthew 10: 10); For the path satisfies all the needs of our journey. Whoever walks on it would need nothing;... would be clothed in an attire befitting of the wedding; would encounter nothing to disturb him; As according to Solomon the Sage, he will find no

trace of a serpent on a rock” (Proverbs 30: 19); And I add that, finding no trace of a vicious wild animal; hence he is in no need to carry a staff to defend himself. ... On account of being solid, this way is called the “*Rock*”.

(The scholar Origen)

- + It is the good path that leads the good man to the Good Father! it leads “*a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things*” (Matthew 12: 35); It leads the good faithful servant.

As this path is narrow, not many of those who love their bodies endure to walk in it.

(The scholar Origen)

Our Holy Christ is “The Way”, set upon the sanctification of our souls. In the Holy Book, sanctification appear to be the foundation for salvation. He who dreams that he is capable of entering into heaven without the purity of heart, the righteousness of life, and the sanctification of the body, would die in this fantasy, to wake up finding himself in eternal shame and disgrace.

4- “*Yeah, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me*” (4)

We enter together with Christ in His death with no fear, for He is with us ... And we joyfully perpetually experience the death with Christ, if we practice the Sacrament of repentance and confession in its true conception; namely, by delivering our soul within the hands of the Holy Spirit, who rebukes us and brings us back to the paths of righteousness for the sake of His name.

What is the meaning of “the shadow of death”?

a- As death is the worst evil in the sight of men, “*the shadow of death*” refers to the time of great sorrow, darkness, and temptations; Or it could mean suffering from troubles. Yet the troubles, however intense they are, would never stop our walk toward eternity, terrify us, or destroy our hope by fear, as long as we enjoy the company of the Savior.

Here, the psalmist’s talk is amazingly articulate. He is going steady, and would not cease his perpetual steady progress along the royal path, however strong the tribulations are. Walking in a ‘valley’, and not on the tops of mountains he, and the believer feel a kind of peace and security.

It is called “*the valley of the shadow of death*”, and not ‘the valley of death’, as the authority of death is no more.

Finally, what preoccupies the heart of the believer is the company of God, or the divine presence, as a deposit of the encounter with God, face to face, after passing through the temporal life.

b- The psalmist’s talk refers to some kind of coalition between the believer and death itself; he does not fear death, but enters with it into a sort of coalition or a covenant, that through it, he crosses over to the eternal life; he counts it a way to enjoy the life to come.

c- “*The shadow of death*” refers to our fellowship in the death of Christ; receiving it with joy, to gain the power and glory of the resurrection. By saying, “*Though I walk*”, he means the behavior of the believer or the procession of his life as a short period. The Lord

Christ, the Good Shepherd, Himself, walked in “*the shadow of death*” in the days of His incarnation, and even entered into the grave, itself, so that we would accept to walk together with Him along the same path.

+ As the Lord walked in “*the valley of the shadow of death*”, where the souls of the dead were; Yet, He resurrected in the body again, and then ascended by it to heaven; It is obvious that the souls of His disciples, for whose sake the Lord has suffered, will set forth, as well, to the same hidden place assigned for them by the Lord; there to remain up to the day of resurrection, when they receive their bodies once again, and rise whole – body and soul – like the Lord, to come to the presence of God.

(St. Erinaos)

+ We perpetually carry in our bodies the death of the Lord Jesus, to reap the immediate profit: “*that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh*” (2 Corinthians 4: 11).

(The scholar Origen)

5- “***Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me***” (4)

The rod is for leadership and defense; Whereas the staff is for support.

According to St. Clement of Alexandria, it is “*the rod of strength sent by the Lord out of Zion*” (Psalm 110: 2); the rod of the strength of teaching, sanctifying, instructing, and saving.

+ How can wisdom save the soul of a young man from death? ... She counsels his father, saying: “*If you beat him with a rod, he will*

not die" (Proverb 23: 13). According to the great David, that rod comforts and does not wound.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

St. Ambrose sees the Good Shepherd who leads us by His rod, and supports us by His staff; the seal of His cross which we received in the Sacrament of 'Meron', granting us the anointment of the 'Paraclete' (the Comforter), terrifying to the demons.

In the Near East, the Shepherd usually has the following:

a- A simple attire he usually puts on while working (different from that for social situations) ... This simple attire refers to the

Lord Christ, "*emptying Himself from His glory*" (Philippians 2: 7), to carry our human nature, and to take upon Himself the form of a servant, in order to bring us – the servants – forth to the fellowship of His glory.

b- A rod, he uses to protect the flock against the serpents and the wild beasts; which refers to the cross of the Lord of glory, by which He destroyed the authority of the devil, killed the sin, and corrupted the dominion of death.

c- A staff on which he supports himself; and by which he may take hold of a runaway sheep; referring to the Savior instructing His believers by the firm, yet compassionate staff of fatherhood.

d- A vessel of oil, to soothe the wounds of his sheep; referring to the holy Anointment.

e- A flute on which he plays, to proclaim his gladness in his shepherding work; referring to the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ, praised by the soul and the body, as though on a harp of love.

f- A knife he may use if necessary; referring to the work of the Holy Spirit who separates good from evil.

“Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”

Reigning upon His people with His cross, as though with the rod of His kingdom, the psalmist trusts completely in the leadership of the divine Shepherd, even if He leads him across the dangerous mountain paths.

6- *“You prepare a table for me before the presence of my enemies” (5)*

The psalmist probably means that God, who cares for us, seeing our enemy standing against us, He, by Himself, prepares a table for us to eat without haste, confusion, or disturbance; to enjoy without fear from the enemy lying in wait for us.... Being His beloved own, He grants us peace and satiety in the midst of the spiritual battle, ... In His love He, by Himself, presents the table to us, after washing our feet together with His disciples’.

The Shepherd who granted His people a victorious exodus, prepared for them a table (of Manna) while on their journey in the wilderness. The enemies who attempted to disturb the journey toward the divine dwelling place, were brought to shame when they saw the exalted grace presented by God to His people.

In the book of psalms, thanksgiving is usually followed or accompanied by a sacrificial meal, or a holy table (Psalm 22: 26; 63: 6); or sacrifices (Psalm 55: 13 etc.; 116: 17 etc.).... As the enemies of David were probably going around in the temple, while he was offering his thanksgiving sacrifice to God, he uttered this verse: *“You prepared a table for me before the presence of my enemies”*

Our Lord Jesus Christ grants us the table of His body and shed blood, that puts to shame the adversary enemies. The presence of the devil would never disturb us, nor deny us the enjoyment of His holy banquet.

- + When man says to God: “*You prepare a table for me*”, he refers to the spiritual sacramental table prepared by God for us “before the presence of the unclean spirits”. Yes indeed, for (the table of the demons) is mixing with them; Whereas “the table of the Lord” is a fellowship with Him.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- + The devil trembles for fear before those who reverently partake of the sacramental table, presenting the body of the Lord, who supports us before our own lusts, and the presence of the devil.

(St. Cyril of Alexandria)

7- “*You anoint my head with oil*” (5)

Anointing with oil refers to a personal relationship between the shepherd and his flock; as well as to a state of joy and satiety. In the old days, those in grief, used to cover themselves with dust and ashes; and in joy, they used to wash up and anoint themselves with oil (Job 2: 12; 42: 16; 2 Samuel 12: 20). And anointing the guests with oil was a common sign of honor and hospitality (Psalm 92: 10; Amos 6: 6; Mathew 6: 17; Luke 7: 38, 46). It is as though the psalmist says to his Divine Shepherd: [You are treating me as a guest who has the privilege of attending the banquet You prepared for me]. Aaron was anointed as High Priest during the journey in the wilderness, when God, the Shepherd was leading His people toward the promised land. By that anointment, God proclaimed His divine care, by receiving man, through priesthood, as His own portion; and presenting Himself a portion to man.

Now, in the Sacrament of 'Meron', every believer is anointed as a general priest, to become the possession of God, and to receive God as his own possession and portion. Through this anointment, he receives from the hands of God, the Spirit of joy and gladness, by the work of the Holy Spirit in him, by the proclamation of the gospel of Christ as good news, working every day in his life; and as a continuous renewal and perpetual sanctification of the inner man, and of all the body members to the account of the kingdom of God.

+ By oil, you were anointed on the forehead; for the seal which you received was from God, engraved by the holiness of God.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

8- "*My cup runs over*" (5)

Cups were used to care for the sheep. Such a cup was a hollow concave piece of rock about 30 inches long, 18 inches wide, and 18 inches high, of which many were discovered at the sites of old wells in the wilderness of Judah. The shepherd used to fill the cup with water from the well until it runs over, then let his sheep drink from it, while continuously pouring water, By doing this he is sure that the water is always cold, and plenty enough for his flock of sheep. That is probably what the Hebrew text of the verse: "*My cup runs over*" means. That cup of perpetually renewed water, probably refers to the mercies of our Shepherd, new every morning, loading us with benefits (Lamentation 3: 23; Psalm 68: 19)

He who receives God's mercies and new benefits every morning, would flow with thanksgiving and praise, even if his possessions are no more than a morsel of dry bread; Otherwise, he who does not receive these blessings, even though he may acquire the whole world within his hands, his cup would be cracked and holds no water.

According to the Septuagint version, this verse came as: "How glorious is Your cup of wine!". The wine that brings joy to the heart of man, is a symbol of the presence of the Spirit of God, Grantor of grace, who revives the soul of the believer, and moves it toward heaven. The Spirit flowed upon the disciples; namely upon the church on the day of the Pentecost, her cup ran over; and the Jews thought that "*they (the apostles) were full of new wine*"; namely drunk (Acts 2: 13).

- + The Lord's cup would make us forget about the temporal things, and lead our souls to the spiritual wisdom ... It would set the soul free of grief, and grant her comfort, present to her the joy of the divine goodness, instead of the dark depression of the heart, caused by the burden of sin.

(St. Cyprian)

- 9- Finally, we enjoy these divine blessings, and the holy Sacraments in the house of the Lord, to sing together with the psalmist, "***I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever***" (6).

Does the lamb live in the house of the shepherd? ... Yes, ... When the prophet Nathan rebuked David on his sin, he presented to him a parable of "*a poor man who had nothing except a little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished, and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup, and laid in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him*". (2 Samuel 12: 1-3). ... Our divine Shepherd has acquired us, received us like an only begotten daughter, and set for us a dwelling place in His house, in order to follow Him wherever He goes.

Here, the psalmist proclaims that he dwells in the house of his Shepherd -- the church -- the icon and the deposit of His eternal heavenly kingdom. There, the

believer finds his gladness to worship, minister, and dwell with His beloved Lord in the church, as though in His heavens forever. The goal of the Lord's care for us is to make us abide together with Him in His divine Sanctuary.

PSALM 24

THE LORD OF GLORY ENTERS INTO HIS SANCTUARY

Seeing, how the Lord has created the world and all what are in it for his sake, and watching the procession of the King of glory, ascending to His heavenly Sanctuary, the believer's soul dissolves with love, and his heart kindles with a higher fire, longing to join this unique procession, to cross over through the opened-up gates of heaven, together with his Savior, to the bosom of the Father.

It is the psalm of the glorious love. By love, God created everything for the sake of man; By love, He grants him the holiness, to join the procession of the Holy One; And by love, man would be brought up to heaven, opened-up by the conquest of the cross. ... In other words, the true believer would see his enjoyment and the exultation of his soul in God, being the Holy Creator, the Grantor of conquest.

The occasion of the psalm:

- 1- According to some, this royal, liturgical (worshipping) psalm, was sung on the occasion of bringing the ark of God up from the house of Obed Edom to Mount Zion (2 Samuel 6: 12 – 17). And according to the Jewish Historian Josephus, seven choirs of singers and musicians preceded the procession of the ark, singing this psalm in a marvelous way. The procession of the ark, representing the divine presence, or the Savior King of glory, crossing over from the domain of the king's authority, to ascend up to the holy city of God on the tops of the high mountains.

- 2- According to others, David wrote this praise to be sung on the occasion of the dedication of the temple, which he, by the spirit of prophecy knew that his son Solomon was going to build.

- 3- And according to a third party, this psalm was not written by David; but it was a song of conquest sung by those returning victorious from a battle; ascending to the temple of God, to glorify the ark of the covenant, the Grantor of conquest; the way the Romans used to do in their capital.

Its relationship to the two preceding psalms:

There is a kind of integrity between psalms 22, 23, and 24. Psalm 22 proclaims the Messiah, the suffering Savior.... Psalm 23 proclaims Him as the Good Shepherd, through whose salvation work, He brings His flock forth to paradise, the green pastures, to enjoy the waters of comfort, and to dwell together with the Lord forever... Whereas psalm 24 talks about the glorified King, who does not stop at having His people dwelling together with Him, or He dwelling in their midst, but brings them forth in a holy procession, through the open gates of heaven; up to His eternal heavenly glories, to enjoy the bosom of the Father.

In other words, psalm 22 is the praise of the Golgotha; ... Psalm 23 is the praise of the redeemed church; ... And psalm 24 is the praise of the open heaven. According to tradition in our Orthodox church,, this psalm is sung in the feasts of resurrection and ascension. In the liturgy of the feast of resurrection, the priest and the deacons enter into a debate taken from this psalm, to proclaim the glory of the risen Christ, His conquest over death, and His ability to lift us up together with Him to His glory.

The reader may notice some analogy between this psalm and psalm 15, despite the difference in the rites of worship; and the two psalms were probably used in the ministry of the temple at the same time.

Its Messianic interpretation:

This psalm includes a prophecy concerning the ascension of our Greater High Priest to the court of the heavenly Zion, and to the glory of His kingdom. It is as though, bringing the ark of God up to the house of God (the tabernacle of meeting, or the temple), was a symbol of the ascension of the Lord Christ up to heaven, and our own ascension in Him, being holy members in His body.

The psalm begins by proclaiming the kingdom of the Lord over the whole creation (1 – 2); Then it reveals our ascension to the Sanctuary of the Lord (3 – 6); And finally the ascension of the Lord Christ to heaven (7 – 10). In other words, the King came down to our world to reign through the cross, sanctifies our life, granting us the worthiness to enter into His Sanctuary. By His ascension, He raised us up to His heavens, commanding the whole heavenly choirs to open the gates of heaven before men. Here, the Savior appears as a Warrior King; on account of that our entrance into heaven needs conquest over our spiritual enemies. Hence, the Lord is called here: “The King of glory”, “the Lord of Sabaoth; namely, the Lord of hosts”.(10)

According to some, the order of the rite of singing this psalm, during the entrance into the temple, was probably as such:

- a- In the procession: The visitors, or the choir of the procession, while still being outside the temple, on their way to it sing the first part (verses 1 and 2); which represents the praise of the visitors, celebrating the greatness of God the Creator.

- b- A debate between the leader of the group and the guard of the gate
 - The leader of the group (3): enquires about the features required for those who ascend up to the house of the Lord.
 - The guard of the gate (4 – 5): answers the question by presenting the spiritual features befitting to those who desire the enjoyment of the blessings of the fellowship with God in His holy house.

- The leader of the group (6): glorifies those who enjoy the blessings of the Lord, and the grace of salvation.
- c- The praise of the choirs before their entrance into the temple: proclaiming God as the King. They probably meant that they came as a royal procession, glorifying God the true King, by their life, and their hidden and manifest behavior ... In their visit and their entrance into the temple, they concentrate only on God.
- The choir of the procession (7) seek the opening of the everlasting doors, not for their own sake, but for that of the King of glory, being His procession
 - The choir of the temple (a voice from the inside of the doors), say: "*Who is the King of glory?*"
 - The choir of the procession answer; "*The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle*"; who entered the battle even to Hades, is risen; and now, He ascends together with His spoil to His heavens.
 - The choir of the temple (10) again repeat their question: "*Who is this King of glory?*"
 - The procession of the Levites (10): answer: "*The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory*"

So the magnificent debate reveals the longing of those hidden in the victorious Christ, to ascend together with Him through the everlasting doors; and the heaven itself marvel before the salvation work of the Lord of glory, that granted humanity such unutterable things

The title:

According to the Septuagint version it is "For the first day of the week"; Namely, to be sung on the first day after the Sabbath; which was actually the case.

- + “A psalm of David himself on the first day of the week”; glorifying the Lord, and His resurrection that occurred early on the first day of the week; hence is known as “the day of the Lord”.

(St. Augustine)

Its general frame:

- 1- The creator of all 1 – 2
- 2- The King, the Whole in holiness 3 – 6
- 3- The glorious and conqueror King 7 – 10

1- THE CREATOR OF ALL: (1 – 2)

“The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness; the world and those who dwell thereon. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters” (1, 2).

Verses 1 and 2 talk about the Might of the Lord in creating the world, being the Creator, the King, and the Judge. Creation, in the Old Testament, is considered the foundation of God’s authority upon the whole world, namely, a collective authority (Psalm 24; 74: 16; 89: 11 etc.; 95: 4 etc.; 1 Samuel 2: 8).

God – by Whom everything was – seeks His right in the whole creation, not to submit, but to embrace all to Him and to renew their creation, so that by love, He would reign upon the whole world. The day of His enthronement by the cross has come, *“to take the nations for His inheritance, and the ends of the earth for His possession”* (Psalm 2: 8).

When David brought the ark of the covenant up with a glorious procession, praises, and joy; his mind, by the spirit of prophecy, raised up to see the church of the new covenant,

embracing all the nations, peoples, and tongues; and to see the new world or the new earth, where the Lord Himself dwells, he sang, saying: "*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness*" (1).

The psalmist presents to us an elaborate portrait of the holy church, as follows:

a- The church is where God dwells in the midst of His people:

"*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness*". The church that exists here on earth is the church of God, all its righteousness and holiness are from the Lord.

The believers confess that, even the earth itself on which they walk, is the earth of their Lord and Savior, and is not theirs. The Lord has the right of authority and royalty. ... The devil, on the other hand, although was called the prince of this world, yet, he has taken it by force, supported by his evil children; But as far as the believers are concerned, he has no right on the earth on which they walk; For God sanctifies their whole life, their clothes, and even their shadow. Ailments were healed by the handkerchiefs or aprons of St. Paul; and the evil spirits were driven out by the shadow of St. Peter, passing by on their followers (Acts 19: 12). The children of God perceive that "*whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they do all to the glory of God*" (1 Corinthians 10: 25 - 31); for He reigns on all.

The earth is also a symbol of our body from which it is created; It is therefore, the possession of God, who sanctifies our earth (our body) with all its senses, emotions, and energies, as good things given by Him.

+ The Holy Book says: "*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness*". By this it teaches us that all good things are from God, presented to mankind by His divine power and might, and distributed by Him to support man.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

According to the psalmist: *"The heavens, even the heavens, are the Lord's. But the earth He has given to the children of men"* (Psalm 115: 16). He granted us the earth to reign on it as kings and stewards of God. But having lost our authority and honor, He came down to reign on the whole earth, to mend our ways on it, and to make us kings again (Revelation 1: 6).

Having become earth through sin, Our Lord came to reign upon us, and to dwell in us as His own world, in order to turn us from earth to heaven.

Reigning on the hearts, the Lord Christ would never share His kingdom with any other king. He asks us to present to Him the fullness of our life, being his own possession; For, on His side, He longs to grant us His life.

b- The members of the church are from all nations of the world: (1)

As it was not possible for the Jews to accept the idea of the church open before the Gentiles, they got offended when the Lord said to them: *"Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land, but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian"* (Luke 4: 25, 26). And they were also offended when St. Paul declared before them that the Lord sent him to the Gentiles; and that *"In Jesus Christ there is no Jew or a Gentile"* (Romans 3: 29).

- + All men are the possession of God, for “*The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness*” (1). That is why St. Paul the apostle says in his epistle to the Romans: “*There is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resist the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves*” (Romans 3: 1, 2).

(St. Erinaos)

- + Christ is not confined to one place.

(St. Jerome)

- + A believer is not judged according to his place of residence, whether here or there, but according to the worthiness of his faith.

(St. Jerome)

c- The church is founded upon the water of baptism (1):

The psalmist says:

“*For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters*” (2).

At the beginning of creation, “*the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters*” (Genesis 1: 2), to create everything for the sake of His beloved man, to enjoy the earth and all its possibilities. And in the New Covenant, the Lord founds His church as a new creation established upon the seas of baptism, which embraced the new earth from the whole world.

d- A holy church (3 – 6)

e- A victorious heavenly church (7 – 10)

2- THE KING, THE WHOLE IN HOLINESS: (3 – 6)

The Lord, Creator of the whole world, presents His life delivered for the sake of the salvation of the whole world, according to the words of the apostle St. John: "*He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world*" (1 John 2: 2). He adds to His body, members from all nations, peoples, and tongues, through faith in Him, gaining son-ship in the water of baptism. Now, proclaiming God, "*the Whole in holiness*", the psalmist reveals the commitment of the church and everyone of its members, to live in the holy life befitting of the Holy Groom of the soul.

"Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place?" (3)

The church is lifted up as though on the Hill (The Heavenly and Righteous Lord Christ), being the holy body of the Holy One.

+ "*Who may ascend to the top of the hill of the righteousness of God?*", or "*Who may stand in His holy place?*". When we reach that holy place, founded upon the seas and established upon the rivers, Who can hold this foundation fast?

(St. Augustine)

The church life is a state of continuous ascension, which knows no stopping nor going down. With each day, the believer enjoys an experience of fellowship with the Lord Christ, the Holy Hill, in whom we rise up by the Holy Spirit, and enjoy the heights of glory.

We have not yet reached the summit, where we would enjoy the perfect image of the Lord Christ, conformed in our depths, and proclaimed in our practical life; But we surely hope to keep perpetually ascending.

The enjoyment of the evangelic church life, is a divine grace for no favor on our part; and the abidance and perpetual growth in it, is the work of the Spirit of God dwelling in it; Hence the psalmist says: "*Who may stand in His holy place?*"; namely, *Who can hold his position there?*

The law cannot hold us fast in the fellowship with God, nor even help us to approach Him; But it is the rich grace of God that qualifies us to exist in the divine presence. The Holy Spirit of God who carry us forth to the waters of baptism to gain the son-ship of God, and who sanctifies our members by the holy anointment, grants us the tears of repentance, as a perpetual cleansing of our sins, and purification of our depths. And He, Himself, grants us through the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the abidance in Christ, by having communion in His body and blood delivered for our sake. The Spirit of God grants us the spiritual fruit that brings joy to the soul in God, and opens up the heart wide by love to embrace the whole humanity, and to sanctify man completely.

The church, being "*a holy place*" (3), her members are committed to purity (4), not think in vanity (4), but in heavenly things, and to love one another. For without holiness, no one can see the Lord; And without purity, there would be no church!

Sheep are no goats; even if they mix with goats. God Knows how to separate between the saints and the wicked.

The holiness of the church is expressed by their works beside their inner feelings and will; Hence the psalmist says:

“He who has clean hands (the works), and a pure heart” (4)

This touches our relationship with God, with our brethren, and with ourselves.

“He who did not lift up his soul in what is vain, nor swore deceitfully” (4)

In the Holy Book, he is counted to have clean hands, he who has not defiled them with blood, violence, bribes, or dirty profit, in any way against God or men. Hands are tools to realize works, but, as it is the heart that moves them; hence it has to be pure.

Clean hands do not imply just the apparent act of washing them, lest *“we would be making the outside of the cup and dish clean, but the inward part is full of greed and wickedness”* (Luke 11: 39); Nor implies washing the hands as done by Pontius Pilate during the trial of the Lord Christ.

The purity of hands confirms our concept of the true faith. *“Faith working through love”* (Galatians 5: 6)

“Who did not lift up his soul to what is vain”; It is befitting of he who wish to ascend to the house of the Lord, or to enjoy the fellowship with the Holy God, not to lift up his soul to what is vain; namely, not to preoccupy Himself with the vain pleasures of this world, but to have his soul drawn to the heavenlies, to the everlasting joys.

“Nor swore deceitfully”. A sign of the holy life in the true Christ, is that the mere word of the believer should be stronger and sounder than any

vow; That he utters the truth, on account of that he is united with the true Christ, and has become a son of the truth. But he who is bound to the liar devil, and the father of lies (John 8: 44), utters lies, even after he vows to tell the truth.

Now, what are the fruits of this holy church life?

“He shall receive blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face” (5, 6)

The believers who walk in a holy life *“will ascend to the hill of the Lord, and stand in His holy place”*; ... will start by the Spirit, and will not consummate by the body, but will be enflamed, and will grow by the Spirit.

“They shall receive blessing from the Lord”; For they do not ascend to give, but to take. If they offer sacrifices, they are actually from the Lord, from what He has given them ... But they will gain the Lord Christ Himself, their righteousness, joy, satiety of their souls, and everlasting glory.

They will gain mercy from God their Savior, to experience the mercy through the salvation work of God; will enjoy God as their Savior; who will not only forgive them their sins; but they will receive Him, personally, as their glory.

The believers will count themselves *“a generation of those who seek the Lord, who seek the face of Jacob’s God”* ... By their ascension to the hill of the Lord, they will become more thirsty toward God, and will seek Him, not for the sake of His gifts, but to see Him face to face.

According to St. Augustine: [They seek the face of God who gave the first-birth right to the younger son (Jacob) (Genesis 25: 23)]. Namely, we

seek the face of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, while we are still young, made us a church of the firstborns who have the right of everlasting inheritance.

And according to St. Clement of Alexandria, If David made it clear that God is his Savior ; who was called "*the Face of Jacob*", for "*He is the image of the Person of the Father*" (Hebrew 1: 3); He who proclaimed the truth concerning the Father; He made it clear that the Mighty One is the One and the Only God, the Father "*whom no one knows except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him*" (Matthew 11: 27)

3- THE GLORIOUS AND CONQUEROR KING: (7 – 10)

Having presented God, as the "*Creator of all*" (1, 2); "*The King, the Whole in holiness*" (3 – 6), the psalmist presents Him as the "*Glorious and Conqueror King*", Before whom the everlasting doors are opened (7 – 10).

"Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in" (7)

It so seems that David, having decided to bring forth the ark of God up to Mount Zion, and having seen by the eye of prophecy, the Lord who became Man, ascending to His heavens -- the eternal Zion, he used a military language to welcome the Lord in His conquest; quoting an early tradition, that the Lord is a Warrior King who conquered the enemies of His people; brought His people safely out of the bondage of Pharaoh, crossed with them over the wilderness (Numbers 10: 35-36), and brought them forth into the promised land. The book of Revelation, presents to us in more than one location, a magnificent portrayal of the Savior as the Conqueror, who grants victory to His people:

“And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer” (Revelation 6: 2).

“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself; ... And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses” (Revelation 16: 11 – 14).

The Word of God incarnated to enter into our world as a Warrior, to fight in our name and to our account; and was a conqueror in all His battles. the battle of the cross; He made the enemy of no reputation, and destroyed his dominion; And the climax of His victory was declared by His resurrection and ascension to heaven; to which the King of Glory set forth carrying us in Him.

According to St. Augustine, In this psalm, the psalmist refers to the ascension of the Savior in the body to heaven; and to that the angels accompanying Him, call on the heavenly hosts, the officers on the doors of heaven, to open up those heavenly gates for the King of Glory to come in; the gates that open up to eternity.

By the ascension of the Lord Christ, the heavenly gates were opened before the believers; For their Heavenly Head ascended, and where the Head is, the body will also be.

Lift up your heads , O you gates, and lift them up, you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in” (9)

As the gates of the temple would never be called “*the everlasting doors*”, we have to search for a concept more exalted than the mere ascension of the ark of covenant up to Mount Zion; For the language of the prophet exalts to what is greater than what we find on earth. He crossed over with his mind to the things that the ark of the covenant, the

tabernacle of meeting, and the temple, were provided as shadows thereof. If those things were symbols of the Lord Christ, the ascension of the ark of covenant to Mount Zion, would be a faint shadow symbolizing the ascension of the Lord Christ, the Lord of Glory, up to where He will receive those before whom the heavens will open their everlasting doors.

- + The Lord Christ closed shut the doors of death, and opened the heavens for Himself; realizing His divine promise: *“Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”* (John 16: 33). The price was completely paid, when the Lord wrestled against death, and conquered it.

“Lift up your heads, O you gates”; The gates of the everlasting justice, love, and compassion, where the soul is united with the One and the Only true God; and refuses to practice the worship of adultery to those several false gods.

“And the Lord of glory shall come in”. Yes, the King of glory will come in, He who sits on the right hand of the Father, interceding for our sake.

(St. Augustine)

- + The gates were never closed before Him (the Lord Christ), the Lord and Creator of all; but that was written for our sake, before whom the door of paradise was closed shut. Therefore, through the body relationship, because of the body He has taken by incarnation, it was said: *“Lift up your heads, O gates”*, as though He would come in like any man; But, concerning His Godhead, it was said: *“The Word was God”*; the Lord, and the King of glory.
- + The gates lifted up their heads to see Him *“He who comes from Edom”* (Isaiah 63: 1)
- + The Word was not in need for the gates to be opened; as, being the Lord of all, nothing can stand in His way; but it is us who are in such a need. He carried our

body; delivered His body to death on our behalf, and by it He, again, paved for us the way to heaven.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + The Groom says: If you wish for the doors to be opened before you; and for the doors of your soul to be lifted up for the Lord of glory to come in, You are committed to receive My longing in your soul; according to the words of the Evangelist, saying: "*Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven, is My brother, and sister, and mother*" (Matthew 12: 50). It is befitting of you to approach the truth, and to become His fellow, so as not to separate from Him.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

- + It was written about Him, that "*He lay down and slept, and awoke, for the Lord sustained him*" (Psalm 3: 5). He, who commands the rulers in heaven to open up the everlasting gates for the Lord of glory to come in; proclaiming ahead of time His resurrection from the dead, and His reception in heaven.

(St. Erinaos)

"Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts; He is the King of glory" (10)

This marvelous debate proclaimed in this psalm reveals that no one could pass through the everlasting gates, and enters the heavenly sanctuaries, except the Mighty Lord, the Lord of host, the King of Glory. Before Him alone, the everlasting gates of the heavenly city would open up; the gates of the temple, not made by human hands; the Savior Jehovah, "*the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords*" (Revelation 19: 16); the Mighty in wars; the unconquerable Prince of salvation.

“*The Lord of Sabaoth*”; a glorious title concerning only the Lord, came twice in the New Testament (Romans 9: 29; James 5: 4).

AN INSPIRATION FRPM CHAPTER 24

THE OPEN DOORS

- + Open up the doors of my heart, to come in and reign; You who open the gates of heaven before me;

- + O Holy One, sanctify me by Your Spirit;
Qualify me to dwell in the mountain of Your sanctuary;
And stand in our holy place.

- + You who ascend to Your heavens, lift my heart up to the throne of Your grace;
Receive me in the procession of Your victory, to cross over, with and by You, the everlasting doors.

- + O Lord of Sabaoth, the Lord of Gory;
Pour Your splendor over my soul;
To become a queen, and fit for royalty (Ezekiel 16)

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PSALM 25

GOD, OUR TEACHER

This is one of the alphabetically arranged psalms, every verse starts with a different letter of the Jewish alphabet which includes 22 letters. Yet, this alphabetical order is not perfect, for some disarrays appear in verses 2, 5, 18, and 29.

This psalm could be classified among the psalms of wisdom, or those of personal lamentations, particularly when man is sorrowful because of feeling solitude and persecution.

It is obvious that the prophet David wrote it during a late stage of his life; for he talks about the sins of his youth (7), and refers to the many tribulations that dwelt upon him, and to the multitude of enemies who stood against him. Some scholars believe that he wrote it when his son Absalom rebelled against him. Yet, according to those who refuse to refer it to David, disregarding what came in its title, it rather concerns the Babylonian captivity, and the complaint of the captives for the persecution of their enemies.

This psalm is considered a good example of the proper way of praying to God in our daily supplications, from which we should learn that:

- * The definition of a prayer (1, 15): A prayer is lifting up the soul and the eyes to God
- * What should we prayer for? To seek: the forgiveness of sins (6, 7, 18); to be directed to the way of commitment (4, 5); to have God's mercy (16); to be saved from our troubles and distress (17, 18); to be delivered from our enemies (20, 21); and to redeem the church of all its troubles (22).
- * How to supplicate to God in our prayers: Our trust in God (2, 3, 5, 20, 28); our bitterness, the oppression of our enemies against us

(17, 18); and our integrity and uprightness (21).

* What are the precious promises given to encourage us to pray? To instruct and guide us (8, 9, 12); The benefits of the covenant with God (10); the gladness of having a fellowship with Him (13, 14).

Christ, the Teacher:

Having its own feature, this psalm concentrates on the Lord Christ, as being the Teacher; and reveals to us the role of teaching in the believers' life. In the eyes of the suffering David, a teacher does not provide bare mental knowledge, but he first, and before anything else, be a father, a shepherd, a friend, and a physician.

Suffering from a feeling of desolation, David cries out, saying: "*Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted*" (16) ... a feeling of desolation, of need, and of self-depreciation.

Suffering from the remembrance of his sins, particularly those of his youth, he says: "*Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions*" (7).

Perceiving that he is surrounded by scoffing enemies, he says: "*Consider my enemies, for they are many, and they hate me with cruel hatred; ... let me not be ashamed*" (19, 20).

And In his personal bitterness, feeling, as well the bitterness of his people as a whole, he says: "*Redeem Israel, O God, out of all their troubles*" (22).

In other words, David was in need of the true Teacher, the Son of David, who, alone, can solve all his problems, and those of his people; for He is:

* A personal Teacher for every believer, in particular for the one who suffers; And a Teacher for the congregation as a whole, to save them from their afflictions.

* A satisfying Teacher, who take away from the soul her feeling of desolation, through dwelling in her; And deals with her feeling of poverty; as
He became poor to make her rich with Himself -- the Treasure of wisdom and knowledge.

* A Teacher who can forgive sins, and by His blood can cover transgressions.

* A strong Teacher, who strengthens the soul against the unseen spiritual enemies.

The guidance words (the key of the psalm):

1- This poem beside being a complaint, its main guidance words are: “**Show me Your ways, O Lord**”(4), the ways of God for which the psalmist supplicates, seeking to recognize and to walk according to it.

2- The other guidance words are: “**On You I wait all day**” (5); For those who proclaim the Lord as their Teacher, wait on Him to guide them to His royal paths.

According to St. Augustine: [Christ speaks here in the name of His church; for the context of this psalm rather applies upon the Christian people who have actually returned to God].

Its general frame:

1- The prayer and trust in God 1 - 3

2- The Lord is my Savior and Teacher 4 – 21

a- Who grants me knowledge

b- Who trains me on the truth

- c- Who presents to me the treasure of promises and covenants.
- d- Who forgives my sins
- e- Who holds me fast in goodness
- f- Who saves me from the concealed snares

1- THE PRAYER AND TRUST IN GOD: (1 – 3)

David defines prayer as lifting his soul, together with his hands, up to the Lord, the way he used to do; to have his soul pray together with his body, his heart together with his mind; to become like a dove that flies up to abide in the bosom of God. ... For he who lifts up his hands and eyes, and not his heart, will hear the rebuke by the Lord to the children of Israel: *“These people draw near to Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me”* (Isaiah 29: 13). A prayer is a journey of ascent, as though on the ladder of Jacob, for the soul to soar above all troubles and worries, to reach up the top of the ladder, and enjoy the bosom of God.

A prayer is not a duty, nor a formality we are committed to fulfill, but is setting the heart free of the dust, to rise up from glory to glory; Man remains with his body on earth, while his heart sets forth by the wings of the Holy Spirit, like a dove flying to the heavenly places.

By a prayer, the believer experiences every day that he is a sojourner on earth, living in afflictions, surrounded by enemies; yet exultant in the spirit, happy with the deposit of heaven, enjoying new goods in his fellowship with God.

+ A prayer is lifting the heart to God.

(Father John of Damascus)

+ A prayer is turning the hearts of flesh into spiritual hearts; the mortal hearts into zealous hearts; and the human hearts into heavenly hearts.

+ When you stand to pray, give your heart to God, your true heart by which you love your children, your father and mother, your friends; and by which you sense the sweetness of the unfeigned pure love.

(Father John of Cronstadt)

In every liturgy of the Eucharist, the priest seeks from the congregation to [Lift up their hearts]; to which they respond, saying: [They are with the Lord].

- + He first seeks from you: [Lift up your hearts]; as is befitting of members of the body of the Lord Christ.... Being members of Christ, Where is your Head? He is in heaven. ... Hence, when you hear the words: [Lift up your hearts], you answer: [They are lifted up to the Lord in heaven].

Lifting the hearts up to the Lord is a divine gift. ... Therefore, lest you may refer it to your strength, your worthiness, or your works, after saying: [They are lifted up to the Lord in heaven], the bishop or the ministering priest will say: [Let us thank the Lord]. ... Let us thank Him, for, unless He grants us His grace, our hearts would still be holding fast to the earth; to which you testify by saying: [Meet and Right]; Namely, [We thank Him who has lifted our hearts up to where our Head is].

(St. Augustine)

“To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me; Indeed, let no one who waits on you be ashamed;” (1, 2)

As the work of the enemy is to bring my soul down to the dust by the unclean lusts, and to divert it to the human weakness; I am in need of the divine help to lift up my soul.

The word “trust” was used at the beginning of the psalm; but the same tendency or spirit prevails on the whole psalm when he talks about God (5, 8-10, 14 etc.).

“*Waiting on God*”, means accepting His timing, and His wisdom; which distinguish David’s position from that of Saul toward God (1 Samuel 26:10 etc. 13: 8-14); and the position of Isaiah from that of the people (Isaiah 30: 15-18).

With the increase of our troubles, our trust in God increases; For dangers should take us away from ourselves, to seek the help of God. David’s conscience testifies to that he never trusted in himself, nor in anyone, but in the work of God; and he never was shaken nor ashamed by having such a trust.

“Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause” (3)

It is not the afflictions, but committing iniquity. that bring forth reproach and shame. Although David was in bitterness because of the persecution of the enemies, yet he was in glory, for he was leaning on the chest of God, his Savior; who has turned his affliction into an experience of fellowship with Him. The enemies on the other hand, who planned to kill David for no cause, namely, those who vainly committed iniquity; despite their possibilities and human authority, were put to shame.

If sin brings shame on us, By repentance God would restore for us our inner glory. In the Holy Book, no negative promise, more valuable and important, than that the people of God would never fall into shame or disgrace.

“*Let not my enemies triumph over me*”. David’s enemies used to ridicule him, counting him weak, and unable to get away from their hands.

- + Let them not gloat on me, those who set snares for me by their deadly venomous suggestions; those who, scoffing, cry out: “**xxxx xxxx**”, in an attempt to draw me to their ways; But, “*No one who waits on you will be ashamed*”.

(St. Augustine)

2- THE LORD IS MY SAVIOR AND TEACHER:

A- He grants me knowledge:

“Show me Your ways, O Lord, Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation. On You I wait all the day” (4, 5)

In seriousness, the psalmist prays to God to show him the way, to teach and instruct him with the spirit of fatherly love, as a Savior. On his side, he waits all day to recognize God's paths, to walk along them with the spirit of obedience. The psalmist calls the Lord his eternal merciful Teacher or Instructor, who brings him forth to His holy paths.

The sinner boasts in his ways, whereas the humble says together with the Lord Christ: *“Not as I will, but as You will”* (Matthew 26: 39). It is wise to resort to God to reveal to us His will; and we would count it a great mercy, that our Lord, as God of our salvation, grants us to understand and perceive His will, proclaimed to us in the Holy Book, and through His divine care.

It is good to deliver all our ways in the hand of God, to supplicate to Him to show us His ways, to take our weak hand and lead us by Himself; and to do everything for our sake, that we would live for His sake. ... How weak we are! Without Him, we cannot recognize the way, find it, nor walk along it.

+ The saints would never claim that they have reached the way along which they progressively walk, by their own effort, but through the favor of God, saying: *“Lead me in Your truth”* (5).

(St. Pavnorius)

According to the school of Alexandria, the Christian is a Gnostic; namely, a believer with spiritual knowledge (gnosis), for which he longs and seeks from God as a divine gift.

- + The Gnostic should be rich in knowledge.
- + Someone may say that the Greek have discovered philosophy through their human understanding; but as the Holy Book says that understanding is from God; the psalmist cries out: "*I am Your servant, Give me understanding*" (Psalm 119: 125).

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

Through this concept, the study of the Holy Book, according to the early fathers of the church, was bound to worship; Namely, no perception of the concepts of the Word of God, nor an enjoyment of the knowledge of the secrets of the gospel, without prayer and supplication with thanksgiving and praise, for the sake of what God grants us of knowledge.

Many teachers of the school of Alexandria used to spend almost all day teaching; and most of their nights reading the Holy Book, on their knees praying. And if they happen, while teaching, to find a phrase or a verse, difficult to understand, they ask their students to pray together with them to God to grant them understanding, enlightenment, and knowledge.

In worship, particularly during partaking of the liturgy of the Eucharist, the church gives thanks to the Lord for the knowledge He gave her..

+ We thank You, O Father, for the sake of life and knowledge, You proclaimed to us by Jesus Christ Your Son. Glory be to You forever.

(The Dedakia)

+ Grant our bodies growth in purity; and our souls growth in understanding and knowledge; through our communion in Your body and blood.

(St. bishop Serapion)

B- “He leads me in His truth”

“Teach me Your paths, and lead me in Your truth, and teach me” (4, 5). God reveals the truth to us, and sanctifies our thoughts, to hold fast to His truth, and to get the enlightenment from heaven; by which the divine knowledge would turn into a living instruction in our life -- a lived life; and would not be just an object of pure philosophical debate.

God Himself leads us in His truth, to find His teaching practical (5). And that His way or path is the way of life that would find favor in His sight. We get this way of life by entering with God into in the covenant of His grace, receiving His divine instruction, and enjoying His grace.

+ The Gnostic so tastes the will of God, that he listens to the Scripture, not by his ears, but by his soul.

+ The Gnostic, as a lover of the One and True Truth, becomes a perfect man, a friend of God, and would be counted as His son.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

It may be easy for man to train birds to utter words, and the wild beasts to do certain tricks; But no one can train man's own soul, except God alone; the divine Instructor of human souls, the Sanctifier of the bodies, and the Controller of the mind by His Holy Spirit.

+ All wisdom and understanding are from Him; The knowledge of all goodness comes to us from up high, from the exalted throne, as though from a fountain. Nothing worthy of commendation, can man do, unless he gets strength from Him; which He, Himself, teaches us, saying: "*Without Me, you can do nothing*" (John 15: 5).

+ The fountain of all blessings is Christ, *Who became for us wisdom from God*" (1 Corinthians 1: 30). For in Him, we become wise, full of spiritual gifts. Now, all who have good sense, will confirm that, having such knowledge, by which we would have progress in every way of the exalted holy life, and in virtue, is a gift from God, who qualified us well for conquest.

Here we find the psalmist seeks from God: "*Show me Your ways, O Lord, Teach me Your paths*". Now, The paths that lead those to progress in the non-corruptible life, with a great longing, are diverse; One, particularly is "prayer", which is of great benefit to those who practice it. The Savior Himself was keen on teaching it to us by presenting Himself as a role model, to strive to imitate Him; For, as is written, He gave a parable to exhort His disciple to pray without getting bored.

(St. Cyril of Alexandria)

If the divine Teacher, on His side, gives in abundance, the enlightenment, the understanding, together with guidance and instruction, to let us enjoy them as a lived life; We, on our side, are committed to have the spirit of meekness and humility, to prepare our souls to receive His spiritual gifts; according to the words of the psalmist:

“The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way” (9)

All the true ministers of God are *“poor in spirit”*, humble and meek; of contrite mind and heart, on account of their past sins and ignorance, and of their present weaknesses; seeking from God to work in them with His divine grace, to keep them from sins in the future. By such a humble spirit, they enjoy God’s work and gifts.

- + The secrets are proclaimed to the humble and the meek; Namely, those would be qualified to get the spirit of proclamation in their soul to interpret the secrets for them. Hence the saints say that humility consummates the soul with the divine secrets.

(St. Isaac the Syrian)

- + Humility is indeed a great thing; For every goodness is preceded by humility, and by its practice, the journey would be shorter... Humility alone would bring us forth to the spiritual life, even though slowly.

(Father Dorotheos of Gaza)

C- He presents to me the treasure of promises and covenants:

“Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your loving kindness; for they have been from of old” (6)

All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies” (10)

The whole psalm is a mixture of cry-outs coming out from the depths of the psalmist's heart, and of divine promises. I cannot cry out to my God, unless I discover His Book as a treasure that embraces His true and faithful promises. The more I cry out from the heart, the more I enjoy an enlightenment to discover His divine promises as personal promises concerning my own life ... It is a series of cry-outs from the heart, and of the recognition of God's promises and covenants to His church, in which I am a living member.

In this psalm, the psalmist talks about the amazing Teacher, who presents to him His tender mercies and loving kindness, not as things outside Him, but out of His divine features; being everlasting.

Being the Father Teacher whose nature is love; He is in no need to be reminded of His mercies; Yet the prophet David says: *“Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your loving kindness”*. God finds pleasure when His son seeks his right for mercies and loving kindness from Him; being the Fountain of the everlasting love. ... Crying out: *“Remember, O Lord”*, God enlightens our own depths, to remember His mercies and loving kindness; By proclaiming them to us, we seek them with the spirit of trusting sonhood, with hope and no despair.

The everlasting Fountain of love, the Source of mercies and loving kindness, presents to us a covenant, that started with Adam; Clarified to Noah, at the renewal of the world after the great flood; Confirmed to Abraham, the father of fathers ..., And finally realized in the most perfect way on the cross, when the

Lord wrote down His covenant in His body by the precious blood – a covenant of mercy and truth.... On the cross, the divine love embraced His justice; And God's mercy, which would never separate from His justice, was revealed. Hence the psalmist says: "*All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies*" (10).

The paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to His true believers, who seek His covenant to keep it; Who are faithful in their bond with Him, to become His possession in truth; And who desire the holy life, and obedience of the divine commandment, striving to reach it by the power of the Holy One. Yet, in case they happen to sin, out of weakness, they would not be denied the enjoyment of the promises of the covenant.

According to St. Augustine, those who seek the divine covenant, enjoy the mercy proclaimed by our Lord through His self-sacrifice in His first coming; and will enjoy the truth that He will proclaim in His second coming, on the great day of judgment... Although the truth accompanies the mercy; and the mercy accompanies the truth.

- + Those who, in meekness, seek the covenant, by which our Lord has redeemed us to the Newness of life by His blood, and study His testimonies in the prophets and the evangelists; will be granted His mercy in His first coming, and His truth in His second coming.

D- THE FORGIVER OF MY SINS:

This unique Teacher, who proclaimed His everlasting love through His covenant and promises, manifested through the sacrifice of the cross, is, alone, capable of forgiving my sins; Hence the psalmist says:

“Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions. According to Your mercy, remember me, for Your goodness’ sake, O Lord. Good and upright is the Lord. Therefore He teaches sinners in the way” (7, 8)

The prophet David would not be able to confess his sins and transgressions, particularly those he committed in his young days, unless the Lord reveals to him His everlasting mercies and loving kindness. God’ love and His fatherly compassion, are our support in confessing our sins.

The prophet David seeks from the Divine Teacher not to remember his sins, but to remember him as His beloved creation, which has a special place in His heart, not for any favor on His part, but for the sake of His mercy, goodness, and His holy name. ... The right-hand robber, seeking from the true Teacher to remember him in His kingdom; not only was forgiven his crimes and sins, but was carried to the paradise, justified in the worthiness of the precious blood. ... Seeking from the Lord to remember us, He responds by saying: *“I, even I, am, He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember Your sins”* (Isaiah 43: 25).

The prophet David does not seek forgiveness, only of the sins he has committed in the past, in the days of his youth, but, because he knows his weakness, he seeks it for the sake of his present sins, for they were many. Taking refuge in the holy name of God, he says:

“For Your name’s sake, O Lord, Pardon my iniquity, for it is great” (11)

He who wishes for the covenant of God, anticipating the eternal reward, would confess the multitude of his sins, seeking forgiveness, not for his own worthiness,

but for the sake of God's name and mercy. His iniquity being great, it needs a flow of the divine grace.

The way of repentance is narrow, yet secure, for by it we return to God our Father, and enjoy His loving kindness.

+ Your way is narrow and difficult, yet it does not lead to destruction. Teach me your narrow ways, found only by few (Matthew 7: 14).

+ *"Lead me in Your truth"*, that I avoid sin.

"Teach me", For by myself, I am taught only vanity.

"For You are God of my salvation, and on you I wait all day", Since You drove me out from paradise (Genesis 3: 23), I journeyed to a far country (Luke 15: 13), and could not return to You, unless You came to receive me -- the prodigal son. Through the journey of my life on earth, my return back to you depends on Your mercies; Therefore, *"Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your loving kindness"* (6).

Remember, O Lord Your works full of grace, for men claim that You have forgotten us.

Moreover, Do not forget that Your mercies have been from old, from eternity. Indeed, they would never separate from You. Since the fallen sinner submitted to vanity, You did not forsake him without hope (See Romans 8: 20). You have granted Your creation a multitude of great comforts.

(St. Augustine)

E- He establishes me in goodness:

By the spirit of meekness, we enjoy and draw the mercies of God, and experience His forgiving and compassionate fatherhood. And by the fear of God,

our will conform to His divine will; and the way we choose would be His way. ... Hence the soul would not find herself wrestling between an evil will within her, and a Divine good will; but find conformity and harmony between her depths and the ways of the Lord, and abide in the Divine goodness; as expressed by the words of the psalmist:

“Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses. He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth” (12, 13)

He probably means to say: [For him who fears the Lord with a spirit of godliness, God will choose a way in which he will find pleasure. God presents the way of His commandment to those who fear Him, in which they will find pleasure ... By the fear of God, ‘Saul of Tarsus’, the blasphemer and persecutor, chose, by the divine grace, to pray, worship, preach, and be persecuted as an apostle.

He who fears God will abide in the royal way, where he fears no one and nothing, but his soul would abide as though in the bosom of the Lord. He will not be alone, but will carry along with him those whom he draws to the holy evangelic life, counted as his descendants, to enjoy the church as a holy land in this world. Hence, the psalmist says: *“and his descendants shall inherit the earth”*.

It does not stop at the abidance of his soul and, of those to whom he ministers, in the divine bosoms; but he who fears the Lord will enjoy the glory and strength of the Lord, according to the words of the psalmist: *“The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him”* (14). God Himself will be his honor and strength.

+ Fear may seem befitting only for the weak; but the Lord strongly supports those who fear Him. The name of the Lord, glorified in the world, supports those who look up to Him, and those who seek Him in everything; To them

He proclaims His covenant; for the nations and the end of the earth are the inheritance of Christ.

(St. Augustine)

According to the Hebrew version, it came as: *“The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant”*

(14); And, according to the Septuagint version, it came as: *“The Lord is (strength) for those who fear Him; the name of the Lord is for His godly; and He will show them His covenant”* (14). To them He reveals His secrets, counsels, and His covenant with His people; as though to His very own . And being one of those who fear the Lord, David was longing to be led together with the friends of God along the royal path.

In short the divine Teacher presents to those who fear Him, the following blessings:

- * A royal path, and a holy commandment, that would bring pleasure to their souls.
- * An abidance in God, the Greatest Goodness.
- * A holy inheritance to those they minister.
- * A revelation of the divine secrets, being God’s personal friends.

F- He saves me from the concealed nets:

“My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net” (15)

The feet of those who concentrate their sight upon the Lord, will not stay long in the nets; For, by the grace of God, our souls would flee out of the net of confusion in the things of this world, and its evil pleasures, to find comfort with our glorified Redeemer.

- + I fear nothing of the perditions of this earth, as long as I do not concentrate my sight on the earthly things; For He on whom I concentrate my sight, *“will pluck my feet out of the net”* (15)..

(St. Augustine)

When we concentrate our sight on the dust, we would fall into the fearful nets; Whereas, when we concentrate it on the Heavenly One, He will lift us up by His Holy Spirit, to keep us from falling into the net And in case we fall, He would lift us up from it to Himself.

God is everywhere, even though our eyes may not be able to see Him all the time, unless we are enlightened by Him ... Hence the psalmist says: *“In Your light we see light”* (Psalm 36: 9).

G- He saves me from desolation:

“Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted” (16)

Feeling desolate and miserable in his affliction, from which his servants and army could not save him, and feeling that even his parents have forsaken him, David knew that no one could save him but the Lord.

One of the worst problems that man may suffer, is feeling desolation and loneliness, even though people may be around him on all sides; and sometimes

even if he is in the bosoms of his parents. ... He would be in need of God, Himself, to turn to him, enter into his heart, fill his void, and keep him from feeling miserable..

The psalmist said before: . Now he says: "*Turn Yourself to me*" (16). For, perpetually looking, in his depths, toward the Lord, he sees God "*turning to him*". Simon Peter, looking at the Lord during His trial, and seeing Him "*turning to him*", he wept bitterly; for the Lord's looks soften the heart, give the soul contrition and repentance, and open up fountains of holy tears.

H- He saves me from my enemies:

The looks of the Lord grant us repentance and mercy, to get rid of the inner enemy, namely, the sin; Hence the psalmist goes on to say:

"The troubles of my heart have enlarged; Oh, bring me out of my distresses!. Look at my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins" (17, 18)

The psalmist cries out, seeking from the Lord to save him from the burden of sin inside him; as well as from his outer enemies, saying:

Consider my enemies, for they are many, and they hate me with cruel hatred" (19)

It is the work of the Teacher – the Good Shepard – to take care of his sheep in the midst of the wolves. He would not destroy the wolves, but He rather destroys their evil nature, to turn them into lambs; Or, according to the prophet: "*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the young goat... the cow and the bear shall graze*" (Isaiah 11: 6, 7)

I- He grants me integrity:

The perfect work of the Holy Teacher is to grant us the integral holy life:

“Keep my soul and deliver me, ... (Let those with integrity and uprightness get attached to me)” (20, 21)

The Believer would be sanctified through being attached to the holy souls, as one holy congregation under the Holy Shepherd.

J- An antiphon sung by the choir:

Although the prophet David was very serious in seeking from the Lord to save him from his troubles, yet, in the midst of his own troubles, he did not forget those of the congregation as a whole. He prayed for his own sake; and now he prays for the sake of the congregation to be saved. He prays for the new Israel, (not the nation of Israel), but the church of the New Covenant; saying:

“Redeem Israel, O God, out of all their troubles” (22)

+ Redeem Your people, not only from the troubles that come on them from outside, but also from those they suffer from within; For You, O God, have prepared Your people to enjoy beholding You.

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPTATION FRPM PSALM 25

O MY TEACHER, TEACHING ME YOUR WAYS

- + Teach me Your way, O Lord, to abide in You;
Lead me in Your truth to enjoy Your kingdom;
Carry me to Your cross, to enjoy Your eternal covenant;
Forgive my sins, and grant me abidance;
Carry me to You, O Greatest Goodness.

- + Make me concentrate my looks on You; And turn Yourself to me;
Lift me up out of the dust; and do not let my feet remain long in the net;

- + Save me from my desolation, and take away my misery;
For You are my satiety and treasure;

- + Save me from my sin;
Take away the animosity of my enemies, and turn them into friends;

- + Grant me integrity and uprightness together with Your people;
Give salvation to Your church, and comfort to Your people.



CHAPTER 26

WALKING IN UPRIGHTNESS

The occasion of this psalm:

This psalm, as a 'psalm of innocence', and as a personal lamentation by him who was unjustly accused of committing a serious crime, could be bound to psalms 7 and 17.

According to some, this psalm was written during the rebellion of Absalom against his father David, or the persecution of Saul, because of evil reports by "*the congregation of evildoers*" (5) and "*hypocrites*" (4), who portrayed David as a an extremely evil man, and accused him of committing the following serious crimes:

- 1- Betraying his country and his people, by taking refuge in other countries.
- 2- Despising the collective worship, and the enjoyment of the house of the Lord, on account of that he fled from among his people.
- 3- Partaking of the worship and evil practices of idol-worshippers
- 4- Being behind the murder of 'Ishbosheth' the son of Saul, by the hands of Baanah and Rechab (2 Samuel 4: 5 – 12); For which David raised this supplication to heaven, proclaiming his innocence of that crime.

According to some scholars, this psalm is a collective lamentation; even though the psalmist speaks in the singular tense, as a representative of the congregation, being one unit.

This psalm could also be a praise sung by the priests while they, according to the rite, "*wash their hands and feet, lest they die*", before they offer the sacrifices (Exodus 30: 20, 21); when they approach the altar for ministering; ... According to others, what came

here is the voice of the person visiting the house of the Lord, proclaiming that he has completely fulfilled the proper conditions of entering the sanctuary. This psalm, therefore, suits those who seek God's protection while entering the temple.

Reciting the proclamation of innocence could be considered an active rite to be practiced before entering the temple, or at least, before going ahead with practicing the religious rites in the temple. In it there is a personal confession which qualifies one to partake of the worship. ... It could also be counted as one of the collective prayers, by which the congregation, as a whole, proclaim their readiness for the holy worship. Many of the phrases of this psalm could be sung in the name of the whole congregation.

The psalm here, expresses the inner meaning of the rite, namely, the joy before the unapproachable God, who approaches us.

A Messianic psalm;

In this psalm, the prophet David is a symbol of our King Jesus Christ, who became a reproach to men.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the best to recite such "*proclamation of innocence*", being "*a High Priest, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*" (Hebrew 7: 26) ... We, as well, may recite it when we are in fellowship with the Lord Christ. According to St. Augustine: [David here, represents, not only Jesus Christ, the Intermediary Man, but the whole church, set in integrity in Christ].

Its relationship to psalm 28:

We see the house of the Lord in psalm 26, 27, and 28.

In psalm 26, the worshipper approaches God by purity, praise, together with faithfulness in the enjoyment of the beauty of His temple; And in its last verses, he proclaims his gladness and the exultation of his heart in approaching the Lord.

In psalm 27, he sees in this house, his refuge from enemies, and the place where the Lord appear to him, to encounter Him face to face.

And in psalm 28, the psalm presents his supplications, stretching his hands toward the Holy of Holies, to receive the Lord's response to his prayers.

Its general frame: :

1- David defends his integrity

1 - 3

2- David's defense concerning his alleged forsaking of his people and the house of the Lord

4 - 8

3- David seeks from God salvation and mercy

9 – 12

1- DAVID DEFENDS HIS INTEGRITY:

According to some, the language of this psalm seems strange and un-attractive to many Christians, who assuming that the confidence of the psalmist is set upon his trust in the 'ego', and self-righteousness; criticize his boasting of good behavior, and compare him to the Pharisee mentioned in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector (Luke 18: 9).

But we should notice the following:

1- By referring to his 'Integrity' here, he attempts to vindicate himself from the charges directed against him; beside that, by the goodness of his heart, he had

no evil intentions, but walks in purity and innocence; A fact to which the Lord Himself testified when He appeared the second time to Solomon, and said to him: *“Now, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom”* (1 Kings 9: 4-5). ... Despite his past falling into sin which would prove the opposite, David walked in integrity. While his son Solomon, despite his wisdom, has fallen in his old age into sin and misery.... Yet, another Son of David, *“David’s Origin and Seed”*; His Son and Lord – our Lord Jesus Christ – was without sin, as He Himself said: *“The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me”* (John 14: 30). He, alone, can perfectly present such a proclamation!

- 2- According to some, saying: *“Vindicate me”*, David means: (Come to my defense). For the righteous believers are often unjustly judged to the maximum; but they have God, the Judge of all, as their Savior, and their Attorney who comes to their defense.
- 3- In verse 11, saying: *“I will walk in my integrity; Redeem me, and be merciful to me”*, the psalmist confesses his need for redemption, and his trust in God’s grace and mercy.

If the prophet David seeks from God to *“examine his mind and heart”* (2), it is not said out of some kind of pride, for any righteousness he might have is a divine gift; for he says: *“I have trusted in the Lord, without wavering”* (1). We as well, as children of God, when we deny the work of the Lord Christ in our life, that would not be a kind of humility; as it is befitting of us to testify to the power of God, and to His love by proclaiming His redemptive salvation work in us; ... to testify by words, as well as by deeds.

- 4- In his attempt to defend himself, the psalmist probably meant to spare his people the offense, lest they may encounter perdition because of him.

Likewise, we notice St. Paul's reluctance to defend himself, or to boast in himself, saying: "*But with me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court*" (1 Corinthians 4: 3); "*We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored*" (1 Corinthians 4: 10). ... Yet, when he felt that the accusations were directed against his apostolic status and right, and against his evangelic preaching, he had to defend himself strongly, saying: "*Receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little*" (2 Corinthians 11: 16); and, "*I have become a fool in boasting, you have compelled me*" (2 Corinthians 12: 11).

"Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity. And I have trusted in the Lord without wavering" (1)

The prophet David – having been unjustly accused by his enemies, by charges that touch his faith and life, and cause his people to be offended in him – could not help, but to cry out before the divine tribunal, where God Himself, is the Judge, who searches the minds and hearts, and who knows all things, hidden and manifest. Here, David presents his conscience to testify to the purity of his heart and his faithfulness.

The psalmist, confirming that he has kept his conscience good, and has put his hope and trust in the Lord, supplicates to Him to examine his case, and to be the Judge between him and those who accuse him. Although he cannot justify himself before the charge of sin; yet through the divine love, God may justify him against the false accusations; For God alone, is the Witness to the soundness of his heart and intentions.

According to St. Augustine, the psalmist says: "*I have trusted in the Lord*" (1), on account of that he was accused of having a fellowship with the idol-wrshippers, and of

despising the collective ministry of the house of the Lord.... It is as though he says: I do not trust in any human arm, whether a believer or non-believer, but my trust is in the Lord alone. If I had to live among the evil idol-worshippers, by the body, Yet by the Spirit I am separate from them; I do not trust in them nor in any others.

- + To seek to be tried is a serious matter, difficult for man to choose for himself; What is this trial sought by the psalmist, but to be separated from the wicked.

What is the meaning of the expression: "*I have trusted in the Lord*"? ... By lingering among the wicked, who stir up dissensions, man would not be trusting in the Lord; ... By trusting in man, you will follow his lead; will falter when he falters, and will fall when he falls; But by trusting in the Lord, you will hold fast.

(St. Augustine)

"Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart" (2)

The word "examine" here is analogous to examining and proving the precious metals by fire (Psalm 12: 6; 17: 3). The psalmist longed for God to examine him more than once; being sure of his innocence of what he is falsely accused; and seeking from God to prove and proclaim it by Himself; As the divine examination will give him more justification, splendor, and glory.

- + For fear that I may unconsciously commit some secret sins, "*Examine me, O Lord, and prove me*"; Reveal what is inside me, not before You, who sees everything, but before me, and my fellow servants ...
- + Try my hidden desires by fire; prove my thoughts, to make sure that they do not live in evil, and that evil does not stir them up.

What fires will examine my heart? ... But the fire of Your Word.

What fires will prove my heart? ... But the fire of Your Spirit.

About this fire, it is written: *"There is nothing hidden from its heat"* (Psalm 19: 6).

And the Lord Himself said: *"I came to send fire on the earth"* (Luke 12: 49).

(St. Augustine)

- + For the sake of having this purification that grants life, David prays, saying:
"Examine me, O Lord, and prove me, Try my mind and my heart".

(Father Theodor)

While proclaiming his innocence, which is the fruit of God's work in his life, the psalmist, at the same time, seeks God's mercy, which is always before his eyes.

"For Your loving mercy is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth" (3)

David remembers God's mercy in the past, depends on it in the present, and hopes for it in the coming days. His piety (or innocence) is set upon his sound conviction of God's divine care toward His people as a whole, and toward him personally; In all his thoughts, David concentrates on this side of God's features.

By saying: *"I have walked in Your truth"*, the psalmist probably refers to the false accusation against him, that he diverted to idol-worship; proclaiming that, although he had to flee from among his people to an idol-worshipping people, yet he has never gone astray from the divine

truth to the falsity of idol-worship; For the true God's is always in the depths of his heart, and before his eyes.

2- DAVID'S DEFENSE CONCERNING THE ACCUSATION OF FORSAKING HIS PEOPLE AND THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:

"I have not sat with idolatrous mortals, nor will I go in with hypocrites. I have hated the congregation of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked" (4, 5)

It is a common knowledge that men are identified by the company they keep. Although David had to flee from among his people to an idol-worshipping land, yet he did not have fellowship in the fruitless works of darkness, nor partake of the practices of the wicked. Yes, he had to take refuge among a congregation of evildoers, law-breakers, and hypocrites; yet, he did not like their practices, sit with them in counsel, nor entered with them into covenants.

Being in the world, we are committed not to separate ourselves completely from its people, "*since then we would need to go out of the world*" (1 Corinthians 5: 10), but not to partake of their evil thoughts, and their defiled practices.

We should take the defilement away, and separate ourselves from the evil of the wicked, to be worthy to enter into the presence of the Holy One, and to dwell in His house.. That is why the 'laver' was put between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar, for in it, the priests had to wash their hands and feet before approaching the sanctuaries (Exodus 40: 30-32).

+ "*I have not sat with idolatrous mortals*" (4)... 'Sitting' symbolizes that man be one heart with those he has company. For, if your heart is not there despite your presence among them, you are not sitting with them; Otherwise, if your heart is there, you are sitting with them, even though you may absent in the flesh.

(St. Augustine)

Although the prophet David, by fleeing to an idol-worshipping land, was deprived of His own people, and of the house of God, yet, with his heart, he kept “sitting” with the godly of his people, and partaking of their worship by the Spirit and the Truth.

The prodigal son departed from his father’s house, sought the company of “the *congregation of evildoers*”; and ended up sharing the food of the swines; But once he returned with his heart to his father’s bosom, he got back to enjoy the joyful and honorable congregation.

Let us therefore, flee from “*the congregation of evildoers*”, “*for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*” (Romans 1: 18). Let us forsake their congregation, “*lest we share in their sins*” (Revelation 18: 4), and be denied the heavenly congregation, or the divine banquet.

Keeping away from the company of “*the company of evildoers*”, may exhort them to repent their wickedness; Whereas by mixing with them, and through slothfulness in sanctifying our life, beside leading us to perdition, we are not providing the evildoers with the chance to realize the seriousness of their condition.

“*I have hated the congregation of evildoers*” (5). This expression may seem to some as unkind; but the psalmist, having got in touch with God, who dwells in the congregation of the righteous, perceives that the devil dwells in “*the congregation of evildoers*”, as his own, whom he uses as tools for his work, and for that of death to the account of evil. It is as though the psalmist proclaims that he has chosen the church of God, to enjoy the divine presence, and hated the congregation of the devil; ... has chosen the congregation of the saints, rather than that of evildoers; has chosen the higher Jerusalem, rather than the adulteress Babylon; ... has chosen the seed of the woman,

and rejected that of the serpent... *“For there is no fellowship between the light and the darkness”*.

A spiritual priest:

Although the prophet David was not a priest nor a Levite..., Yet, having had to flee from among his people, and from the collective worship in the holy house of God; On the negative aspect, he proclaims that he does not partake of the evil life of the law-breaking wicked and hypocrites. And on the positive aspect, he perceives that although being like a fugitive, he is present by his heart, not only among the people of God, but partakes of the holy ministry of the priests; ... that he is present by his Spirit in the tabernacle, washes his hands, together with the priests, not in the water of the laver, but in the innocence of the heart, ... goes about the altar, not with his body, but with his inner longing, and his enflamed and fiery love; ... hears the heavenly praise by his spiritual ears, ... and tells of all the wondrous works of God ... No power could deprive him of the enjoyment of the beauty of the house of God, nor the presence by Spirit in the place where His glory dwells. That is what he expresses by saying:

“I will wash my hands in innocence; So I will go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Your wondrous works. Lord, I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells” 6 – 8)

This phrase proves that he has kept himself away from the sin of idol-worship. The prophet David, by his heart, washes the hands of his soul before God; and attaches himself to the spiritual altar of God.

The priests used to go about the altar during offering the sacrifice; and those who offered it, most probably did the same from afar, referring by that to their awareness of the seriousness of the practice of offering the sacrifice on their behalf.

Washing the hands has been a 'symbolic' act of purity; yet the Jews, so concentrated on the practice itself, to proclaim that whoever despises the washing of hands would be cut off the synagogue, become poor, and even be taken away from this world; And that the Israelite who eats his food with pure hands, utters the holy language, and prays day and night, will be sure to gain the everlasting life. It was claimed that 'Aquiba', a prominent Jew, while in prison, and having water just enough to either drink or to wash his hands, chose to do the later task, saying: [I would rather die thirsty, than break the tradition].

By saying: "*I wash my hands in innocence*", the prophet David meant to proclaim his innocence of the charges against him, and of the crimes unjustly referred to him. ... We, as well, as we encounter the crucified Christ, wash the hands of our souls, in the water and blood flowing from His side. For all the water of the world would not be enough to purify the depths, like the water of baptism, bound to faith in the atoning blood of Christ, that renews our nature, and purifies our depths.

As long as we are still in the world, we are in need of continuous washing through repentance -- "The second baptism", by the work of the Word of God and His Holy Spirit. The Word of God is Spirit and Life ... able to pierce the soul to its depths, to grant her purity and sanctification.

+ "*I wash my hands in innocence*", not in the seen water.

You wash your hands when you do your works through holy and innocent thoughts in the sight of God; For there is an altar before the eyes of God, into which the Priest (The Lord Christ) enters, He, who presented Himself a sacrifice for our sake. This altar is so high, that no one can reach, except him who washes his hands in innocence.

(St. Augustine)

- + You may notice that during the liturgy, the deacon presents water to the priest, as well as to the other priests present around the altar, to wash their hands; surely not on account of their need for physical purity, for all of us are pure of blemish when we enter into the church. Being a symbol of purity of every wrong doing and transgressions; the hands symbolize the work, and by washing them, we enter into innocence and blamelessness. That is why, in preparation for this act, the priest says: *“I wash my hands in innocence, and go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may proclaim the voice of Your praise, Alleluia”* (Psalm 25: 6, 7). Washing the hands, therefore is a symbol of the immunity against sin.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

Enjoying the innocence of heart and the purity of hands, namely, the sanctity of the depths and works, the inner ears of the believer become able to hear the voice of the angelic praise, and to respond to it by inner joy, exultation of the soul, and the singing by the tongue of praises and glorifications; By his inner life and behavior, man would proclaim God’s wondrous works with him, to say: *“That I may proclaim the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Your wondrous works”* (7)

The prophet David probably means to say that in the midst of all the slanders of his enemies, his ears are not inclined to their words, and his mind is not preoccupied, even with defending himself before them, for the joyful voice of praise fills his whole being, and satisfies his life . Instead of complaining against the enemies, or grumbling at what dwell upon him, he tells of all the wondrous works of God, that lift him up as though to the heavenly life by the Holy Spirit.

According to St. Augustine, the verse, saying: *“That I may proclaim the voice of thanksgiving”*; means that the voice of the Holy Spirit in the glorifications of the church, teach us how to glorify You.

- + *“That I may proclaim the voice of thanksgiving”... Many have ears; yet not those about which the Lord Jesus cried out, saying: “He who has ears, let him hear”* (Matthew 13: 9)

To proclaim the voice of thanksgiving, means to perceive within yourself, that all what is corrupt in you by sin, is coming from yourself; and that everything good, and work for goodness, is coming from God. That is how you should proclaim the voice of thanksgiving, by never glorifying yourself, however your virtues are, lest you will be blamed.

(St. Augustine)

When the inner ears are sanctified to hear the voice of thanksgiving, the tongue of the heart would open up to partake of glorifying God, and of telling all His wondrous works, without referring any glory to one’s self or ego; The inner insight would be sanctified as well, to behold the glory of the house of God; And the heart would open up by love, longing to have a place in the dwelling place of His glory; saying with the psalmist:

“Lord, I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells” (8)

By the “house” here, the prophet David means the tabernacle of meeting, because the temple was not built yet. It is as though the fugitive David longs not to be deprived of the holy tabernacle of meeting and the ark of covenant, the symbol of the divine presence, and not to be driven out of the people of God; but, at the same time, seeks to have the divine Sanctuary in the depths of his heart.

- + The beauty of the house of God is transfigured in those who are crowned with the beauty of holiness in the church.

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + Without this love (our love of God) the spiritual structure, whose clever architect is St. Paul, would never stand, nor would we have the beautiful house, for which the blessed David longs in his heart to be purified by God, saying: *“Lord, I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells”* (8).

Without love, man would set in his heart – with no insight – a non-beautiful house, unbefitting of the Holy Spirit, nor of the honor of receiving the Holy One who dwells in the heart; It would miserably and instantaneously fall..

(Father Ibrahim)

- + God desires from us to set a house for Him, promising us, in return, to behold Him,... Every man can set for God a tabernacle inside his heart.

(The scholar Origen)

4- DAVID SEEKS FROM GOD SALVATION AND MERCY:

After presenting the evidences of His integrity, David fervently prays to God not to let him be excluded from the congregation of the people of God, who are the object of God's love and faithfulness; nor *"to gather his soul together the (hypocrites), nor his life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands is a sinner's scheme, and whose right hand is full of bribes"*; His hope in God is not to allow for him to suffer together with those from whose company he separated himself; he desires not to have a portion with the sinners, during, at the end of his temporary (temporal) life, or after his burial in the grave. ... What made him raise such a prayer, are the contradictions concerning the features, supplications, longings, habits, and goals, between the saints and the sinners. For they have no similar thoughts or common feelings, they speak different words, have different behavior and life styles, and take different paths....

+ *"Do not gather my soul together with (Hypocrites)"* (9). Do not gather my soul that loved Your beautiful house, together with those who hate You; nor gather my life with bloodthirsty men, who hate their neighbors; For by these two commandments, your house is beautified (in me).

(St.

Augustine)

The (Hypocrites) and the bloodthirsty here, are those who worship several gods and idols.

The psalmist finds no pleasure in the company of sinners; but in worshipping God among the congregation of the people of God. He separates himself from the congregations of sinners and evildoers. On another aspect, he confirms his faithfulness to the Lord, and to the worship presented to His glory; and his longing to be a member in the people of God, saying:

*“Do not gather my soul together with the (hypocrites), nor my life with
bloodthirsty men, in whose hands is a sinner’s
scheme, and whose right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in
my integrity; Redeem me and be merciful
to me. My foot stands in an even place. In the congregations I will bless the
Lord” (9 – 12)*

It is as though the prophet David says to the Lord: [I am not preoccupied with the unjust and vain accusations of my enemies, but what preoccupy me is that You protect me – a fugitive -- from the idol-worshipping atmosphere in which I had to live, by my body, and not by my heart. Do not allow for me to become a partner of the hypocrites, the criminals, the sinners, the bribe-takers, in their life, nor in their destiny; For their life is not my life; and their goal is not my goal; Contradictory to them, I walk in my integrity; namely, I walk along Your way with the spirit of meekness and humility; ... I lean upon Your salvation, and hope in Your mercies *“My feet stand only in an even place”*, in Your royal path, until You bring me forth to the life of praise and joy together with the holy congregation]..

On a negative aspect, if the psalmist could not endure to have a fellowship with the sinners here; If he could not endure the spirit of hypocrisy, blood-thirst, bribes, nor oppression; How could he endure to have the same eternal destiny with them! ... It is as though he says: [Do not let me join them there, as long as I have not joined them here in their oppression and iniquity; but, *“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his”* (Numbers 23: 10)].

And on a positive aspect, by rejecting the evil of the sinners, he proclaims his desire for God’s great salvation and mercies, where his soul

would be sanctified by the precious blood, and would “find *his feet stand in an even place*”, namely, in the righteousness, gifts, and divine promises of Christ, his depths would set forth in inner praise, on the level of the holy congregation, as a member in the one church of Christ.

Commenting on the expression: “*their right hands are full of bribes*”, St. Augustine says: [God alone sees who receives bribes, and who rejects them]; giving an example for that, the judge whose hand stretches to receive a bribe, not only from the rich, but from the poor as well; by which he, against justice, utters oppressive verdicts against the truth, for the sake of fearing the rebuke of men. Bribe here, is his love of commendation and honor, rather than of money, at the expense of the truth.

Comparing between those whose hands are filled with bribes, and those who raise pure hands to heaven, St. John Chrysostom says: “*Let the lifting up of my hands be as the evening sacrifice*” (Psalm 141: 2).

Finally, according to St. Augustine, the psalmist partakes of the praise of the Lord by the holy congregation; his love for his brethren brings him together with his love for God.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 26

VINDICATE ME, O LORD

- + You are my righteousness; You are my reward;
Let the world judge me; For You are my Intercessor and the Judge

- + Grant me not to think about the accusations of men;
But to think about how to bring You pleasure; and live with You.

- + I do not partake of the thoughts, goals, behavior, nor gatherings of the hypocrites;
So, do not allow for me to have their same eternal destiny.

- + I love the beauty of Your house; By Your Holy Spirit, adorn my heart to become a
dwelling place for You.

- + Bring me forth to the upright way, the way of Your righteousness;
To partake of the praises for you, by the saints and the heavenly hosts.

=====.

PSALM 27

TRUST IN THE LORD

UNITY OF THE PSALM:

According to some scholars like Bishop Weiser, this psalm consists of two parts: (1 to 6, and 7 to 14), which differ from each others in the style and content: The first part is a strong song expressing the unshakable trust in God; whereas the second part is a lamentation prayer from someone in great need of the divine help amid his tribulation.

According to others, there is harmony between the two parts. For the psalmist, being threatened by enemies and adversaries, even if they join forces together against him, yet he believes that any human help is vain, compared to his trust in God alone, his light, help, and stronghold; particularly in the sanctuary of His temple, where, he seeks the holy help of God. In his anguish, the psalmist seeks from the Lord to let him live all the days of his life in the house of God, to experience the sweetness of God, and to behold the beauty of His temple. He seeks what is more than the protection from his enemies; He seeks from God to let him stand in His city, enjoy His face, and perceive the joy of His house.

ITS OCCASION:

This psalm is connected, either to king Saul's persecution against David, or to the period when the later escaped from the face of his son Absalom; or to the period during which he was fighting against the Philistines, when he was almost killed by some giant adversary, if it was not for 'Abishai' who came to his rescue at the last moment. At that time, David has been a frail old man, even though he was as valiant as he used to be, yet have lost the vigor of his youth. Fearing for the life of their king and leader, *"the people came to swear to him, saying: 'You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel'"* (2 Samuel 21: 17).

ITS TITLE:

'For David, before he was anointed.

David was anointed three times: (1 Samuel 16: 13; 2 Samuel 2: 4; 5: 3). The first time when he was still a boy, when he was anointed in his father's house in secret, without the knowledge of king Saul, nor of the people; The second time, when he was publicly anointed by the people of Judah; And the third time when He was crowned a king over all the tribes of Israel. In all of them, David has been a symbol of the "the Son of David", the Savior Christ:

- 1- From eternity, the Divine Word was anointed a Savior and a Redeemer of men; even before our creation and our fall.
 - 2- He came to reign on His people, His own.
 - 3- He proclaimed His kingdom in His church, from one end of the world to the other end.
- + The anointment, then, only concerned the king and the priest; for in both of them was the symbol to be realized in Him who came a King and a Priest, at the same time – the Lord Christ -- who alone, carried the two titles. He was called "Christ" on account of that He was anointed by God (the Father). He was not anointed as our Head, but we were anointed, as well, as His body. Now, He is the "**King**", being our Leader and Guide; And He is the "**Priest**", for He intercedes for us. He is actually, the **Priest**, as well as **the Sacrifice**; for the sacrifice He offered to God the Father, was Himself.

As all partake of the anointment, and of Him ... Hence, the psalm is a prayer by someone longing for such a life, fervently seeking the grace of God, consummated in us at the end.

ITS GENERAL FRAME:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| 1- A trust in the Lord | 1 - 3 |
| 2- A refuge in the church of Christ | 4 - 6 |
| 3- A prayer with hope | 7 - 13 |
| 4- A counsel and a guidance | 14 |

1- A TRUST IN THE LORD:

In both its form and content, this poem (1 – 6) likens psalm 23.

Watching in immense fear the multitude of armies joining forces against him, , yet, his fear was swallowed by the vision of God, in whom the psalmist finds the light, the salvation, and the strength. The Lord Himself was his portion, light, gladness, peace, salvation, strength, and refuge. His trust with no fear, in God, enables him, not only to confront all the dangers before him, but even to find sweetness and gladness in the temptations..

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?”

The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?”(1)

No one can utter such words, except he who no longer lean upon his human friends, nor upon himself; but unconditionally leaning upon, and trusting in the Lord, in utter deliverance under all conditions. Such an independence of everything human, sets man free of every fear. Yet this kind of trust is only granted to him who sees in God his utmost goal, in all the practical and actual situations of his life.

Trusting in that all the features and attributes of God suit his protection and his enjoyment of the eternal glory, the believer says: *“The Lord is my Light, salvation, and the strength of my life”*. The psalm starts by proclaiming God, as our Light, salvation, and the strength of our life, on a personal level; ... by whom the believer is personally saved from his spiritual enemies, to have his inner insight enlightened to behold the heavenly glories

The light is a natural symbol of everything positive, from truth to goodness, to joy, and gladness (Psalm 43: 3; Isaiah 5: 20; Psalm 97: 11; 36: 9). Enjoying God as our light, we would fear no one nor anything; for light scatters the darkness, and *“If God is for us, who can be against us”* (Romans 8: 31).

The psalmist presents to us the words of a man of experience, through his personal life and experience, who was surrounded by armies, but by faith he conquered; being as though in the midst of dense fog, he discovered that *“God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all”* (1 John 1: 5); by His light he saw the light; and heard to the voice of the Lord, saying: *“I am the Light of the world, he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life”* (John 8: 12). ... We should never be deceived by fog; for when the Sun of Righteousness shines in us, granting us the healing by His wings, saving us

from evil, we would say: *“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid, For YAH, the Lord is my strength and my song; He also has become my salvation”* (Isaiah 12: 2). The more the hosts of darkness joined forces against us, the more we long for the Sun of Righteousness, and the more we discover His work of salvation, practically in our life.

The true Light grants me the light of knowledge; to discover Him the Savior from my sins; and experience Him my strength against evil. This is the work of God, my Savior in my life: He grants me the light of knowledge, salvation, and strength.

+ He gives me light; Scatter, O darkness! ... He saves me; Farewell, O all weaknesses! :

+ God grants me both the knowledge of Himself (the Light), and salvation; ... Who can take me away from Him?!

The Lord confronts all the attacks of my enemy, hidden and manifest; ... I fear no one!

+ Yes, Lord, In the absence of Your Light, there will be appearance of death; or rather the coming of nothingness.

+ How miserable I am, ... darkness prevailed on me; ... Although You are the Light; Yet I have covered my face from You!

+ Oh Lord, Utter the words: “Let there be Light!”; ... For then, I would be able to behold the light, and flee from the darkness!

See the true way, and forsake the way of loss!

See the truth, and keep away from vanity!

See life, and flee from death!

Shine in me, O God; For You are my Light and enlightenment!

+ O Most exalted Light; Hasten to shine in a blind man, who desires to become Your possession!

(St. Augustine)

Granting us Himself a Light, Our inner insight becomes enlightened, and would discover in God, its salvation and strength.

+ Being our strength; By Him we gain conquest; For He gives us the authority to trample upon serpents and scorpions, and all the power of the enemy.

(St. Cyril the Great)

+ Being faithful, and fearing God, you would fear no one; ... "*The righteous is as bold as a lion*" (Proverb 28: 1).

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

+ O God, ... You are my Life; my Creator; my Light; my Guide; my Stronghold, and my existence; Have mercy on me; and lift me up¹

+ O God, my God ... You are the breaths of my life: my goodness, my strength, my comfort in the day of anguish.

See the multitude of my enemies; Save me from their hands; ... For where will those who hate You, flee from Your face?!... As for me, I live by, and in You.

O Divine Word ... I wish I become attached to You; For in You will be my keeping.

You created me; I pray, re-create me!

I sinned; Visit me!

I fell; lift me up!

I became ignorant; Instruct me!
I lost sight; Bring me back to light!

(St. Augustine)

According to St. John Chrysostom, the Holy Book presents to us the Lord with several titles, to satisfy all our needs: He is our Light, Salvation, and Stronghold, as it came in this psalm; He is the Bread, coming down from heaven; the Door, the Way, the Truth, and the Life; etc.

+ David does not always call God by the same name or title. But during his war and conquest, he says: "I love You, O Lord; my Strength, my Shield"; And when the Lord saves him from tribulation and darkness, he says: "*The Lord is my Light and my Salvation*".... He calls Him according to his condition at the time; Sometimes, he calls Him through His compassionate love; or calls Him through His justice; and other times, through His righteous judgment.

(St. John Chrysostom)

"When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, My enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell.

Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident" (2, 3)

The wicked, who came against him to eat up his flesh and to destroy him, were mighty, yet His God is mightier than them all. The wicked (Psalm 26: 5) used to slay the people of God and to eat them as they eat bread; do them harm, and afflict them (Psalm 14: 4; Jeremiah 26: 5; 1 Samuel 26: 21; Psalm 44: 2; Proverb 44: 2; Numbers 20: 15). ... Yet the Mighty One did not force them to stop practicing their evil, but by His salvation love, He offered them His life-granting body to eat; so that we, as members of His body,

would offer our bodies as food to our brethren in humanity, by the giving spirit of love, to eat us up, and turn from ferocious wolves into meek lambs. Hence the Lord Jesus says to His disciples: "*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves*" (Matthew 10: 16).

Let the wicked, therefore eat up my flesh; for by it, Christ dwelling in me is able to turn their evil life into a holy one ... ; He knows how to make me a vessel that bears sufferings for the sake of Christ, who has turned Saul of Tarsus, from being a persecutor of the church, who ate the flesh of her children, into the apostle Paul, about whom He said: "*I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake*" (Acts 9: 16).. ... The idol-worshippers ate up the flesh of St. Mark, and shed his blood on the streets of Alexandria, to turn it into a holy city, embracing the living church of Christ.

- + "*When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh ...*" (2); to insult me, because I seek what is more exalted; will, to disturb me by their cursed teeth, and to afflict me by their vain desires, ... they would stumble and fall.
- + "*My flesh*" means the instincts of my lowly nature. Let them (the wicked) then stir up against me; for they will actually destroy in me what is mortal (my physical desires); But, in me, will endure, what my persecutors could not reach, the temple where my God dwells.

(St. Augustine)

Let my enemy then, come, and stir up against me; for he will only eat up my flesh; Namely, in his war against me, he would not be able to force himself on my inner life – the kingdom of heaven set in me – he will only bring me forth, for some time, into physical or psychological affliction, for some, to make me take off my carnal desires, and walk along the narrow way of Christ, with purity.

“Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear” (3). No human power, nor huge armies, happened to gather together against the Lord of hosts (Daniel 11: 38); except to become in God’s sight, no more than the grass of the field; For God’s care in most cases takes the side against the mighty oppressor (Ecclesiastes 9: 11).

- + An emperor protected by his guards has no fear of anyone; If the mortals protect the mortal to fear nothing. What would be the case if the Immortal protects the mortal? Would he fear and be disturbed?1

(St. Augustine)

Armies would never terrify the believer, for he takes refuge in the Immortal Eternal Being; who sends His angels to guard him; And He Himself would be his hiding place (Psalm 32: 7).

The believer, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, will not fear even the devil and all his hosts. Believing in God who scatters the darkness by His cross, neither the devil nor the sin would have authority in his heart; for he enjoys the kingdom of God inside him.

2- A REFUGE IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST:

As the armies gathered together around David, he found his secure refuge in God alone. ... And instead of worrying about how to confront the enemies, his heart withdrew to the house of the Lord, to the church of Christ, set by the Holy Spirit within himself, and to the holy collective worship, where he would enjoy the sweetness of God dwelling in the heart, as well as in the midst of the congregation:

“One thing I have desired of the Lord, that I will seek: that I will dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life;

to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble, He shall hide me in His

pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle, He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. And now, my

head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me. Therefore I will offer sacrifice of joy in His tabernacle.

I will sing, Yes, I will sing praises to the Lord” (4 – 6)

If the devil's goal is to stir up troubles around us, in an attempt to preoccupy us away from our Holy God, and to deny us the fellowship with Him, The heart of the true believer – by the spirit of wisdom – will withdraw to the church of God, to His house, proclaiming his longing to be with God all the days of his life.

In his sufferings, the prophet proclaims:

- a- Not diverting away from his ultimate goal: Building a house for the Lord, where he, himself, will also dwell.
- b- Beholding and meditating with gladness in the Lord, who dwells in His holy temple
- c- Being protected in the tabernacle of the Lord, and hiding in His pavilion.
- d- Being set high by the Lord upon a rock
- e- Having conquest over his enemies
- f- Offering sacrifices of joy and singing praise to the Lord.

a- Not diverting away from his goal:

The longings of prophet and king David, had for long concentrated upon building a house for the Lord; Namely, to perpetually dwell by his heart in the divine sanctuaries. And as he says here, his only desire and longing which fill up his

heart, and in which all the other longings gather together and are realized, is to live in a perpetual fellowship with the Lord, as long as he could; For then, he would possess everything.

He longed to dwell in the house of the Lord to worship Him, and to enjoy His protection. As it is to be noticed here, that even the priests have never actually dwelt in the temple, the psalmist did not mean the physical dwelling, but the spiritual dwelling; Namely, to have his heart dwell there as a spiritual priest to God.

Although the psalmist begins his psalm by proclaiming his personal relationship with God, being his Light, Savior, and the Stronghold of his life; We see him here, on account of his great love for the house of the Lord, and for the liturgical collective worship, recognize God through the congregation (the house of the Lord). Namely, there is no separation between man's personal life with God, and his relationship with Him through the holy congregation.

The psalmist longs to dwell in the house of the Lord all the (days), and (not the nights) of his life. For he found in the Lord His Light that scatters the darkness of his night. And according to St. Augustine, the psalmist's life had no nights, and there was no darkness in it.

+ There, you can see what I love! ... It would be so amazing to behold the Beauty of the Lord Himself!

Once the night of the psalmist comes to an end, he longs to have rest forever in the Light of God; to have no more night, but to have the dawn shine forever on him.

(St. Augustine)

It is to be noticed how the psalmist calls the church by several titles, each of which has its own goal:

-- **The house of God:** referring to God dwelling in the midst of His people; and to the believer dwelling together with God.

-- His **holy temple:** referring to holiness as the beauty of the Holy God; by which we enjoy beholding God, and His paradise.

-- His **pavilion:** referring to God partaking of our sojourn in the world; having His own tabernacle, living among us, and departing with us, until He carries us to His heavens; ... The glory of God used to dwell in His holy tabernacle.

-- His **tabernacle** under which He protects us against the heat of temptations.

-- A **Rock:** To which He lifts us up, away from the serpent, which cannot crawl on a smooth rock.

b- Beholding and meditating with gladness in the Lord, dwelling in His holy temple:

“To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (4). The Holy God dwells in His holy temple; pouring the holy life upon

His church, so that the believer would enjoy the holiness, without which no one would be able to behold God.

The soul sanctified in the Lord is counted as His temple, a chaste virgin for Christ; As according to St. Jerome: [Blessed is the soul, the virgin in whose heart there is no place except for the love of Christ; who, Himself is the Wisdom, purity, perseverance, justice, and every other virtue].

c- “For in the time of trouble, He shall hide me in His pavilion, in the secret place of His tabernacle, He shall hide me” (5)

According to St. Augustine, the tabernacle or the pavilion of the Lord refers to His incarnation, as He emptied Himself and hid His Deity, to consummate the salvation work by the cross, to let us hide in Him from the arrows of the enemy, and the reproach of sin.

+ For He hid me in the ordinance of His incarnated Word, through the temptation that confronted my mortal life; He hid me in His pavilion; and protected me since the faith that justifies me has dwelt in my heart (Romans 10: 10).

“He shall set me high upon a rock”; to guide me to salvation by the manifest knowledge of my faith, He made like a stronghold founded upon His strength.

(St. Augustine)

The pavilion of Christ in which He hides me, is His body resurrected from death, in which, by dwelling in it, I am protected against my corrupt nature; as it is written: *“On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down”* (Amos 9: 11).

The pavilion, here, refers to the honored and holy body, the temple of God, born by the virgin, in which the believer dwells in company with the body of the Lord.... Having taken for Himself the nature of every body, He became the true vine, in which He gathered together the element of every branch.

(St. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers)

There is a bond between the tabernacle and the pavilion; both refer to the Lord's company with us during our sojourn in this world. The

tabernacle was set in the middle of the camp during the journeys of the people through the wilderness; and in it the Lord shone His glory and splendor upon His people during peace. The royal pavilion on the other hand was set in the midst of the camp of the army, during battles, guarded by the mighty warriors; ... The believer lives under the protection of the Warrior King and His heavenly hosts; ... Christ dwells in our life under all circumstances, to grant us His glory and conquest.

The tabernacle refers to the sacrifice, in which the holy blood protects the believers against sin. And the pavilion refers to the necessity of the spiritual strife under the leadership of the Savior Himself. It is as though both the tabernacle and the pavilion represent the unity of faith and strife; namely, the works of our new life in Christ Jesus, the Subject of our faith, and the Leader of our spiritual strife.

d- Being set up high by the Lord upon a Rock:

The Rock upon which the Lord sets me high is the living faith in Him, which is the foundation of the church, and upon which the holy souls are built as a holy temple for the Lord, whose foundation the tempests could not shake.

As the serpent cannot crawl on a smooth rock, When our Christ sets us high in Him, the old enemy would not be able to crawl into us.

The prophet David often speaks of the Lord Christ as a Rock (See psalm 18); the Rock from which the water of wisdom flows, that waters the soul, and supports it in its sojourn, and during her continuous spiritual strife.

e- Having conquest over his enemies:

“And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me” (6)

Finding his refuge in the Lord's royal pavilion, the believer's head is lifted up above his enemies, trusting in the sure conquest he gets under the leadership of the Lord. In the house of God, we, not only find refuge against the wicked enemies, but we gain honor, having our heads lifted up; for which we offer the sacrifices of praise and exultation. Our hearts trusting in the perfect conquest, our heads are lifted up with joy and cherish, even though we see ourselves surrounded on all sides and threatened by our enemies.

The temple was seen as a secure place (see 2 Kings 11: 3; Nehemiah 6: 10); the secret of its security is not its high walls and towers, but the Lord dwelling in it, and the fellowship with Him experienced inside it.

f-Offering sacrifices of joy and singing praise to the Lord:

In the house of the Lord our souls exult by God, whom we recognize and behold the splendor of His holiness; in whom we take refuge; by whom we enjoy conquest; whom we approach; and whose company we experience in our life; So that our depths would turn into a spiritual harp, on which the Spirit of the Lord plays the praises of thanksgiving, setting our heads high above the adversary evil enemy.

- + We offer the inexpressible sacrifice of exultation, of joy, and of thanksgiving.... But where would we offer it? ... in His tabernacle; in His holy church ... Here we find a reference to the glory of the church.

Concerning the present, we are committed to moan, and to pray: Moaning being the portion of the miserable, while praying is that of the needy.

Prayers will pass on, to be replaced by praise; ... Weeping will pass on, to be replaced by joy.

(St. Augustine)

3- A PRAYER WITH HOPE:

“Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When You said, ‘Seek My face’, my heart said to you, ‘Your face, Lord, I will seek’. Do not hide Your face from me. Do not turn Your servant away in anger” (7-9)

Having been surrounded by his enemies, the psalmist prayed seeking help from God his Light; But, beholding the divine Light, he came to forget all about his enemies, and sought from God to shine upon him, to enjoy His face.

According to the Hebrew text, it came as “*Seek My face*”; David probably remembered the grace-filled divine promise, that if we seek His face, He would never deny it to us.

While painfully thinking about the affliction he brought upon himself through sin, memories shine on him as light in the midst of darkness, of the covenants he is committed to, and of the Word of God which expresses both the commandment and the divine promise, at the same time, saying: “*Seek My face*”.... The psalmist, therefore, instead of getting disturbed by the enemies and their threats, is preoccupied with God’s commandment, counting it as a promise; in response to our request to enjoy beholding Him.

Hiding His face, means God, as the Divine Judge, refuses to attend to our case, and to grant us salvation. The psalmist probably intends to say: I know that the multitude of my sins would make You hide Your face from me; You reject me because of Your justice and righteousness, but You are a merciful God, capable of saving.

- + Hiding His face because of our sins does not mean forsaking us in anger; for he may hide His face from your sins, but He would never hide His face from you as a person.

(St. Augustine)

We cry out to God, together with the psalmist, seeking from Him not to remember our sins, but to remember our sinful souls, that by repentance, they would receive His mercy; not to hide His face from us, but from our sins, to return to Him, to see Him and He sees us. The psalmist consummates his prayer, saying: *“Do not leave me, nor forsake me, O God of my salvation”* (9);

- + *“Do not forsake me, O God of my salvation”*, Despise not a mortal seeking the Immortal! For You heal the wound caused by my sin.

(St. Augustine)

Praying to God, the psalmist feels comfort, and that he is lifted up by the divine grace.

Even though his friends, and probably even his own parents, have given him their backs, counting his affliction as chastisement by God. Yet there is light that brings him gladness in his loneliness, which is that God receives him, embraces him to His bosom, and carries him as a son on His divine arms. God's love exalts above any other love, even above parental love..

“When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me” (10)

It is difficult to imagine that the father and mother may forsake their own child; yet if it so happens because of unforeseen circumstances, the heavenly Father who will embrace him, lift him above his enemies, and bring him forth into the eternal bosoms. ... 'Hagar' forsook her son under a tree to die of thirst, and went to sit afar from him. But the Lord heard the moaning of the boy, and opened the mother's eyes to see a well of water to quench her son's thirst. Moses' parents, likewise, forsook their son in the river among the weeds; and the Lord sent Pharaoh's daughter to adopt him.

We did not hear that David's parents have forsaken him, but he probably meant their inability to give him help in the time of his troubles. Some believe that the father and mother, here, refer to the dear friends, and those close to him, who denied him their trust and appreciation.

- + *"When my father and my mother forsake me"*. The kingdom and city of this world, that gave me my mortal birth, have failed me, because I sought You, and despised their gifts to me. They could not give me what I need; but the Lord received me, granted me Himself, and cared for me.
- + The psalmist here, made himself like a little child before God, whom he sees as his father and mother: his father, on account of that He has created him; and His mother, on account of that He cares for him, raises him, feeds him, suckles him, and nurses him.

Having been without faith, the devil was our father (John 8: 44); and Babylon was our mother... But now, we recognized God as our true Father; and the heavenly Jerusalem, the holy church, as our true mother, part of which still sojourn on earth.

Away from our ancient father and the mother, namely, from the devil and Babylon, God received us as His children, to comfort and bless us by immortal things.

Our enemies are still capable of stirring up troubles against us, for we are still within their hands; but our Head is actually there in heaven; He who said: "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?*" (Acts 9: 4); by which He clearly shows that He is in us. Even though we are down there on earth; Yet we are, at the same time, in Him up high; according to the words: "*lifting up my head above my enemies around me*" (6).

(St. Augustine)

Proclaiming his parents' inability to support him in his time of affliction, the psalmist found in God the compassionate heavenly fatherhood, capable of saving him from his enemies, of restoring his honor, to lift up his head above them. While still on earth, perpetually wrestling against his spiritual enemy, In this war he needs no map to guide him in his battle, but a Leader to hold his hand, to hide him in Him, and to grant him the spirit of conquest; Hence he says: "*Lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies*" (11).

The Lord Christ, as a Guide and a Way at the same time, precedes and supports the believer to pass through the narrow royal path, the path of the cross, without stopping nor retreat.

- + Grant me uprightness on the narrow path; It is not enough for me to start; for my enemies will not cease to afflict me until I reach my goal.

"For false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence" (12)

Oppression would not be satisfied except by realizing its vanity; Yet, because it failed to disturb me, I got a promise of a greater reward in

heaven: “*I would have lost heart, unless I had believed, that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*” (13)

(St. Augustine)

While oppression found many false witnesses; I, by faith, found in God a Father, a Mother, and a Support. ... While oppression will come to an end by reaching its goal, namely, vanity and destruction; I will reach my goal, when I behold what God has promised me of blessings in heaven “*the land of the living*”.... While the wicked trust in oppression, to collapse together with it; I trust in faith, by which I am lifted up to the land of the living.

What is the land of the living?

- + I do not believe that the prophet calls this earth “*the land of the living*”, on account of that it only produces mortal things; and all what come out of it will eventually dissolve. But, by “*the land of the living*” he meant that land, not approached by death, nor on which the wicked tread, or evil has a place.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa).

- + By baptism, we came to be “*the land of the living*”, and not that of the dead; Namely, of virtues, and not of iniquities. But for this to be true, we are committed, after being baptized, to keep away from going back to the mire of iniquities, and to have no place in us for blood, namely, for the works of evil entailing death.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- + It is befitting of “*the land of the living*” to be desired, not in an earthly way without life, but in a heavenly way, and with an alert heart; on account of that it is the land

for which the psalmist longed with flaming love, singing with joy (in another psalm):
“*My soul longs for you like a thirsty land*” (Psalm 143: 6).

(St. Augustine)

- + As “*the land of the living*” is there, the (land of the dead) is surely here!
- + Because all good things are there, where eternal life is, life without sin, the psalmist says in another location: “*We would be filled with the goods of Your house*”

(St. Ambrose)

4- A COUNSEL AND GUIDANCE:

“*Wait on the Lord, Be of good courage. And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord*” (14)

Teaching us the life of prayer, together with repentance, in order to enjoy conquest over the enemies, to enjoy the beauty of the Lord’s temple, and to behold the Lord’s face; the psalmist again, confirms our need to trust in God, to wait on the Lord, and to anticipate His work in us; to wait on Him with strong faith, being sure of His compassionate fatherhood, grantor of every heavenly blessing.

- + Endure as a man, the fire that purifies your lusts, and with courage that which purifies your heart. Do not assume that what you have not got, you never will; and do not fall in despair, as long as you meditate in the words, saying: “*Wait on the Lord*”.

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 27

“My father and my mother have forsaken me”

- + When the enemy gathers up his armies against me, I feel darkness;
All my friends and loved ones have deserted me;
My father and mother have forsaken me;
But You are my Savior, my Support, and My Conquest.

- + By You I am enlightened, to have no fear of the hosts of darkness;
In Your house I dwell, and my soul finds comfort;
Your holy sanctuary lifts me up to Your heavens;
And in Your tabernacle I rejoice together with Your angels and saints.

- + I sought Your face; I pray, do not hide it from me;
Hide it from my sins; for my soul waits on You.

- + The wicked find strength in oppression which will not endure;
But I enjoy You, For You are my reward and my glory.

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CHAPTER 28

OUR CHRIST IN THE PIT

A MESSIANIC PSALM:

The prophet David, while suffering, and feeling that he was going down to the pit, by the spirit of prophecy, he saw the Lord Christ, our Savior, entering into Hades to break down its gates, and to redeem from it the believers of the Old Covenant, who have fallen asleep with hope. He saw the Savior of the world, who, by His own free will, chose to deliver Himself for the sake of mankind. In other words, this psalm is said in the name of “the Son of David”, presenting in some detail the experience of the literal (or historical) David; And at the same time, presenting it as a symbol of the Lord Christ to come; Hence, this psalm is considered a Symbolic Messianic psalm; or actually a supplication presented by our Greatest High Priest to our account.

About this psalm, St. Augustine says: [It is the voice of the Intermediary, whose arm was strong in His struggle with passions. The evils which He seems to pour upon His enemies, are not curses, but rather a proclamation of their punishment; the same way it came in the gospel, when our Lord addressed the cities which saw the miracles He performed, and yet did not believe in Him (Matthew 11: 20),

‘Gunkel’ sees this psalm as a personal lamentation; ‘Mowinkel’ sees it as a national collective lamentation; ‘Tournay’ sees it as a psalm of thanksgiving; while others see it as a royal psalm.

This lamentation is a cry-out because of a deep pressure, reflecting a huge danger that dwelt upon David, even close to death; It represents a **prayer** for the sake of judgment

over the enemies, a **praise** for the sake of the anticipated salvation; and an **intercession** for the sake of all the people of God.

This psalm is a fulfillment of David's vow to offer to the Lord a sacrifice of joyful praise amid his sufferings. ... Here he fulfills his vow, even before the Lord responds to his prayers.

David's afflictions turned him into (the sweet psalmist of Israel), who, with a spirit of confidence, knows how to resort to God with effective and well-received cry-outs from the heart, ... how to hate and fear evil, ... how to have a wide heart to perceive the salvation of the Lord for him, as well as for all his people; ... and how to forget his own troubles, and seek the blessing and growth of the people of God. In other words, his afflictions did not lead him to depression or grumbling, as much as to the width of heart with love, and the lifting up of the mind to heaven to live perpetually exultant.

Its general frame::

1- A supplication	1 - 2
2- An entreaty and trust	3 - 5
3- A thanksgiving and praise	6 - 7
4- An intercession and love	8 – 9

1- A SUPPLICATION: (1 – 2)

This prayer was raised in the temple, by someone, probably ill or suffering affliction by the wicked. It was raised toward the depths of the temple – the Holy of Holies – where God resides over Ark of the covenant (1 Kings 8: 6-7). According to the Hebrew text and the Septuagint version, this psalm is referred to the prophet David; although some refer it to king Hezekiah when he was about to die.

Confronted by a horrible danger, that turned him into weakness itself, yet the prophet David felt that he would be saved even from going down to the pit, to the shadow of the lower world, through the salvation of God.

“To You I will cry, O Lord my Rock; Do not be silent to me, lest, if You are silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit” (1)

What does God’s silence mean?

1- It means that God will not be silent anymore; He will talk to bring joy to His servant, and confusion to his evil enemies. It is ‘the prayer of listening’; namely, to beseech God to listen and to respond to us.

2- By the silence of God, we would be denied His Word – our life – He who created the whole world for our sake, and saved us by His cross. Whoever does not enjoy the fellowship with the Lord Christ, the Word of God, will not be able to hear the Father, nor to recognize His divine will; And for him, God will be silent. Such a man would end into the pit of death! ... How horrible is the silence of God!

3- God would never separate from His Word; But a non-believer, for whom Jesus is not the Word of God, by his lack of faith he deprives himself of the divine voice, and for him God would be silent.

1- In His love, God is perpetually talking to man – his beloved creature. The spiritual man hears the voice and responds; Whereas the carnal man would assume Him silent. God spoke, and was heard by the child Samuel; while Eli, the experienced priest could not hear Him. The believer with the (circumcised) ears would, all the day long, hear the word of God addressed to him personally; when all the others would count God as silent, not responding

to their prayers and supplications. The psalmist, asking for a personal divine response, says: *“Do not be silent to me, lest I become like those who go down to the pit”*. ... Knowing for sure that God would never be silent, his fear lied in his own self; lest he may be deaf, and God would seem to him as silent. He used to cry out from his heart with unutterable words, anticipating God’s voice in his heart as a personal message that touches his life.

5- The silence of God toward a sick man, reminds us of what came in the gospel of St. Luke 7: 7, when the Centurion said to the Lord Jesus:

“Say the word, and my servant will be healed”; and when the leper said to Him: *“Lord, if You are willing. You can make me clean”* (Luke 5: 12).

The Word of God came to realize our salvation from Hades by His salvation works that proclaim the divine love even through His silence. We remember the suffering servant in the book of the prophet Isaiah, the Word of God who *“will not cry out, nor raise His voice to be heard in the street”* (Isaiah 42: 2); And we remember as well the silence of the Lord Jesus during His passion before the Sanhedrim, and before Pilate, when *“He kept silent and answered nothing”* (Mark 14: 61; 15: 5).

2- According to St. Augustine, the words of the psalmist are the words said by the Lord Christ on the cross; when the non-believers thought that He was forsaken by God, and that He was going down into the pit forever.

3- Having prayed for the sake of his own spiritual progress, and the edification of the kingdom of God within himself; he believed that unless God responds to his prayer, he would be counted as dead, going down into the depths of Hades (the pit). Trusting in God’s power to overcome death, he did not fear death itself, but feared an immature death, namely, to die before he could realize the mission for which he was created and called by God.

In short, when God seems to have closed His ears and would not listen to us, or became silent, and would not respond to our prayers, We are committed to persist on raising our supplications, until we enjoy our right for a divine response; Namely, our right to be brought up as though from Hades, to enjoy the resurrected life. God's silence is death to us, and His talking to us is an enjoyment of the new resurrected life in the Word of God, raised from the death.

“Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary” (2)

Supplicating to God, asking Him to talk to him personally, and not to be silent, and finding his salvation in God who dwells among His people, the psalmist lifts up his hands toward the holy temple of God, which although not yet built, yet, by the holy sanctuary, he meant the Ark of the testimony, and the seat of mercy, being the throne of God who resides between the two cherubs, from where He used to address His people, as it came in the book of Exodus 25: 22: *“And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim, which are on the ark of the testimony”*. The seat of mercy refers to the Lord Christ, the Word of God, who proclaims the Father and the propitiation (John 1: 1; 14: 9; Romans 3: 25; 1 John 2: 2). Now, as it is in prayer, it is also by faith we look up at the Lord Christ, the way the believers of the Old Testament used to look at the seat of mercy.

Lifting the hands up is an old sign in prayer, supplication, and entreaty (Psalm 44: 20; 63: 4; 88: 9; 141: 2; 143: 6), referring to a wish to enjoy the heavenly blessings, and of feeling the need for heavenly things, which the temporal things cannot fulfill. Stretching and lifting up the hands also symbolize faith in the crucified Lord Christ, and partaking of His cross, the grantor of conquest. It was not possible for the people of the old to overcome Amalek, without the lifting hands of the prophet Moses. And the Coptic artist used to portray the saints lifting their hands up, to proclaim that the secret of their holiness and conquest, as true men of prayer, is their attachment to the Crucified.

What came in verse 2 are the words uttered by the buried Lord Christ; whom the Jews assumed that He has gone down forever into the pit, together with the evildoers; when He actually went down to Hades to bring forth those who departed in hope, and in anticipation of His salvation work.

Comparing between the prophet Jeremiah who was cast into a royal dungeon in the court of prison, where he sank in its mire (Jeremiah 38: 6); and St. Peter who ascended to the roof of the house where he saw a divine vision, the scholar Origen says that, as believers, we should ascend together with the Word of God by the Holy Spirit, in order to get true knowledge and divine visions; and should never let the word of God be cast down into the dungeon through our carnal thoughts and our evil desires. Ebed-Malech the Ethiopian took with him thirty men, and let down old clothes and old rags by ropes into the dungeon for Jeremiah to put under his arm pits to be lifted up (Jeremiah 38: 13)... Who is Ebed-Malech, but our Lord Jesus Christ, who became a servant to lift up our thoughts and nature from the depth of the pit through the church (the 30 men), by His humility (the old rags). It is befitting of us to receive the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ, to be lifted up, and be clothed with heavenly royal attires forever. There, we would sit at the right hand of the heavenly King, who descended to the pit to keep us from descending to it ourselves.

2- AN ENTREATY AND TRUST: (3 – 5)

The psalmist recognized faith and hope as sources of conquest and victory upon the enemies, not for the sake of personal gains; but upon the hidden enemies, so as not to divert from the way of truth, and not to partake of the evil of the wicked, through using their deceptive ways, to end up having their same portion. He seeks from God with faith, not to forsake him to himself, so as not to perish together with the wicked, saying:

“Do not take me away with the wicked, and with the workers of iniquity, who speak peace to their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts” (3)

The psalmist seeks from God not to count him together with the deceptive wolves and serpent-like wicked, the hypocrites, and the scoundrels; For, being the true Good Shepherd, God knows that the psalmist is a lamb, and not a wolf in the body of a lamb.

The true singer of this psalm is our Lord Jesus Christ, “*who was numbered with the transgressors*” (Isaiah 53: 12), carried the sins of the whole world (1 John 2: 2); and, for our sake, went down to Hades, yet His portion was not together with the wicked, for He has never done evil, nor had iniquity in His mouth. He went down to Hades to separate between the true believers and the wicked non-believers; to carry His believers as spoil upon His shoulders, and to lift them up to the bosom of the Father, to partake of His eternal glories.

If our Christ came down to the world to dwell among the sinners, yet He did not partake of their evil, but delivered His life to carry them forth from evil to a holy life; So it is befitting of us, as members of His body, not to despise the sinners, but the sin; to keep ourselves from evil itself; to live in the world, yet, as though in heaven, where the Holy Spirit of God carries us to His temple, sanctifying our life, so as not to end up like the wicked.

Although the righteous could not be separated from the wicked in the world; yet, it is befitting of the holy church of God not to have the wicked among her congregation; She is committed “*to purge out the (corrupt) old leaven*” (1 Corinthians 5: 7), to remain herself a holy leaven, capable of sanctifying a multitude in the Lord. The psalmist saw her “*a holy sanctuary*” (Psalm 28: 2); the secret of her beauty is that she rises up as though to heaven; has her royal way, along which no wicked may tread! ... The church, therefore, should purge evil (Isaiah 53: 11); And, being the bride of Christ her Groom, she should forget her people and the house of her ancient father, the devil; for “*the King greatly desires her beauty*” (Psalm 45: 11)

- + Paul counsels us, saying: “*purge the corrupt from among yourselves*”, “*to put away from yourselves that wicked person*” (1 Corinthians 5: 13, 2); “*for evil company corrupts good habits*” (1 Corinthians 15: 33). I wish we keep away from having wicked friends.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Who are those wicked from whom the psalmist advises us to keep away, so as not to end up sharing their eternal destiny?

The psalmist concentrates upon the hypocrite deceptive persons, “*who speak peace to their neighbors, but evil is in their hearts*”; those who utter sweet and smooth words, that bear the image of love, so as to catch the souls of the simple; those are more dangerous than the ferocious beasts. The psalmist, by the eye of prophecy saw Judas Iscariot who delivered his Lord by a kiss, together with a word of peace.

- + Who is that lamb who turned himself into a wolf, and started to bite the Good Shepherd?!
- + Why have you forgotten the gift given to you by the Lord, the same gift He gave Peter and John?!
- + Beware, O wise people, from the deceptive kisses; as through one of them the Son of God was hanged on a tree!

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

- + Malice is a science, and a satanic act devoid of truth, which the wicked think he can hide from most people.

Hypocrisy is a mixture of all kinds of tricks by which the body appears with what contradicts what lie in the soul.

Innocence is a feature of the sound, comfortable soul, free of any deception..

He who has no malice has his soul as pure as it was created, and acts according to this purity.

. is a false prophet.

(St. John El-Sollamy)

Anyway, he who does not partake of the evil of the wicked, would have the hope not to partake of their punishment.

“Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavors. Give to them according to the work of their hands. Render to them what they deserve” (4)

This is not the language of grudge or revenge, that may contradicts the prayer for our enemies, but it is rather a prophecy concerning their

Perdition, for the psalmist knows that men will surely reap nothing but what they sow.

According to Bishop Weiser, members of the congregation who entered with God into a covenant, intended to express their separation, actually and positively, from the suppressive elements among them (Deuteronomy 27: 11; etc.).

The cause of their malice and their deception, is the blindness that dwelt upon their insight, that made them unable to recognize the (fingerprints) of God’s love in the works of His creation, salvation, and the going on events; denying themselves, therefore, God, the source of their edification, to come to lose even what they have got by nature; Instead of being exalted, they go down; and instead of being built up, they are destroyed; ... God’s grace would be utterly taken away from them.

“Because they do not regard the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands, He shall destroy them, and not build them up” (5)

Non-believers would reap the fruit of their malice, their evil, and spiritual blindness;
Being deceived by their own deception, they will perish.

3- A THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE: (6 – 7)

“Blessed be the Lord, because He has heard the voice of my supplications” (6)

Having offered a spiritual prayer from the heart, the prophet David perceived that salvation, or even what is greater (the everlasting salvation) is not far from him. Being convinced that the Lord has heard him, and has not been silent toward him, he uttered a praise of thanksgiving to God. By faith he prayed (1 – 2); and by the same faith, he offered thanksgiving; For he, who prays with faith will rejoice in hope.

It is befitting of us to trust in the words of God Himself, saying: *“It shall come to pass, that before they call, I shall answer, and while they are still speaking, I will hear”* (Isaiah 65: 24). For through such trust our prayer and supplications are mixed with thanksgiving and praise to God, who surely hears us.

Asking us to pray according to the will of God, to respond to our prayers, St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian, says:

[We should not seek from God something He intends to grant us without being asked, not only to us, His own household, and beloved friends, but even to those who do not know Him. The Lord says: *“Do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do”* (Matthew 6: 7); *“But seek first the*

kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”
(Matthew 6: 33).

And in case you seek something, and He does not hasten to respond to it, do not be sad, for you are not wiser than God; ... You may not be worthy of getting your request; Or the ways of your heart do not conform to your request (but contradict it); Or you have not reached yet the stature that makes you worthy of getting the request you ask for.... We should not rush to reach great statures before the right time, so that God’s gift would not be abused on account of being got in a hurry. For what we get in a hurry, we would lose in a hurry; Whereas what we get with labor, we shall surely keep]

Having got his request, being spiritual concerning his own salvation, the edification of the congregation, and the perdition of evil, a request befitting of his spiritual stature, the psalmist enjoyed the blessing of the Lord in his heart, and his tongue opened up to bless the Lord.

Who can utter the words: “*Blessed be the Lord*”, except one whose heart is full of the blessing of the Lord? ... He who gets the blessing will feel the blessed God, Grantor of the blessings; ... He who is glorified within himself, would be able to glorify God, would experience the strength of the Spirit, and would praise the Lord, Grantor of strength.

“The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him” (7)

Trusting with his heart trusted; namely, with his whole inner man, his whole being exulted. The trusting hearts exult in the Lord.

During affliction, man sees his life as the longest and darkest nights. But with faith, the Lord Christ shines upon his life, turns it into a joyful day; and turns the darkness into light. That is why David's lamentations always mix with sacrifices of thanksgiving.

- + He who walks along the way of the Lord, would give Him thanks for everything dwelling upon him, and cast blame upon himself.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

4- AN INTERCESSION AND LOVE: (8 – 9)

In his affliction, the psalmist believes, not only that the salvation of God has turned his sorrow into joy, and his supplication into thanksgiving, but has turned it, as well, into an intercession. Hence he forgets his own affliction to seek the edification of the people of God. He could not rejoice in his own salvation, without confessing his preoccupation with the congregation.

“The Lord is their strength, and He is the saving refuge of His anointed. Save Your people and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them also, and bear them up forever” (8 – 9)

The psalmist generalizes his experience, applying it to the people, protected by 'Jehovah' their God; believing that what is for the benefit of the king, would surely touch the people as a whole; and what is for the benefit or loss of a member, would have its activity upon the body as a whole.

By saying: “*Your people*”, David refers them to God and not to himself. They are the portion of the Lord, and the Lord is their strength and salvation.

David asks God to grant His people the following blessings:

- a- Salvation: To save them from their enemies. They cannot enjoy fellowship with Him, unless He grants them conquest upon the 'ego', sins, and Satan.
- b- The blessings from God, to be blessed. Their salvation from their spiritual enemies is not enough, but they are in need of tasting the sweetness of God Himself; their righteousness, sanctification, glory, and joy.
- c- Caring for them; feeding them in His heavenly pasture, namely, in His church; offering them the heavenly bread, the Eucharistic body, and the Eucharistic blood of Christ, together with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- d- Lifting them up above all enemies; above fears and dangers, to enjoy the exalted inheritance and the everlasting glory. He lifts His believers forever. He does not take away the sufferings from their life, as much as lifting them up above every affliction and sorrow, to enjoy Him even in their temptations.

The people looked up to David as being their shepherd, and expected him to bear them, which he did; on account of that he, himself was borne. We, as well, if we are borne in the bosom of the Father, in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, We, in our turn, could bear the others to the same place, not by our own ability, but by the divine grace. The entire burden will not abide on our soldiers, but on those of that One Good Shepherd, alone.

It is not the work of the spiritual guides alone, to pray for the sake of the people, but it is the work of every member of the congregation to pray for the sake of Jerusalem (9); ... of the parents to pray for the sake of their children, and of the children to pray for the sake of their parents; ... of the priests to pray for the sake of the people, and of the people to pray for the sake of their priests. ... Through prayers together with love and good work, even a child can bear the whole world in Christ.

Such intercession was also uttered by Christ, risen from the dead, through His propitiation blood, for the sake of the edification of His people, granting them the resurrected life.

So the psalm started by supplication to God to hear the voice of the psalmist, for the sake of his own edification, and the destruction of evil; Then his supplication, through faith, turned into a song of praise of thanksgiving to God, who hears the prayers of His believers. The psalmist set forth to intercede for the entire congregation, through his practical experience with God, with a wide heart.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 28

SAVE ME, O LORD, FROM THE DUNGEON OF THE PIT

- + You, who descended to Hades for my sake;
Lift me up from the Hades of the 'ego', and set me free from the pit of sin

- + Listen, O Eternal Word, to my cry-outs;
Carry me by Your love on Your shoulders
For You are the Good Shepherd.

- + Teach me to carry every soul; by my love;
The way You carry me by Your love
Train me by Your Holy Spirit to pray for the sake of every soul;
So that all would live in the bosom of the Father forever.

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PSALM 29

A THUNDERSTORM OR THE VOICE OF THE LORD

On this psalm, a feeling of the authority of the Lord prevails. It starts by a heavenly scene, in which the high creatures offer glory, in harmony with the sound of violent thunder, emerging from the natural elements.

Its occasion:

According to the Septuagint version, this psalm was sung on the occasion of the holy feast of the tabernacles, during which the people rejoiced in the harvest (particularly of olives and grapes); And praying to the Lord to send rain to break down the season of draught (Zechariah 14: 16 – 18). The 'Telmud' binds psalm 29 to the feast of the Pentecost, or of the Weeks.

According to some scholars, the prophet David wrote this psalm after setting the tabernacle of the meeting. ... And according to St. Athanasius the apostolic, what came in the title of this psalm: "On the way of the tabernacle", symbolically refers to the Jews who ministered in the tabernacle, and through the shadow – of the law and the prophecies – until they came out of it, for the Gentiles to enter into faith instead of them. ... And according to 'Theodorus', the tabernacle here, is the body, in which the soul dwells; and coming out of it refers to the departure from this mortal world. This psalm, therefore, teaches us to be prepared to depart to our heavenly home. ... And according to St. Augustine, this psalm refers to the purification of the church, and to keeping her holy in this world, until she departs from it.

We therefore, see how the fathers see this psalm as being the psalm of the glorious work of God, who, by His Holy Spirit, blows like a thunderstorm that shakes the depths of the soul, and prepares her to depart from this world, with a holy life that glorifies God;

... It is the psalm of God' glory, working in His people, to bring them forth to the fellowship of His glories.

The prophet David could have been watching a terrifying thunderstorm that came all of a sudden, from the mountains of Lebanon, down to the wilderness of Kadesh in the south, all the terror and horror it brought by its fierce thunder and lightening, and the damage of the fires it caused to possessions. ... Yet, it would not stop at the external natural signs and consequences; but it should be understood as a self-testimony about God, of the history of salvation.

Psalm 29, therefore roars together with the sounds of the terrifying winter storms, through the circumstances experienced by the people, who perceived that God is like a thunderstorm that dwells, not only on nature, but would sweep through the soul. He dwells in our souls, even during the inner thunderstorms of temptations.

The prophet David, being a man of extremely tender senses and feelings; knows how to play on the strings of his heart a melody of love to God, under any circumstances.... Under a clear sky, he would say: "*Heavens speak of the glory of God*".... and in every thunder or lightening, during a thunderstorm, he senses the active voice of God in human life. If he enters into an affliction, he gets in touch with God, his Savior; ... And if he gets comfort, he would enjoy the deposit of the heavenly joy. ... In case he is chased and driven out by enemies, he searches for the city of God, whose gates are open with love; ... And in case he returns to his people, he sings a praise for the beauty of the house of God.

The active voice of the Lord:

In this psalm we find "*the voce of the Lord*" repeated seven times, like seven consequent waves of thunder; portraying the power and activity of the Divine Word in the life of men. The "Voice of the Lord" is the incarnate Word who descended to the world to set out of His disciples, "the sons of thunder", as active tools to enjoy the new

evangelic life; when their old nature is shaken, falls down, and replaced by a new nature, bearing the image of Christ the Word; to enjoy the blessing, the honor, and the glory.

“God is in the thunderstorm”; not only in nature, but in the thunderstorm of the inner soul, as well. In our depths He proclaims Himself through the thunderstorms that sweep through our inner nature. The Word of God came to enter into the soul, and to stir up in her an inner revolution against evil; to destroy in her the ancient man, and to grant us the new man.

It is also a thunderstorm that dwells upon the congregation as a whole, through which God proclaims His covenant with His people, not set upon putting a new cloth on an old garment; but upon a complete and a renewable change; Hence the name of God ‘Jehovah’, His special name concerning His relationship with His people, appears 18 times in this short psalm. This title proclaims His presence among His people; truly glorified, not only through His might in nature, but rather in His presence among His children.

Its relationship to psalm 28:

This psalm comes in its right position after psalm 28, in which the psalmist cries out: *“To You I will cry, O Lord my Rock, Do not be silent to me, lest if You are silent to me, I become like those who come down to the pit”* (Psalm 28: 1); to which God responded, and granted him His active voice as a thunderstorm that swept through his depths, and changed his nature.

The two psalms are alike in their ends; granting His people strength (honor), and blessing them with peace.

Its general frame:

1- A call to worship	1 - 2
2- The thunderstorm and the goodness of God	3 - 9
3- God, the eternal King	10
4- God's graces upon His church	11

1- A CALL TO WORSHIP: (1 – 2)

“Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones; Give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (1, 2)

Every strike of thunder was interpreted by David as a call to him, as well as to others, to give glory and honor to God.

Who are the mighty ones?

- a- According to some scholars, it refers to the holy heavenly beings, counted as the children of God; and refers, as well, to those who ministered in the temple in Jerusalem, being a shadow of the heavenly kingdom.
- b- According to fathers of the church, it refers to the Christians who came from all the nations and tribes to present their life a sacrifice of love to God; those whom the Lord commanded to call God their Father, saying: *“Our Father in heaven”* (Matthew 6: 9).

The psalmist (according to the Arabic language version) calls upon the mighty children of God to *“give unto the Lord the little sons of sheep”*, as glory and strength to his name. Those are the believers who have got the adoption to the Mighty One by baptism, and have got the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of glory and strength.

What can the heavenly beings or the believers, give God except their life as a sign of love to Him, as a response to His love for them, being His beloved children!.

God's children give Him glory and honor, namely, the enjoyment of God's unique beauty, which is His holiness, and the proclamation of our conquest over sin by the strength of His grace. If God is the whole Holiness, we cannot glorify Him except by our holy life, by a fellowship with the divine nature, and by the experience of the work of His exalted grace.

+ Present yourselves to the Lord, O you who are begotten by the apostles through the gospel "1 Corinthians 4: 15).

Worship the Lord in holy hearts, with love for everyone; for you, yourselves, are His holy royal dwelling place.

(St. Augustine)

+ Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones; Give unto the Lord (the sons of sheep); namely, the offering of the apostles, and the offering of the believers. Let us follow the lead of our Savior who called Himself "*the Shepherd*", "*the Lamb*", that was slain for our sake in the land of Egypt (Exodus 12: 6), and "the ram" that "*was caught in the thicket by its horns*" (Genesis 22: 13), as a ransom for Isaac. Let us say together with David: "*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want; He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters*" (Psalm 23: 1, 2).

(St. Jerome)

We can glorify God by approaching Him as living sacrifices, following the lead of our Savior who, in His love, while being the Shepherd, has become the slain Lamb for our sake; and by delivering our life a sacrifice, so that He would care for us, to be in need of nothing.

King David used to offer himself to his God, and to refer his strength, conquest, and honor to God. ... He used to put his crown, the scepter of his kingdom, his sword, and his flute, in God's hand; ... He used to put all his possibilities, and his gifts, for the glory and the praise of God.

What does he mean by saying: “Give unto the Lord the little sons of sheep”?

This verse could not be literally interpreted, but it bears a prophecy about the Christian faith. For, having been born to fathers who worshipped idols of sheep and other animals; we -- the sons of sheep -- have become by faith the sons of God; Having forsaken the worship of sheep, and believing in the true living God. We, the sons of the Gentiles have become the sons of God; according to the words of the psalmist: “*Instead of your fathers shall be your sons*” (Psalm 45: 16).

According to some, “the (male) sons of sheep”, could not be literally interpreted; For a single male sheep can produce a multitude of offspring; so that a newborn sheep could not be referred to a certain father sheep, but could only be referred to the she-goat that gave it birth; for the entire flock usually would not have more than two or three male sheep among a multitude of she-goats. ...

According to St. Basil: [The male sheep, which precedes the flock, and leads them to pastures, water sources, and folds, symbolizes the overseers over the flock of the Lord Christ, by whose teachings, they lead their flocks to the spiritual pastures and water sources; are ready to stab their enemies by the two horns of the Old and the New Testaments, and to draw them by the Word of God to the good godly life. By turning them into their sons, they would present them to God, saying: “*Here am I and the children whom God has given me...*” (Hebrew 2: 13). 2:

In the Septuagint version, the expression: “*Give unto the Lord*” is repeated four times, then followed by saying: “*Worship the Lord in (His holy sanctuary)*” (2); by which the psalmist calls upon the believers, wherever they are in the four corners of the world

(North, South, East, and West), to present their life as an offering of love to God, without disregarding the holiness of being gathered together in the presence of the Lord in His holy sanctuary, or His holy house. Wherever we are, and under any circumstances, we should be connected to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; to offer our life delivered for the sake of God and men.

Let us worship God in His holy sanctuary ... According to St Basil the Great, God's holy sanctuary is the One holy church, and not the synagogue of the Jews, whose house, because of their sin, is left for them desolate (Luke 13: 35), to be replaced by the church where we encounter God and worship Him by the Spirit and the Truth. ... Yet, according to St. Basil, many in the church who pray while their minds are preoccupied with vanities, would not be in God's holy sanctuary.

According to St. Augustine, God's holy sanctuary is heaven, to which our heart is lifted up, while still being on earth. This could not be realized except by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, who, alone, can bear our inner man to heaven, to say: "*He raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2: 6).. Hence, in the third hour of prayers in the Agpeya, recalling the dwelling of the Holy Spirit on the church, we say: [Whenever we stand in Your holy sanctuary, we are indeed considered as being in heaven].

2- THE THUNDERSTORM AND THE GOODNESS OF GOD: (3 – 9)

The thunderstorm may refer to the prophecies of the Old Testament, through which the voice of God is heard. The words "*The voice of the Lord*" are repeated here seven times.

A- "*The voice of the Lord is over the waters; The God of glory thunders; The Lord is over many waters*" (3)

Commenting on these words, St. Hypolitus the Roman says: [What voice is this? It is "*You are My beloved Son; In You I am well pleased*" (Luke 3: 22). On the

waters of baptism, we listen to the voice of the Mighty God proclaiming our sonship to Him. That is why this psalm is read in the rite of the liturgy of baptism, when the priest stirs the water by the cross after pouring the 'Meron' in the baptismal font.

According to St. Augustine, those waters are the Gentiles who received the voice of the Lord; saying: [When our Lord Jesus Christ made His voice heard through the Gentiles, filled with awe, He turned them to His statutes, and made His dwelling place among them].

Speaking of those "*many waters*", the prophet Isaiah says: "*Woe to the multitude of many people who make a noise like the roar of the seas, and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters. The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters; But God will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, and be chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, like the rolling thing before the whirlwind. Then behold, at eventide, trouble! And before the morning, he is no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us*" (Isaiah 17: 12 – 14).

The Lord rebuked those "*many waters*" by thundering with His voice on the nations who flew away. Having been heathen peoples, they became no more; but came back as a strong and glorious church, carrying not the whirlwinds of the seas, nor their torrent currents, or their salty waters; But came as a church bearing the obedience, meekness, and gentility of Christ.

The "*many waters*" refer as well to the sufferings and afflictions that dwell upon the believer, almost to swallow him; about which the psalmist says: "*Rescue me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of foreigners*" (Psalm 144: 7). The voice of the Lord thunders on them to turn our sufferings into glories, to become a fellowship with Him in His passions and crucifixion, and a way to enjoy the strength of His resurrection and glory (Romans 8: 17).

The “*many waters*” may refer as well to our energies and possibilities, of emotions, feelings, motives, and gifts ... which we corrupted to become like the salty waters of the seas, surrounding and drowning our souls. But through the Word of God, they turned into a river of fresh water that brings pleasure to the city of God, namely, our hearts. ... The prophet Jonah says: “*You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me*” (Jonah 2: 3). Left to his human possibilities, which are a divine gift corrupted by man, Jonah was cast into the heart of the seas, and was about to drown in the deep salty waters; ... But the Word of God turned those energies to his edification, and the seas turned into a fresh water river, not to surround him, but to water his land by heavenly sweetness, turning the dryness of his soul into a fruitful paradise. Instead of moaning because of the water, he said together with David: “*Save me, O God, for the water has come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me*” (Psalm 69: 1, 2); he exultantly praised God for the sake of the rivers running from his heart, according to the words of the Lord Christ: “*He who believes in me, as the Scripture said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*” (John 7: 38); and said together with the psalmist: “*There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God*” (Psalm 46: 4).

Pouring the ‘Meron’ on the water in the font of baptism, the priest stirs the water with the cross, uttering the words we mentioned, to proclaim that the voice of the Father is set forever receiving the newly baptized, those who become members of the body of His beloved Son, to enjoy the fellowship of His glories.

+ God, the Father of glory, thundered, testifying to His Son, saying: “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3: 17).

(St. Jerome)

B- *“The voice of the Lord is powerful; The voice of the Lord is full of majesty” (4)*

When the divine Word came, He, by weakness, proclaimed what is greater than strength; He was raised by the body on the cross, bearing our reproach, to make us bear His strength and majesty, working in our life.

The Word of God, or the voice of the Lord also proclaimed His dwelling in His church, when he performed many wonders through the hands of His apostles; and powerfully spoke by them to draw the Gentiles from corruption to a new glorious life, a joyful evangelic life, a holy life in the Lord.

The psalmist, after speaking of God’s work in “the many waters”. exults in the powerful and glorious voice of the Lord, And the believer, with great strength and majesty, experiences the voice of the Lord in his daily life, after entering into the water of baptism, to receive sonhood in God and the gift of His Holy Spirit, who renews his life to make it according to the image of God.

+ This is our renewal; making us according to the image of God anew, through the washing of renewal and the Holy Spirit, to make us the children of God, a new creation by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, taking away everything old from it..

(St. Basil the Great)

+ Baptism cleanses us from every blemish; makes us the holy temple of God; and brings us back to the fellowship of the divine nature by the Holy Spirit.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

“The voice of the Lord over the waters” terrifies the demons, gives strength and authority to believers; destroys the energies of darkness; and grants us the enlightenment, to live by the Spirit of strength and inner glory, not by the spirit of failure and despair.

C- *“The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; yes the Lord splinters the cedars of Lebanon. He makes them also*

skip like a calf of Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox (the beloved, like the son of the Unicorn) ” (5, 6)

The voice of the Lord in thunder breaks the cedars, the cedars of Lebanon, the strongest of the cedar trees. The strong tempest sometimes uproots them and brings their high and mighty tops down to the ground.

These cedars represent the self-boasting haughty souls. The voice of the Lord or the incarnate Word of God, came to bring these souls forth to the life of humility, through the grief of repentance.

“God has chosen the weak of the world to put to shame those who are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1: 27)... for the weak to enjoy the Mighty One who has taken for their sake the image of weakness..

+ *“The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars”*. By repentance God breaks those who boast the honor of their temporal origin; who are put to shame when they see how He has chosen the lowly ones to show in them His divine strength.

(St. Augustine)

According to some, the cedar here refers to idol-worship with their huge temples and statutes, yet, like the mighty cedar trees, with no spiritual fruit or benefit. The

incarnate Word of God came to uproot the idol-worship and to turn the Gentiles to His kingdom, the kingdom of joyful and fruitful meekness.

Nothing would break the pride of man's heart, or take away the love of the world (idol-worship), and every sin, other than the voice of the Lord, namely, the enjoyment of the Lord Christ, the Word of God, hidden in the words of the Holy Book. Let us then seek and enjoy Him in His gospel, to set His kingdom in us, that no enemy can approach, nor sin partake.

The voice of the Lord crushes the cedar trees "like the calf of Lebanon"; as Moses crushed the golden calf which the children of Israel made and worshipped (Exodus 32: 20). Instead of that heathen god (the golden calf), the believer enjoys "the beloved like the son of the Unicorn"; namely, the Lord Christ the strong and mighty only begotten beloved Son (the corn or horn refers to the ability to give salvation).

Entering into the water of baptism, we encounter the voice of the Lord who breaks in us the haughtiness of our old man, namely, the work of the arrogant devil; the cedar of Lebanon planted inside us; crushes the golden calf; namely, every temporal covetousness and worship; and sets in us the only begotten Word of God, in our new inner man.

+ *"The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars"*, For the Lord Christ was baptized; while the haughty and proud demons have been destroyed and broken in the pit of perdition; broken by the Lord like the cedars and the calf of Lebanon, scattering in the air their bits and pieces away.

+ About the Savior, the psalm says: *"The beloved, like the son of the Unicorn"*. Our beloved Savior Lord is the Son of the Unicorn, namely, the Son of the cross to which the prophet Habakkuk sings, saying: *"His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise; His brightness*

was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, and there His power was hidden” (Habakkuk 3: 3, 4)..After that beloved was crucified, the prophecy that came in the psalm was realized, saying: “*The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire”* (7); For when Christ purified us, the fire of Hades (in us) was quenched.

(St. Jerome)

- + By the holy baptism man is set free from the authority of the devil, and becomes born without seed, just like the Manhood of Christ; He would be sanctified from the birth of seed by the Holy Spirit; that the devil would have no authority on him, as long as the Spirit of Christ is in him.

(Abba Svirus, bishop of El-Ashmonin)

- + Whoever is baptized for Christ, will not only be born from God, but will be clothed by Christ as well (Galatians 3: 27). ... Do not take this by its literal meaning, as being a work of love, but it is the truth; For the incarnation made our union with Christ and our fellowship in the divinity an actual fact.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Connecting between the Lord Christ, “*the beloved Son of the Unicorn*”, and the saints as being unicorns, St. Ambrose says:

[The saints are called unicorns... For these kinds of beasts are counted as have reached the climax of maturity through the appearance of a corn on their head. Therefore, once a corn starts to appear (on the head of the soul), she would seem to have reached a great level of maturity in virtues, and continue growing to reach perfection.

By that corn, the Lord Jesus crushed the fantasies of the Gentiles, and granted them salvation; saying: *“I wound and I heal”* (Deuteronomy 32: 39). That is why, according to the statutes, the clean animals are those with horns, for the divine law is spiritual; Those who drive the seductions of the world away by the Word of God, and by keeping the virtue, are as though armed by horns on their heads.]

Our Christ is a Unicorn, By His cross He destroyed the evil of the Gentiles and acquired them as members in His body. We, as well, are unicorns, we destroy evil by the Holy Spirit, and by the strength granted to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, to live perfect in Him.

D- *“The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire” (7)*

The strong tempests, sometimes cause fires in the forests; and sometimes, by their rain, quench those fires. By His Holy Spirit, the voice of the Lord ignites the fire of divine love, saying: *“I have come to send fire on the earth”* (Luke 12: 49). This fire swallows and divides the fire of lust in us. As, according to St. John Chrysostom: [By fire, fire is quenched; By the fire of the Spirit, the fire of lust are quenched].

According to St. Basil the Great, the voice of the Lord on the great day of judgment divides the flames of fire in the righteous, but its light remain; Whereas in the wicked, what remains is its burning heat, yet with no light. The word *“divides”* here, means discerns or (separates) the righteous from the wicked in the day of judgment, that the righteous, blessed by the Father, would enjoy the glorious inheritance, whereas the wicked would be cast in the fire set for the devil and his angels.

- + I believe that the fire set for the punishment of Satan and his angels is divided by the voice of the Lord. There would be two kinds of capabilities: one to burn, and another to give light. The firm power of the former waits for those worthy of being burnt; while its radiation, grantor of enlightenment, is kept for the joyful to enjoy.

(St. Basil the Great)

E- *“The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness. The Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh” (8)*

In verses 5 – 7 the psalmist talked about the tempest that blows on the mountains of Lebanon, extending hundred of miles north and south in two separate regions: In the north where the valuable cedar trees that were used by king Solomon in His construction projects (1 Kings 5: 6-10; 6: 15; 7: 1-3, 11-12); trees that symbolize haughtiness (Isaiah 10: 33-34; Zechariah 11: 2). Now in Psalm 29: 8 and 9, the tempest crawls toward the wilderness of the Arabian desert, east of the mountain bordering Lebanon, and shakes the whole wilderness. The word “*shakes*” in Hebrew, makes an analogy to a woman in labor.

The divine Word – the voice of the Lord – came to the world that was like a barren and fruitless wilderness, to shake its depths, to become like a woman in the pain of labor, then rejoices by giving birth to an infant who brings happiness to her life. The prophet Isaiah, by the spirit of prophecy, seeing how the world as a wilderness enjoyed the Messianic era, as an era of living water that turned it into a fruitful garden, says: *“The wilderness becomes a fruitful field; ... then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteous will remain in the fruitful field; ... My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places”* (Isaiah 32: 15 – 17).

“The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh” (8). The wilderness of Kadesh through which the people of God passed before reaching the promised land, refers to man before enjoying the divine promise, and entering into the church of the new covenant, the land of peace. Such a man needs the Word of God to dwell in him by faith, to turn him from being the wilderness of Kadesh to the new Canaan.

- + The voice of the Lord shakes the faith of the Gentiles, who were before with no hope, with no God in the world (Ephesians 2: 11), with no prophet, nor a preacher of the Word of God; as though in a barren lifeless wilderness. The voice of the Lord came to shake the wilderness of Kadesh, to make the Word of His Holy Book known, the Word that was forsaken by the Jews who did not understand it.

(St. Augustine)

- + *“The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness”* ... The wilderness here, refers to the church, which has been before childless, then, by preaching Christ, the wilderness was shaken, the time of its labor came to give birth in a single day, to a whole nation (Isaiah 66: 7). After been called the wilderness of Kadesh; it became the wilderness of holiness, carrying virtues, and giving birth to deer, namely, to saints in groups and multitudes, to kill the serpents on earth, despising their venom, while roaming around preaching the gospel of Christ, all saying: *“Glory be to God”*.

(St. Jerome)

F- *“The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth, and strips the forest bare”* (9)

According to the Hebrew text, it is as though the violence of the tempest so terrifies the deer to give birth prematurely; Whereas, according to the Septuagint version, it came as “Calms down the deer”; the Incarnate Word came to calm our disturbed psyches down, and to restore to us our inner peace.

“*The voice of the Lord strips the forest bare*” (9). By the coming of the Incarnate, the secrets of the divine Scriptures were revealed to us, which were before hidden in the shadows.

At the time of tempest, the dense shadows of the forests disappear before the shining of lightning, and the dark caves are exposed, that no man can hide. When the voice of the Lord came to the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve could not hide behind trees, nor their nakedness covered by the olive leaves, even before themselves. .. The Word of God – the Lord Christ -- shines on us by His Holy Spirit, to bare our life before our eyes, and to rebuke our sins, to approach Him as sick seeking to be healed, soul and body.

+ The soul is in need of the divine Lamp; namely, the Holy Spirit, to give light to the dark house; and of the shining Sun of Righteousness to shine and give light to the heart; and is in need of the weapons by which to conquer in the battle.

(St. Maccari the Great)

It is also said that the thunder, reveals the beasts of the forest which hasten in terror to forsake their dens and hiding places, and become easily seen and hunted... The voice of the Lord, that reveals the secrets of the Holy Scripture, and proclaims to us our hidden depths, will reveal, as well, the evil enemy (the wild beasts), and give us the strength to fight him.

3- GOD, THE ETERNAL KING: (10)

“In His temple everyone says: ‘Glory’. The Lord sat enthroned at the flood, and the Lord sits as King forever” (9, 10)

The incarnate Word of God, having dwelt in the wilderness of this world, to set out of the sons of sheep, “sons of God” (1); to turn the many salty waters into fresh water river; namely, to turn the heathen Gentile congregation into His holy church (3); to destroy the haughtiness of man (the cedar of Lebanon); to divide the flame of the fire of the temporal lusts; to shake the barren wilderness to give us the spirit of humility by the fire of His Holy Spirit, to turn it from the barrenness of the wilderness to a fruitful paradise (8); to calm down our wild deer; to reveal our disturbed depths, to grant us His peace, and to give us an understanding of His divine secrets (9);He now turns our life into His holy temple that utters His exalted glories: *“In His temple everyone says: ‘Glory’”*. This temple is nothing but the holy church of Christ, gathered together from all the Gentile nations, full of reproach, to become in glory. There, the Lord reigns over the souls of His believers: *“The Lord sat enthroned at the flood”*; namely, dwelt in the water of baptism, to dwell in the hearts of those who gain the baptism, being the holy temple of God.

- + *“In His temple everyone says ‘Glory’”* (9). In His church, all those who have got the renewal in the hope of eternal life, bless God, each of them according to the gift given to him by the Holy Spirit.
- + The Lord first dwells in the flood of this world through His presence in the saints whom He keeps in the church as though in an ark (Genesis 7). *“The Lord sits as King forever”* (10); enthroned on His elect forever.

(St. Augustine)

4- GOD'S GRACES UPON HIS CHURCH: (11)

“The Lord will give strength to His people; The Lord will bless His people with peace” (11)

If the voice of the Lord came to proclaim its activity in the life of mankind, to turn the barrenness of the world into the paradise of His church; He came for our sake, His people to gain His strength, blessing, and peace.

+ *The Lord will give strength to His people*”. He grants His people the strength to wrestle against the tempests and volcanoes of this life; even though He did not promise them tranquility in this lowly world.

“The Lord will bless His people with peace” (11), Blessing His people, the Lord Himself grants them peace in Him, saying: *“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you”* (John 14: 27)

(St. Augustine)

This psalm ends with a confirmation to us that the tempest will have to come to an end, for God the King to be glorified, He who confirms His love for His church in time of affliction, granting her strength, blessing, and peace, if she delivers her life in His hand, and uses the voice of the Lord and His promises as a support and salvation to her.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 29

HOW AMAZING YOU ARE, O WORD OF GOD

- + O divine Word;
You who set out of us, the sons of sheep, sons of God;
Receive our glorification, praise, and life, as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to You.

- + How amazing You are, O divine Word of God;
You turn the destructive many salty waters of my sins, and the torrent currents of my lusts into peaceful fresh water;
You thunder upon the water of baptism by Your Holy Spirit, to grant me Your dwelling in me;
You grant me Your strength, and pour Your peace in me;
You destroy my haughtiness (the cedar of Lebanon), and grant me Your meekness
You divide the flame of fire of my sins by the fire of Your divine Spirit
You shake the barrenness of my depths, to set Your paradise in me;
You grant peace and edification to my depths, to calm down my deer (the disturbed thoughts and energies of my soul);
You shine on me, to discover my weakness, and to enjoy Your grace through my repentance.

- + Sit enthroned in my heart, and grant me strength, blessing, and peace;
Come to me, O King, and carry me to You.



PSALM 30

THANKSGIVINGS FOR THE SALVATION FROM DEATH AND FOR THE DEDICATION OF DAVID'S HOUSE

Psalms 30 to 34 are psalms of thanksgiving; the first of them (30) is an appreciation and thanksgiving for the sake of a healing, probably miraculous of someone gravely ill, on account of that verses 3 and 9 refer to death and the grave, and to a marvelous healing that motivated the psalmist to offer a joyous thanksgiving; and to show the lessons he learned from his sufferings.

According to its title, this psalm was sung on the occasion of the dedication of David's house.

Although the relationship between seeing this psalm as thanksgiving for being healed from a serious illness, and the dedication of David's house, seems as vague; Yet, there is actually a close relationship between the two. For our good nature, having lost the image of God, and the likeness of its Creator, has suffered a grave (illness), Then the Savior came to heal it, and to restore it to its first beauty, renewing its creation to set out of it a palace for Himself, or a sanctuary dedicated to God.

The following is a parade of the different views concerning the author and the occasion of writing this psalm:

1-According to some, it was written to celebrate a healing from a grave illness, in which the expectation of early death was extremely

terrifying; probably because the person in question was a young man belonging to a group who ministered so close to the God of life in His temple (Psalm 16).

2- According to Pope Athanasius the apostolic, this psalm was sung by the prophet David Himself when he knew that God has forgiven his iniquity, and when by repentance, his soul, dwelling in the house of the Lord, and, herself a house of God, is renewed.

3- According to St. Gregory, this psalm is a prophecy about what was going to happen to king Hezekiah, whom God is going to deliver from the threat of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19), to extend his life 15 years (2 Kings 20), and to save the temple from the enemies, He sees it, as well, as a prophecy about our Lord who, by the power of His resurrection, has renewed our human nature, being His own dwelling place. Many fathers see this psalm through a mystical vision, as the human nature, the house which was renewed by the power of the resurrection of the Lord Christ; and believe that the illness here concerns the soul, that dwelt upon her through falling into sin; so is the healing of the soul through the salvation work of Christ.

4- This psalm was assumed to be prophetically written for the sake of the dedication of the first temple; although there is no proof, nor even a probability of this assumption.

According to 'Plumer', the best view is that this psalm was written on the occasion of the dedication of the altar to the Lord erected on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite on Mount Moriah (2 Samuel 24: 18-25; 1 Chronicles 18 – 30); called by David as "*the house of the Lord*" (1 Chronicles 22: 1).

5- This psalm was used in the dedication of David's own palace, built by the wood of Hiram (2 Samuel 5: 11; 1 Chronicles 14: 1); which

conforms to its title, and the Jewish godly customs (Deuteronomy 20: 5); the same godly feelings borne by David when he dedicated his own house (2 Samuel 7: 2).

We, as well, should dedicate to God the houses in which we live, and set them as little sanctuaries, We are committed to dedicate ourselves, our families, and all our affairs under the care of God; and to seek His presence and blessings.

6- Bishop 'Weiser', believes that this psalm – according to its title – was used in the dedication of the 'Hanukah' of the temple, annually

celebrated as a memorial of the return to worship in the temple which was destroyed by Antichus Epifanius. Starting in the year 165 B.C. a celebration was held at the same day as a memorial of the miraculous salvation from the authority of the Aramites (the Syrians) (1 Kings 4: 52 etc.; John 10: 22); although, according to 'Weiser' this psalm was not written for this goal.

7- According to some scholars, David was the author of this psalm after being saved from an anticipated death for ordering a census of the people (2 Samuel 24).

Having no knowledge that David has ever suffered from a serious illness, as it happened with king Hezekiah; or that he cried out to the Lord to deliver him from it, to which He responded by restoring him to his health and strength; We see what came in this psalm as only symbolic and prophetic; revealing to us how the Son of David resurrected from death, as though healed of His wounds and delivered from death, and set His house; namely His church; according to what is written: "*He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we were healed*" (Isaiah 53: 5).

- + We glorify God when we dedicate in our souls a dwelling place for God; on account of that the title of this psalm is: (A song at the dedication of the house of David).

(The scholar Origen)

- + It is the joyful song of the resurrection which renewed the body, not only that of our Lord, but that of the church as well, giving eternity to her body. In the last psalm, we find the tabernacle in which we should dwell, has been consummated; and this psalm came concerning its dedication, to make it stay forever in peace, not to be destroyed.

(St. Augustine)

The title:

A psalm; a song at the dedication of the house of David.

- 1- The double name “a psalm, a song”, or “a psalm and a song”, implies the use of string musical instrument (a psalm) together with other instruments (a song), when sung in the temple.

According to some scholars, this means the use of voice together with musical instruments, mixed together during the ministry in the temple. Saying: “a psalm, a song” means that the musical instrument precedes the voice.

- 2- Referring this psalm to the prophet David, ‘Gaebelein’ says: [Those who tend to ignore the title and to deny referring this psalm to David, believe its author to be the prophet Jeremiah, when he was lifted up from the pit; depending on the verse, saying: “*For You have lifted me up*” (1); but it does not need to be literally interpreted as being lifted up from a pit, but to be seen as a symbolic expression

referring to lifting up from the depths of sorrow and affliction]. We, in our turn, are in need of this psalm to reveal to us, by the spirit of prayer, the presence of God who listens to our supplications in the midst of our liturgical assembly.

Its general frame:

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1- Singing praise for the sake of healing | 1 - 3 |
| 2- A call to remembrance | 4 - 5 |
| 3- Looking back at the past experience | 6 - 10 |
| 4- Renewal of praise | 11 - 12 |

1- SINGING PRAISE FOR THE SAKE OF HEALING:

The obvious goal of the psalmist is to glorify the Lord who saved him from the pit and the grave, referring the salvation wholly to God.

It is the song of the resurrection, sung by our Christ, risen from the dead. And we – as members of His body – sing it while enjoying His resurrected life. According to St. Augustine: [This song of conquest sung by Christ today would eventually become our song].

- a- *“I will extol You, O Lord, for You have lifted me up, and have not let my foes rejoice over me” (1)*

David was thankful for being lifted up was not by his own effort, nor by any other's; he did not ascend on any man-made ladder, but it is God who lifted him up.

According to Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem, it is a prophecy about king Hezekiah who he was saved from his enemies; And, at the same time, is a thanksgiving prayer raised by the human nature that was saved by the cross of the Lord Christ, from the demons, and from death.

I praise Your glory, O God, for You have granted me the resurrected life, You have not let my foes rejoice over me; and even death has no more authority over me.

- + Satan and his angels were confused before the resurrection of our Lord. The prince of death, seeing the defeat of death, entered into it.

(St. Augustine)

- + The resurrection of the Son, has set peoples free from vanity.
- + The Son of God is risen with great glory; and by His resurrection, the whole world was enlightened

(Mar Jacob El-Serougi)

“And have not let my foes rejoice over me”(1).

In the background, there are always enemies who rejoice over the suffering of the righteous, and who would wish them dead. We all have wicked enemies who lie in wait like vultures of prey, whom nothing would make them happy like seeing some of the righteous trample and fall; about whom the Lord Christ said to His disciples: *“Because you are out of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”* (John 15: 19).

When king David angered the Lord by ordering a census of his people, to boast his might and possibilities, God gave him the choice of one of three chastisements; And with great distress he said to the prophet Gad: *“Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man”* (2 Samuel 24: 14). It is horrible to be delivered by God into the hands of the devil or that of a man! Blessed be the Lord who keep us from enemies.

b- “O Lord, my God, I cried out to You, and You have healed me”
(2)

We see how the Holy Book binds between health, sickness, sin, and virtue, and our relationship with God; summarized in the Book of Deuteronomy by saying on the tongue of God: “*I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal*” (Deuteronomy 32: 39).

Healing is used to express reforming the evil heart (Isaiah 6: 10); healing the broken bones (Psalm 60: 2); healing the soul from the spiritual deflection (Jeremiah 3: 22); healing the broken-hearted (Psalm 147: 3); and making whole a broken potter’s earthen vessel (Jeremiah 19: 11). By healing he probably means saving from a devastating pestilence; like when God said to the destructive angel: *It is enough, now restrain your hand*” (2 Samuel 24: 16)

Being the Physician of the soul and the body, and having the healing of our whole being in His hand, God says: “*I am the Lord who heals you*” (Exodus 15: 26). He is our Maker and our Physician, who can heal our ailing health; By a mere touch of the border of His garment, the woman with a flow of blood was healed; and by a word from His mouth sickness were cured. The Lord bore our wounds to cure us from them through His wounded body; And risen from death, “*death is swallowed up in victory*” (1 Corinthians 15: 54).

+ Having cried out to You, O Lord, my God, I am no more burdened by the frail body, prone to illness and death.

(St. Augustine)

C- You have granted me victory over the pit:

“O Lord, You have brought my soul up from the grave; You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit” (3)

As a Savior, God brings our soul up from the grave of sin; uproots us from the pit of despair; lifts us up from the trash heap, and brings us into the throne of His grace. He, who rescued Jeremiah from the mire dungeon; and who delivered Joseph from the well, to set him up glorified in a foreign land.

He came down to the pit of Hades to save us from the authority of darkness, and to bring us up to the kingdom of light.

With a language of surety, the psalmist says: *“You have healed me”*; *“You have brought my soul up from the grave”*; and, *“You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit”*; For he harbored no doubt in his mind concerning the salvation work of God with him; based upon actual experience. Here on earth, we enjoy the deposit of eternity in our daily life. T

he anticipated healing realized by the fellowship of the eternal glories, we enjoy its deposit now through our experience of the resurrected new life; we experience the inner glory, the heavenly life, and the fellowship with the heavenly creatures; to say, together with the apostle Paul: *“(God) made us sit together in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 2: 6)

2- A CALL TO REMMEMBRANCE: (4 – 5)

In the initiative call (1 to 3), we encounter the divine name “Jehovah –Lord” three times; and in each of them we find a personal motivation for the psalmist to give thanks to the Lord. Now verses 4 – 5, are a call to the whole congregation to partake of expressing thanksgiving. By this, the psalmist does not separate his personal worship from the collective worship; and his godly life from the holy life of the church.

“Sing praise to the Lord, You saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name” (4)

Having experienced the life of praise and joy in the Lord, the psalmist calls on all the Lord's saints to partake of such an angelic life, through remembering God's work along history, and in their life through His dealing with them. For whoever loves God from his whole heart and thanks him faithfully, would like everyone to partake of his work (4).

The psalmist calls the believer saints; for, although holiness concerns God alone, yet He grants it to His people to practice the holy life. The Lord Jesus Christ granted us His Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of sanctification, who grants all goods, and unites us as a holy praising congregation.

If sin corrupts the peace of heart, denies joy to the soul, and deprives man of his fellowship with the heavenly creatures, perpetually singing praise to God, Yet the fruit of the Holy Spirit who lifts us up to the heavenly life, is the inner joy that plays on the strings of our life to produce a symphony of joyful love. . Granting us holiness, we sing by both the heart and the tongue, remembering God's dealings with us, and glorifying His holiness working in us. In other words, there is no separation between holiness and the life of praise.

Calling the holy congregation to remember the holiness of God, or His holy works, the psalmist concentrates on the work of the cross and the resurrection, being an exalted salvation work, by which God's anger is taken away, to be replaced by His pleasure; sorrow and weeping are taken away to be replaced by joy and gladness.

“For the anger is but for a moment, his favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (5)

The psalmist probably refers here to the chastisement that came upon him for ordering a census of the people, when God sent a plague upon Israel caused by His anger and wrath. But the angel of destruction was commanded by the Lord to restrain his hand before the consummation of the days of chastisement; *“For which David built an altar to*

the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord heeded the prayers for the land” (2 Samuel 24: 25).

According to the Hebrew text, God's anger was meant for instruction and not for perdition; His motive for anger was not for personal revenge, but to present His grace for chastisement, to help the people to forsake their crooked ways, and to walk along the way of righteousness.

+ *“For the anger is but for a moment, his favor is for life”. God took away from you the punishment of the original sin, for which you paid by death; “But His favor is for life”; For He granted you the everlasting life, which you gained not for the least effort on your part; for it was according to His good pleasure “for His favor”.*

(St. Augustine)

According to 'Hengstenberg': [In the second part of the fifth verse, there is a show of someone weeping, coming into a house in the evening, to leave it in the morning, to be replaced by another guest who comes to the house, namely, joy].

As sin conceals the light from our hearts, to be replaced by the darkness of sunset, weeping comes to dwell in our tent, counting itself a perpetual resident, not ever to leave it. But thanks to the Sun of righteousness who shone upon our life to scatter its darkness, turning our sunset into a day of light; and driving the weeping away, to be replaced by the inner joy, to dwell in our hearts forever. Hence it was said to the bride of the song: *“Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense”*

(Song 4: 6).

Our shining Groom, by His grace, scattered the darkness of sunset, to turn our life into a joyful wedding, of unceasing feast, and glorious celebrations.

At sunset, weeping dwelt, when our Lord, by His cross, proclaimed the bitterness of sin which He bore on our behalf. And in the morning, He was risen from the dead to grant us His joyful righteousness and His resurrected life.

At sunset 'Rabshakeh' threatened Hezekiah to destroy Jerusalem; but "*now it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the Lord went out and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when the people came early in the morning they were corpses – all dead*" (2 Kings 19: 35). At sunset, the people all wept, and in the morning they rejoiced in the salvation of God.

It was a prophecy about the salvation work of our Lord; who died at sunset, and was risen in the morning from the dead to grant us His joy.

According to St. Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem, our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of Righteousness, who was rejected by the Jews, to come to be as though at sunset, denied the joyful divine light. The Christians, on the other hand, who believed in Christ, came to be in a morning filled with joy.

The word "*night*" (5) in Hebrew, means (sunset).

+ "At sunset, weeping sets up its tent". Evening dwelt once the light of wisdom was put off in the sinner, and he fell under the verdict of death. Since then the people of God were committed to shed tears amid the labor and temptations, anticipating the dwelling of the day of the Lord. It is befitting of man to anticipate

the morning to testify to the joy of the Lord's resurrection, whose light emerged when our Lord was risen at dawn.

(St. Augustine)

- + Concerning our Lord, sunset was the time of His burial, and the third day was that of His resurrection. You, as well, were buried at sunset in paradise, and were risen on the third day! How?! ... We can summarize the whole time as follows:

There was one day before the law;

Then came a second day after the law;

Then followed a third day under the grace; the day designated and shown by our Head Himself through His resurrection on the third day..

The present time is that of tribulation and endurance; But the morning is the time of hope and joy.

(St. Augustine)

3- LOOKING BACK AT THE PAST EXPERIENCE: (6 – 10)

Verses 6 to 12 represent a sudden change in the nature of the psalm, as the psalmist talks about the tribulation that dwelt upon him, praying and seeking the divine help.

In some detail, the psalmist talks about the time when he was feeling secure and self-confident, thinking that he would never be moved (6). Then once he trusted in himself, God hid His face from him, namely, showed anger against him, and he came to be denied God's grace and mercy.. By arousing God's anger, we may bring upon ourselves God's wrath and judgment; "*For the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6: 23); whereas by doing according to God's will, we shall find life, health, and happiness (1 John 2: 17; 3: 14; Romans 14: 17). The psalmist cried out to the Lord, his only refuge,

and made supplication (8), when he was surrounded by enemies who threatened him with death and perdition; and the response came through the divine love, brought him strength and an inner beauty (7); turned his mourning into dancing; put off his sackcloth, and clothed him with gladness (11).

By anguish we come to be very close to God. ... What was David's experience?

- + When victory was his ally, and all the possibilities were within his hands, When he was in prosperity because of his many conquests, he trusted in himself, saying: *"Now, in my prosperity, I said, I shall never be moved"* (6); Whereas in the time of anguish, he cried to God and made supplication (8); saying: *"If (God) says thus: 'I have no delight in you', here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him"* (2 Samuel 15: 26) .

(St. John Chrysostom)

"In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved" (6)

Those who think that they are secure, and in prosperity, who trust in their strength, honor, and wealth, count themselves as will never be moved; Yet they are building their strongholds on sand to fall under the impact of wind and rain.

According to At. Basil the Great, David's fall into sin came to be the result of his pride.

He, who used to refer his security and prosperity to God's strength and love, in his weakness, fell into self-pride and vain glory, when he ordered a census of his people; disregarding Joab's faithful counsel (2 Samuel; 24: 3). Doing a census, in itself, was not an evil act, as is obvious in the Holy Book (See Exodus 30: 12); Yet doing it out of self-pride and vain glory is an abomination against God.

- + Whoever finds his comfort and prosperity in the temporal things would be filled with pride, will be moved, and will perish. Whereas he who, in His Christ finds his

joy and prosperity, will truly abide in Him, and will never be moved. According to the scholar Origen, the soul in true comfort would never be moved. Our Lord is our comfort, in Him we will never be moved, but shall forever partake of His glory. He grants us success in all aspects of our life; and without Him we would enjoy no strength, wisdom, joy, nor abidance.

Having fallen in temptation, and perceived that his thoughts were wrong, he started to refer every success he already had, every inner and outer glory, and even every spiritual beauty, as a fruit of God's favor, according to God's will and strength, saying:

“By Your favor, O Lord, You had established me as a strong mountain; You hid Your face, and I was troubled” (7)

If David rose to the throne, and has got consecutive victories, it was all according to the will of God; But now, as God hides His face from him, he is moved and troubled, until he returns to his God with repentance.

What we say concerning David, we may also say concerning humanity; whom God granted authority and beauty; But once man assumed that he would never be moved, he broke God's commandment, lost every inner beauty, and collapsed by the spirit of anxiety and trouble.

+ Although I was beautiful by nature, yet I died by sin, through the deception of the serpent.

To the beauty You have granted me when You first created me, You added strength to fulfill Your will.

(St. Basil the Great)

Our spiritual beauty, being created according to God's image and His likeness; and the strength You granted us to keep Your commandment; have been lost because of the pride of our heart; ... "*You hid Your face, and we were troubled*". Talking about this beauty granted by God to the soul, father Dorotheos of Gaza says: [Let us cleanse that likeness (to God), granted to us; Let us wipe out from it the dust of sin, to let it show with all its beauty by virtues ... For God desires to see what He granted to us, without blemish, spot, or wrinkle (Ephesians 5: 27).

Now, as God hid His face from David who abused the beauty and strength granted to him by God, he has had cry out to the Grantor of gifts.

However great our sins are, God's mercies anticipate to restore to us His splendor in us. God hides His face from us only for a certain time, to motivate us to cry out to Him, to respond by being transfigured inside us, and working in us; ... Hiding His face from us, He desires from us to make our prayers more fervent, more faithful, and more trusting.

Yet, It does not stop at prayer; but in the midst of his anguish, the psalmist seeks from God to open up his heart to confess and sing praise. He perceived that, as long as man is in sin, namely, going down to perdition, and attached to dust and ashes, he would benefit nothing, and would not be able to praise God.

"What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your truth?" (9)

In the daring of love, and begging for God's mercies, and seeking the realization of His divine promises, the psalmist says to God: [What profit is there if my blood is shed, and I perish?! Will You not lose one of Your beloved who praises and glorifies You?! ... When I come to lose my

heavenly nature and turn to dust, can my life proclaim Your love or truth, O
Beneficent?!

According to Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic, those words are a prophecy about the
Lord Christ who went down to the grave, but not without
profit, For by so doing, He gained the whole world, and restored to us the joy of
salvation.. ..

The psalmist probably perceived that work of salvation, when he added::

*“Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me; Lord,
be my helper” (10)*

Through such vision, seeing God a Savior of His believers, and not a terrifying Judge to
them, St. Ambrose says: [Is it possible that Christ would
condemn you, He who saved you from death, and delivered Himself a sacrifice for your
sake, when He knew that it is your life you would acquire
by His death? ... Will He not say: *“What profit is there in My blood? if I condemn him,
whom I save? ... Moreover, thinking of Him as a judge,
and not as an Intercessor; ... Would it be possible for Him to issue a harsh verdict,
when He perpetually seeks for us to have the grace of
reconciliation with the Father?].*

The Lord heard my prayer and had mercy on me by going down to Hades, to carry me
from there, to bring me forth to His kingdom; and to set
His kingdom in me. ... Let me sing His praise, saying:

*“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my
sackcloth and clothed me with gladness” (11)*

Not keeping silent, the psalmist wished for everyone to know the changes that happened in his life; from mourning to dancing; from putting on sackcloth to being clothed with gladness; and from silence to singing praise to God.

David changed the sackcloth of repentance that clothes his body, into a wedding garment, to partake of a joyful celebration and spiritual dancing (Psalm 118: 27; 149: 3)... Changing the outer garments reveals an inner change in the soul of the psalmist, whose prayer was heard, and moved from repentance to thanksgiving and joy.

- + What are those sackcloth? ... They are bringing oneself to death! ... For the sackcloth used to be woven of the hair of goats which were counted as unclean animals. ... Our Lord, being one of us, has been clothed with sackcloth, yet not as a punishment, for He has done nothing that warrants death; ... By His own will, He put on Himself a mortal body for our sake.

(St. Augustine)

“A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance”

(Ecclesiastes 3: 4). Our Lord, the Fountain of eternal joy, wept and shed tears; ... We are committed to know how to partake of His weeping and mourning! ... By true repentance, by crying out for the sake of the salvation of every soul; and with every anticipation of the grace of God, working in our life and the life of others, His soul will exult. ... By that, mourning will be mixed with joy; and every sorrow will turn into gladness and joy in the Lord.

- + Anticipating our lamentation here, namely at this time, God will grant us the everlasting things. ... Anticipating our tears, He will flow His goodness upon us.

(St. Ambrose)

+ The gift of gladness is Christ Himself.

(St. Ambrose)

+ Thanks be to You, O Lord, For it was not through an ambassador nor a messenger, but You Yourself saved Your people; *“You have put off my sackcloth, and clothed me with gladness”*.

(St. Ambrose)

Enjoying the spirit of joy and gladness, the Lord Christ Himself, who grants the soul fulfillment and exultation, the psalmist says:

“To the end that my glory may sing, praise to You and not be silent, O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever” (12)

No wonder that he says: *“My glory may sing praise to You”*; for by granting us glory, God will be glorified in us. Glorifying God is not praising Him by words, but proclaiming His work in us; having lifted us from the trash heap up to glory; and from the Hades of sin up to His joyful paradise.

Singing praise is a fundamental task of the believer, whatever his position in the church; It is befitting of us, even in the midst of our sorrows, to dedicate time to sing praise to the Lord,, which would reveal the inner life of joy amid the sufferings. That is what the psalmist meant by saying: *“and not be silent”*; as the true believer would never cease to sing praise.

The psalmist ends his psalm by a commitment of thanksgiving, to his Lord and God who cares for him personally. Instead of the death

confronting him, for which he cried out, he came to be in a new life on a heavenly level,
knowing nothing but singing praise under all
circumstances.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 30

SET YOUR HOUSE IN ME, O GRANTOR OF LIFE

- + O Grantor of life, raise my life from death;
Sanctify my heart a dwelling place for Yourself;
Turn my inner grave into a Sanctuary for Yourself.

- + You went down to Hades to bring me up from the pit of sin to the paradise of
Your righteousness.

- + Remembering Your works with me and with all Your people;
My heart opens up with exultation, and my tongue utters glory.

- + You are the secret of my beauty and my strength;
By Your cross, You entered into sorrow, so that by Your resurrection, you would
bring us forth to joy;

- + At the sunset of this world, the grief of repentance would dwell upon us;
But our Christ will shine on our life by the joy of His righteousness.

- + Put off me the sackcloth of bitterness; and give me Yourself, a joyful garment of
righteousness;
By Your glory, turn my life into unceasing praise.

=====

PSALM 31

INTO YOUR HAND, O GOD, I COMMIT MY SPIRIT

In a commentary on psalm 31, St. Augustine wrote: [If the psalm prays, you should pray; ... If it brings forth grief, you should grieve; ... If it is happy, rejoice; ... If it hopes, have hope;... And if it fears, have fear. For all what is written here, is nothing but a mirror in which we see ourselves],

Its occasion:

This psalm is simply a lamentation prayer with thanksgiving, by someone suffering a chronic illness along many years (9), persecuted by haughty enemies (21); or seeking refuge in God while confronting violent death (13, 5).

According to some, it was written by David during his son Absalom's rebellion against him; while to others, it was written by him while confronting king Saul's bitter persecution, he escaped to a cave in the city of Keilah (1 Samuel 23: 1-12); or to the wilderness of Maon (1 Samuel 23: 13-26); during which David suffered long from labor and sorrow (9), from weakness (13), from reproach (11), from seclusion (12), and from horrible fear and danger (13). But in all circumstances he believed that God is his only refuge.

This psalm actually represents the perpetual struggle suffered by the believer, or by the church as a whole in this world; and the salvation and the conquest that would certainly follow this struggle.

If David cried out to the Lord in his anguish caused by the pact done between king Saul and the people of Keilah who promised to deliver him, saying: "*Into Your hand, I commit my Spirit*"; That was the cry-out of the Son of David, when He carried the sins of the whole world upon His shoulders, and was delivered to the reproach of the cross (Luke 23: 46), followed by the glory of the resurrection. It is the cry-out of every godly believer

in every generation, when surrounded by anguish on all sides; then turned by the Lord into singing and praise.

The general nature of the sufferings of the psalmist – particularly in verses 1 to 8 -- makes this psalm the voice of many believers along the generations.

Some claim that the prophet Jeremiah is the author of this psalm, despite the title indicating that it is written by the prophet David. They base their claim upon the fact that several parts of this psalm conform to the experiences through which the prophet Jeremiah has passed (Compare verse 4 with Jeremiah 17: 18; verse 10 with Lamentations 1: 20; verse 11 with Jeremiah 20: 8; verse 18 with Jeremiah 17; verses 18 and 23 with Lamentations 3: 64); beside the fact that the expression “*fear is on every side*” (13) has been repeated six times in the writings of Jeremiah. Anyway, both David and Jeremiah have been saints who suffered horrible sufferings, and both believed on the same level that God is their refuge. Having had similar experience, led them to use like expressions.

Its title:

(Up to the end; a psalm of David in a state of ‘ecstasy’)

We have already talked about the expression of (up to the end), as a sign about the Lord Christ, being the end and the perfection of the law and the prophets.

According to St. Augustine, the word ‘ecstasy’ here, refers to a psychological condition realized through a divine proclamation; saying: [So was the ‘ecstasy’ of saints to whom God proclaimed hidden things beyond the perception of this world; which was the actual condition described by St. Paul in his talk about himself, saying: “*For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; Or if we are of sound mind, it is for you*” (2 Corinthians 5: 13, 14);

Its general frame:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|
| 1- God is my refuge | 1 - 8 |
| 2- Seeking salvation | 9 - 18 |
| 3- The life, conqueror of sufferings | 19 - 22 |
| 4- An instructive liturgical praise | 23 – 24 |

1- GOD IS MY REFUGE: (1 – 8)

“In You, O Lord, I put my trust. Let me never be ashamed; Deliver me in Your righteousness” (1)

According to the Hebrew text it came as: “In You, O Lord, I am hoping and trusting”; in which the verb “hope” came in the continuous tense, namely, it is consistent up till now. Although we do not concentrate our sight upon a certain event in David’s life, yet it is obvious that the psalm concerns a certain danger, or several dangers that dwelt upon David.

In the initiative part of this psalm, the psalmist puts his trust in God’s justice or righteousness; Namely, that God is “Just” in realizing His promises concerning the forgiveness of sins, and the protection of His believers; which He would never deny. Being “Just”, He would never forsake those who have put all their trust and confidence on Him.

The psalmist trusts in God’s “righteousness”, which surely is above “faithfulness”; Yet without faithfulness there would be no righteousness; For “righteousness” here is that of God, and not of David.

In God we find our refuge; for He is the secret place to which we flee from sin, our enemy, to gain His righteousness. He is a solid “Rock”, a “Place of defense”, “a

Stronghold”, and “a sure Refuge”; by whom we would never be moved by temptations, nor lose our inner peace.

+ He who dedicates himself to God, once and forever, would pass through life with a comfortable mind.

(St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)

a- “Christ is our Righteousness and sanctification” (1 Corinthians 1: 30)

Let us cry out with the psalmist: *“In You, O Lord, I put my trust”* (1), not only in the midst of troubles in this world, but also in the midst of our battle against sin. For He alone is our refuge against sin; not only forgiving, or protecting us from them, but He grants us His life working in us, to carry his righteousness and sanctification, by the work of His Holy Spirit in us: *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new”* (2 Corinthians 5: 17).

Before anything else, as we well know, God is everything: the beginning, the center, and the end of every good work.

(St. Mark the hermit)

b- Christ is our close friend. According to St. Augustine, He is the (ear) of the Father, by whom He inclines to me personally, to listen to me by

His incarnation and crucifixion *“Bow down Your ear to me”* (2)... What is greater mercy than giving us His only begotten Son, not only to live among us, but to die for our sake?! “

“Bowling down the ear” means readiness to listen even to a whisper. The Father listens to the hidden sighs of the heart, and responds by His incarnate Word, delivered on the cross.

The philosophers assumed that, after God created the universe and put it into movement, he let it move through the laws of nature; to stay up there in His heavens separated from His creation. The psalmist, on the other hand, believes that God bows His ear to listen to the heart of everyone, and responds to him by the practical love. He will never delay a moment to listen to the sighs of every poor man.

c- Christ is “*my rock of refuge*”; Whom the psalmist asks to deliver him speedily, saying:

“Bow down Your ear to me, deliver me speedily; Be my Rock of refuge, a Fortress of defense to save me” (2)

Before seeking salvation from affliction, the psalmist proclaims that he cherishes the Lord as His God, as though His own. Referring God to him, and himself to God is everything for him, and the secret of his salvation.

The psalmist felt that a snare was set to catch him, hidden among the bushes, but he finds His God open up for him His sanctuary to find refuge from those who persecute him.

According to Mar Isaac the Syrian, the believer does not wait for the time of temptation to seek refuge in God, but seeks God first to be his refuge when temptation dwells.

- + Before entering into battle, seek an ally;
- Before falling into illness, have a physician;
- Before sorrowful things dwell upon you, pray; to find God listen to you!

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

+ “O Lord, be my Rock of refuge, a Fortress of defense to save me”; a sure Sanctuary, to which I flee to find peace.

+ You are my Fortress of defense. **To** You I run; but where could I run **from** You?! If God is angry on you, where will you hide from Him?!... Hasten to God! For there is nowhere you can flee from Him!... In the sight of the Almighty, everything is naked and exposed! Hence the psalmist says: “*Be a Fortress of defense to save me*”.

Make me healthy to be able to fly to You; Otherwise, I would barely be even able to walk!

(St. Augustine)

d- “***For You are my Rock and my Fortress; Therefore for Your name’s sake, lead me and guide me***” (3)

+ Again, the psalmist proclaims his complete trust in God, saying: [You are my **strength** to endure my persecutors; and my **Fortress** where I take refuge from them.

(St. Augustine)

+ The steadfast faith is a strong fortress; ... For the believer, Christ is everything.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

He is my Refuge in whom I find my comfort and security; Yet that does not mean to have no positive role in my life; For He presents Himself to me as my “Rock”, my “strength”, by, and with whom I work and strive.

e- Christ is my Leader and my Shepherd:

“Therefore, for Your name’s sake, lead me and guide (sustain) me” (3)

+ Your Leader, Himself, who chose to be tempted for your sake, has put Himself before you a role model by His personal behavior.

+ He sustains me and provides me, here on earth, with the food of angels to make me strong. He who promised to provide us with the heavenly food, nourishes us with milk like a loving mother nourishing her suckling.

(St. Augustine)

Having been surrounded by enemies, and fallen in many afflictions, the psalmist found in his faithful God, not only the Savior, but the victorious Leader and the compassionate Shepherd, as well. He sustains us as a Creator, who cares to provide us with all the needs of our bodies, souls, spirits, minds, etc.

If you become hungry, you will find Him your heavenly bread!

If you become naked, He will cover you with His blood forever.

If you are surrounded by enemies, He will lead the spiritual battle by Himself

If you get lost, He will present Himself the Way and the Truth

If you die, He is your resurrection.

He will never let you feel deprivation; for He is the Physician, the Groom, the Friend, the Door, the Life, the Joy, the Riches, etc.

f- ***“Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, for You are my strength” (4)***

The way the psalmist committed his spirit into God's hands; the believer, amid his sufferings, sees his outer man perishes, while his inner man – embraced by God Himself – is renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4: 16).

Finally, the psalmist, not being satisfied with the negative aspect to bring him out of the secret nets laid for him, he feels himself in need of entering into the divine bosoms, to live in comfort and peace; for there, in the fatherly bosoms, he would perceive the conception of redemption, not only as a salvation from sin (the enemy), but an enjoyment of God, Himself. That would not realized by human effort, for it is the work of God in the canonically striving believers, by the Spirit and the Truth. Hence the psalmist says:

“For You have redeemed me, O lord God of Truth, I have hated those who regard vain idols, but I trust in the Lord” (6)

h- Christ is the source of my joy and gladness:

“I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, for You have considered my afflictions; You have taken heed of my adversities” (7)

The fruit of salvation from enemies (sins) and of the entrance into the divine presence, is the inner gladness and the true peace, when the soul meditates in the love of God who lifted her up from humility, and saved her from adversities. Amid his sufferings, perceiving God's past dealings with him, the psalmist was sure of the truth of His promises; and felt that God, even if He allowed for him to pass through adversities, yet His eyes are always upon him, weighing his tribulations, and setting limits for them. Knowing by His heavenly wisdom, and His compassionate fatherhood, the possibility of our endurance, and what is for our benefit, God is like a potter whose eyes concentrate all the time upon the vessels in the furnace, knows the right temperature for each, and the duration of its stay in the furnace.

God's fatherhood, His perpetual care, and His plans, are the secret of our gladness.

- + Gladness in the Lord is stronger than the present life; whoever finds it, if he proves worthy of such gladness, will not only disregard the sufferings, but will even not think about his own life, nor be confused by anything; that is

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

Perceiving that such gladness, coming from the trust in God, and the enjoyment of the salvation of the soul from the real enemies – the spirits of evil and sins – is a gift granted through humility, the psalmist says: *“for You have considered (my humility)”*

- + You can defeat the demons only by humility; Once you acquire it, all their strength will be dissolved.
- + The treasure of humility is inside you; it is the Lord Himself.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

i- Christ is the source of liberation, even from death:

“And have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a wide place” (8)

Having slipped from the hands of king Saul when the people of 'Keilah' betrayed him; David perceived his relief as a deposit of the grace of freedom provided to the believer by God his Savior, by whom we slip from the hand of the devil and escape from his hell, to enter into the wide place of paradise. Our chains are loosened from

the stocks to let our feet run on the royal path with fast steps; that the enemy would not be able to catch us again.

The narrow way to salvation, once we step on it, we will find it wide; contrary to the way to evil, which starts wide, yet once man steps on it, he would be shut up, his life and inner peace would be destroyed. The yoke of Christ is light and sweet; whereas the joy of the world is bitter and deadly.

Amid his sufferings, the psalmist experienced (the width), the width of the Lord's way, and that of the believer's heart. For getting in touch with God's work and His love amid the tribulations, man's own heart would become wide for those who suffer, who are wounded, and are in need, and even for his persecutors. The same sufferings that would destroy the non-believer, and may make him more faithless and bitter, would grant the true believer the experience of love for others and the width of heart, if possible for the whole world. The believer would become like His Savior who stretched His arms, amid the passions of the cross, to embrace the whole world with His divine love! That is the freedom granted by the Savior to those who partake of His passions -- the freedom of love for others and for God, with no fear even of death!

+ "*You have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy*" (8) ... Although we long to reach the kingdom of God, yet not by death! ... But, out of necessity, He says to you: [You have to take that way. ... Do you, O mortal, hesitate to take that way, trodden by the Lord, Himself, for your sake?!]

We are all invited to death. If we die a good death, we shall be set free of its hand; but if we die an evil death (namely, die in our sins), we would be shut up in the hands of death, to get cursed forever on the day of judgment. ... We pray to God to set us free from the hands of our enemy, who would shut us up through our lusts (see Romans 8: 10-13).

- + “*You have set my feet in a wide place*” (8). The way is undoubtedly narrow (Matthew 7: 14) for him who hates; whereas for him who loves, it is wide; ... the same narrow way would become wide!

- + “*You have set my feet in a wide place*”. The resurrection of my Lord, of which I am sure; and His promise of resurrection, would set my love free of the chains of fear; for which it progresses more and more to the width of freedom.

(St. Augustine)

2- SEEKING SALVATION: (9 – 18)

The psalmist starts this section by the usual supplication seeking from the Lord to grant him mercy. While the last section describes God’s mercies in the past, this section talks about its extension, and the need for them in the present time.

Referring the troubles that dwell upon his body and soul to his sins, the psalmist prays to God the Forgiver of sins, saying:

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble. My eye wastes away with (anger), Yes, my soul and my body” (9)

These words suit the experience of the suffering saints in both the old and the new covenants; as all confess their weaknesses, and consequently, their need for the mercies of God.

The psalmist cries out seeking mercy, asking God to help him against his sins, anger in particular; for, while the enemy with all his energies cannot destroy him, his anger on others may destroy his insight, his soul, and his body.

- + As long as anger remains in our hearts, and with its harmful darkness blinds the eye of our soul, we shall not be able to acquire for ourselves a sound judgment or discernment; nor enjoy the insight emerging from a faithful view, or a mature counsel. We would, as well, be unable to enjoy the fellowship of life, restore the righteousness, or even have the ability to enjoy the true spiritual light; Hence he says: *“My eye wastes away with (anger)”*. ... We cannot partake of the wisdom, even if we are unanimously counted as wise; for *“For anger rests in the bosoms of fools”* (Ecclesiastes 7: 9)..

(St. John Cassian)

St, John Chrysostom, however, talks to us about the blessing of anger, if it is directed to the way of truth; ... if we become angry over our sins, and if we cast the blame upon ourselves, and not upon the others. He likens it to a sword, to be kept for use in a befitting way.

The psalmist entered into many troubles from outer enemies, as well as from his own weaknesses, until his life was soaked in bitterness. But trusting in God, and holding fast to His promises, turned his life from bitterness to sweetness.

He portrays the immense grief dwelling upon him in the following way:

- a- Its harm wasted away his eyes, soul, and body.(9); namely his whole being; hence he is in need of the intervention of the Creator Himself, being his Savior.
- b- *“His life is spent with grief, and his years with sighing”* (10). David, from his youth, was known as a brave man who did not fear death; having fought against a lion, a bear, and the mighty Goliath ... ; and in all that, he did not forsake his flute, nor gladness has forsaken his heart. Yet, in moments of weakness, he felt that his whole life was hidden cruel sufferings, and that, out of all his years, he acquired only deep sighs.

In the times of tribulations, man mostly forget his days of peace and joy, and counts his days as an unceasing series of pain; But the prophet David, on the other hand, turned such bitter feelings into psalms, in which lamentations mix with songs of praise, supplications with thanksgiving, and cry-outs with exultations.

c- Having no longer any hope, according to the human way of thought, he says: "*My strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away*" (10). As though he says: [I have become poor, worthy of lamentation, my condition has no chance of healing, for my bones are utterly shaken].

d- He became a reproach among all his enemies, and repulsive to his neighbors and acquaintances; Counting him as dead, those who see him outside, flee from him; feel that he has no place among them, and has to be buried outside the camp. In their eyes he came to be like a broken earthen vessel to be carelessly cast away. ... By all that he came to suffer a feeling of isolation and exclusion.

"I am a reproach among all my enemies, but especially among my neighbors; and am repulsive to my acquaintances; those who see me outside flee from me" (11)

In his affliction, he was seen by his enemies, as an evil man, on whom the anger of God dwelt. His misery became for them a cause for scoff and ridicule! Has not that what happened to the Lord Christ Himself, who was unjustly delivered to trial; scoffed, ridiculed, and spat in the face ... About whom the prophet said: "*He is despised and rejected by men; ... and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him*" (Isaiah 53: 3)?!

What is more painful, was that David's friends feared to be connected to him; lest they would be counted as taking his side against king Saul, and would probably have the same destiny as Ahimalech the priest and his household, who received David and his men, and helped him, even though not aware of Saul's position against him (1 Samuel 21). ... Those who used to honor and revere David, while in the king's palace, have become strangers to him. ... Did that not happen, in a more painful way with the Lord Christ, who was denied by the apostle Peter three times, betrayed by Judas, forsaken by the disciples, and left "*to trod the winepress alone*" (Isaiah 63: 3)?!

Partaking of His Lord's suffering, the apostle Paul says: "*Let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach*" (Hebrew 13: 13).....; Forsaken by friends and acquaintances, he was not dismayed, but counted it as glory to partake of the reproach and loneliness of his Lord. Amid his painful feeling of seclusion and despair, God was his only friend, and His mercy was his only hope to be saved.

Sufferings may kill the soul of a nonbeliever, through his feeling of seclusion; whereas the believer would find it a way to enjoy God's presence and His compassionate response to his prayers, at a time when his earthly friends forsake him, and close shut their hearts before him. In other words, when he suffers seclusion and becomes like dead, God proclaims Himself in his soul to let him experience the resurrected life, "*I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; ... Make Your face shine upon Your servant*" (12, 16).

- e- It did not stop at the ridicule of his enemies, and their fear to be connected to him, but the hosts of evil gathered together to take away his life.

"While they take counsel together against me, the scheme to take away my life" (13)

It is really sad to see how evil counsel together with the spirit of unity on one goal, namely, the oppression of the children of God; the way it happened when the Jewish religious leaderships joined forces with the civil authorities, to crucify the Lord of glory Jesus Christ; when they stood to work together, with human seriousness and wisdom; While, on the other hand, we often see dissension happens between believers, and they walk with the spirit of slothfulness; about which the Lord Christ said: "*The sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light*" (Luke 16: 8).

In all his troubles, the psalmist learned to be consistent on praying without boredom, holding fast to his trust in the possibilities of his Creator, and His love for him. Although his enemies robbed him of his good reputation, and deprived him of feeling the collective security, yet they could not take away his comfort, nor deny him his attachment to God. When he, therefore, says: "*But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord*" (14), he adds: "*I say, 'You are my God, My times are in Your hands*" (15)... You are my personal God, who knows the secrets of my inner love; and who has my whole life and time in Your hands.

Again, the psalmist does not stop at seeking from God, salvation from his enemies who persecute him (15); but he says: "*Make Your face shine upon Your servant; Save me for Your mercies sake*" (16)

I am Your servant, and am not the servant of those people. ... I do not seek their commendation, their company, nor their reward; but I seek Your face to shine in my heart. ... According to St. Ambrose, that "servant" is the Word of God who incarnated and became a servant for our sake; who carried our sufferings without separation from His Father, being His Word.

+ The word "servant" means man, in whom he was sanctified; in whom he was anointed; it means Him who came under the law, and was born from

the Virgin ... Saying: "*I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly*" (psalm 38: 6). Who is He but Christ who came to set all free by His obedience?!

(St. Ambrose)

By the sufferings, we experience the humility and the perpetual prayer; both being the way to the enjoyment of the shining of God's face on us.

+ Be rejected in your own eyes, to see God's glory inside yourself. For where humility is, there, God will dwell.

If you have humility in your heart, God will show His glory in you.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

+ Prayer makes the monk equal to angels; because of his desire to see the face of the Father in heaven.

(Father Ogris)

According to some, the cry-out of the psalmist here, "*Make Your face shine upon Your servant*" (16), is a cry-out seeking the coming of the Messiah who saves man from evil.

While the psalmist, through sufferings, enter into the enlightenment with the glory of God, with the spirit of humility and prayer; The wicked, on the other hand, go down to the depths of Hades by their hypocrisy, deceptions, and lies. While the heart of the suffering godly man, while talking, lifts him up to heaven, that of the tongue of the deceptive wicked, would bring him down by pride to perdition.

"Let the wicked be ashamed, let them be silent in the grave. Let the lying lips be put to silence, which

“speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous” (17, 18)

While the wicked will be put to silence in fear and terror when their schemes are scattered, and they go down to Hades; The suffering godly would be lifted up.. ...

- + If you keep your tongue silent, you will be granted a regretful heart, to discover your real self, and to subsequently enter into the spiritual joy. Whereas if your tongue has the upper hand on you – believe me – you will not be able to flee from the darkness.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

3- THE LIFE, CONQUEROR OF SUFFERINGS: (19 – 22):

How great and sweet is God’s infinite goodness! ... Bringing to mind the past mercies of God, and being sure of the continuity of His help, will exhort in us the spirit of praise and thanksgiving.

God is perpetually present, even during the moments He seems as though utterly absent. Trust in God will not spare us the suffering, but will grant us the enjoyment of the divine presence amid the sufferings, to make us rise above the sufferings; and thus, will turn us from supplication to hope, from trust to surety, from faith to beholding, and from lamentation to thanksgiving to God. For through the enjoyment of the divine response, our heart would erupt with thanksgiving and praise.

This trust will not take away the suffering from our life, as much as it lifts us up above the suffering, to come to be as though walking on the water together with the Lord Christ; not preoccupied with it, but with our heavenly Groom who accompanies us, Walking together with Him above the currents of suffering, and entering into the

sweetness of debating with our Groom, and the enjoyment of His goodness, we would say:

“Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the sight of the sons of men” (19)

- + *“How great is Your infinite goodness (sweetness), O Lord” (19)*. To such an extent, the prophet cries out with marvel, for the sake of the riches of Your sweetness, O God, through the diverse proclamations; the sweetness You have laid up for those who fear You.

Deeply, You love even those whom You reproach, for fear that they may lead a loose life of slothfulness. That is why You hide the sweetness of Your love from those, in whom Your fear is for their own good.

“Which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the sight of the sons of men” (19); You perfectly prepared that sweetness for those who trust You, for You would never deny them what they have longed for, up to the end.

“in the sight of the sons of men”. You would never deny it to the sons of men, who no more live, according to Adam, but to the Son of Man.

(St. Augustine)

- + *“You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence” (20)*. How great is that secret place! He did not say: “You shall hide them in heaven”, or “in paradise”, or even “in Abraham’s bosom”, for all that would be counted as nothing, if out of God.

I wish He who protects us in this life, will, Himself, be our dwelling place when this life comes to an end.

“You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion” (20). To what does this “pavilion” refer? ... It refers to the church of the present time, which, being a sojourner on earth, takes the form of a tent,. The pavilion is like a tent used by soldiers in a camp; which is not a permanent dwelling place. ... Fight therefore this spiritual battle as sojourners; so that after taking refuge in His pavilion, He would welcome you with glory in your true eternal home in heaven, if you lead a good life in your pavilion here on earth.

(St. Augustine)

For whom are these exalted gifts? ... They are for those who pass through the sufferings with the spirit of conquest and victory; who enjoy the sweetness of God’s goodness; who enter into the pavilion of God to hide in the secret place of His presence, until He brings them forth to the eternal home not made by hand, regardless of the oppression of the sons of men. ...

Those gifts, according to the psalmist, are laid up by God for those who fear and trust in Him (19). For those who fear Him, He gives a deposit of those gifts, but lays up for them their perfection – the enjoyment of the perfection of God’s sweetness, of beholding His divine face, and of the eternal home – to gain on the great day of judgment.

Concerning hope or trust in God, Mar Isaac the Syrian says: [The divine hope lifts the heart up]; And concerning the fear of God, he says: [The fear of God is the beginning of all virtues; said to be the son of faith; planted in the heart, when man’s mind retreats from the confusions of this world; turns from the wandering of thoughts, to the meditation in the reform of the things to come].

+ The fear of God is the beginning of the true life of man. Yet, the fear of God will not dwell in a mind scattered in outer things.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

By the trust in God, together with the enjoyment of His fear, we would enjoy the sweetness of His love, and experience the sweetness of His goodness in this world, to enjoy the perfection in the age to come.

The psalmist ends this section by praising God for the sake of His dealings with him, saying:

“Blessed be the Lord, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city! For I said in my haste, ‘I am cut off from before Your eyes’. Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications, when I cried out to You” (21, 22)

Having enjoyed the already mentioned blessings, the psalmist praises the Lord who made him a strong city testifying to the exalted wonders of the mercies of God; Confessing that, in the time of his affliction, and in the moments of his weakness, he felt that he was cut off from before His eyes. He counted that God disregarded him or cast him away from His presence. ...

Yet, he soon experienced the voice of the Lord who hears the cry-outs of the heart, and who performs wonders with those who fear Him.

When a thought of doubt or of weak faith pass over our mind, we should not stop praying fervently, in order to have the same experience of the psalmist, namely, that God will stay faithful to His promises, despite our own unfaithfulness.

4- AN INSTRUCTIVE LITURGICAL PRAISE: (23 – 24)

Having experienced the sweetness of God's goodness amid His sufferings, and his lamentation turned into a praise and thanksgiving; the psalmist calls the holy congregation to enjoy his experience; calls them to love God, to trust in His faithfulness and righteousness, to be filled with courage, and to have a strong heart through trusting Him.

“Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints For the Lord preserves the faithful, and fully repay the proud person

. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen Your heart, all you who hope in the Lord” (23, 24)

Through this collective praise, the believers learn the commitment to love God with courage; If the psalmist spoke of the blessings of the fear of God, the true fear would never be separated from the love of God. He who fears God is committed to have a strong heart, and not to fear men.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 31

INTO YOUR HANDS, O GOD, I COMMIT MY SPIRIT

- + Amid my sufferings, O Lord, You proclaim Yourself to me;
I see You as my righteousness and sanctification;
You start with me the way of sanctification, and go through it with me until I reach perfection.

- + I find You an amazing Friend;
When everyone flee from me;
You bow Your ear to listen to the hidden sighs of my heart.

- + You open up Your doors of love, for You are my rock of refuge
You are my God and support against every temptation.

- + You are my strength ... By, and with You, I work to the account of Your kingdom.

- + You are my Guide, who lead me to the royal path;
You are my Shepherd, You guide me by Your body and blood given for my sake;
You grant me Your Spirit, rivers of water that flow over.

- + You are my Savior ...;
You lift me up as though to Your heaven;
So as not to fall into the hidden nets of the enemy.

- + You are the Keeper of my soul;
You renew my inner man together with my mortal body;
By Your Holy Spirit You grant me Your image inside me.

- + You are my joy and the gladness of my heart;
You lift me up above the sufferings;
And grant me the sweetness of Your goodness.

- + You are my Liberator even from death;
Through the shade of Your pavilion I cross over to the heavenly house;
You turn the narrow grave into a wide paradise.

- + Amid my sufferings, I felt as though You have cut me off from before Your eyes;
To realize that You are my close Friend;
My enemies slandered me, and my friends forsook me;
But You kept attached to me in my tribulation.

- + All schemed against me;

But You made me a strong city

- + I praise You and bless Your name;
I wish every soul partake of my praise for You.

PSALM 32

THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS

A psalm of frankness and confession of sin:

This is the second psalm of repentance, called by some scholars, together with psalms 51, 130, and 145, 'Pauline psalms', (for carrying similar thought to that of the apostle Paul); as it strongly deals with the salvation work of God in the life of the repentant sinner.

It is the jewel of the spiritual beauty, and of the salvation economy of God. While tears and sorrow define the sixth psalm, the first of the psalms of repentance, we feel here the extent of comfort felt by the sinner who does not hide his sin, but says: "*I will confess my transgressions to the Lord*" (5). The main sin here is not that of disobedience, but rather hypocrisy. The key pf this psalm is the words "hide" or "keep silent". When the psalmist hid his iniquity, he said: "*When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the daylong*" (3); But once God exposed his sin, it was forgiven, and the psalmist sought from God to let him have no more guile in his spirit.(2), and to surround him with His mercy (10); namely, God's love who sets a covenant with His people, and wishes for their salvation.

The prophet David prayed psalm 51 when the prophet Nathan pointed his finger toward him, saying: "*You are the man*" (2 Samuel 12: 7). By psalm 51 David confessed his iniquity. Then he sang psalm 32, when he experienced the forgiveness of his transgression that was addressed against God Himself, as well as against Bathshebah and Uriah the Hittite. It is as though this psalm (32) chronically follows psalm 51.

This psalm has been then used in the collective worship, as is obvious in the verse 10, saying: *“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him”* .

According to the rite of some Bezentine churches, the priest recites this psalm three times, as a kind of personal purification, and a preparation for ministering the sacrament of baptism.

Whereas the Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe, recite it as an evening prayer on the second day of the week (Monday).

According to ‘Grotius’, this psalm was written to be sung on the day of Atonement.

It was said that this psalm was the favorite of St. Augustine, who used to pray it with a sorrowful heart and tearful eyes. And when he was about to depart from this world, he asked those around him to write it -- together with the other psalms of repentance – with large letters on a big board, and place it before his deathbed; and he kept reading them with a contrite heart until his last breath.

According to some scholars this psalm constitutes the following items:

- * A blessing uttered by the priest on a person enjoying the forgiveness of his sins (1 – 2)
- * An autobiography that reveals the extent of trouble that dwells of him who hides his transgressions; and the peace upon him when he confesses them (3 – 5).
- * A sermonic counsel presented by the priest from the actual experience of a sinner. Or it might be an antiphon sung by a choir in the temple (6 – 7).
- * Teaching instructions presented by the priest in God’s name, concentrating on the teaching aspect (8 -10).
- * A final song of praise and thanksgiving, sung by the whole congregation.

Its title:

According to the Hebrew origin it came as 'Mashil', believed to be the name of the melody used in singing this psalm; or the name of the musical instrument used together with it; or, according to some, a word derived from a verb found in verse 8, which means (instruct, teach, put into consideration, or to make understood). In the Septuagint version it came as: "A contemplation of David"

This term was repeated in 13 psalms: (32, 43, 44, 45, 52, 53, 54, 55, 74, 78, 88, 89, 142), six of which, at least, were written by David.

Its general frame:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------|
| 1- The divine forgiveness | 1 -- 6 |
| 2- The divine protection | 7 |
| 3- The divine guidance | 8 -- 10 |
| 4- The divine joy | 11 |

1- THE DIVINE FORGIVENESS: (1 – 6)

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute

iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (1, 2)

A- Concerning the term "blessed", that came several times in verses 1 and 2, see our commentary on it in psalm 1, where we said that we get

The blessing in the Lord Christ, the Word of God.

This psalm is called in Hebrew 'A psalm of Asher' – the name of one of the tribes of Israel – whose name means (the happy or the blessed one).

While psalm 1 reveals the blessing to him who is bound to the Word of God in his mind and heart, as well as in his practical behavior. Here, in the psalm of Asher, the blessing is to him “*whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered*” by the grace of God. It is the psalm of every man who, in his weakness deflected and lost the way, then was drawn by God’s grace; and to be true to himself and to God, he would confess his sins.

While psalm 1 proclaims the blessing of the exalted life of contemplation, not separated from the daily behavior; the psalm of Asher, on the other hand, proclaims the blessing of the soul, contrite with repentance, that, by the Spirit of God, knows how to cross over to the throne of God, to take forgiveness (by force).

While psalm 1 concerns him who keeps the law with spirit and truth, the psalm of Asher concerns the breaker of the law, on whom the grace of God granted the perfect righteousness of Christ.

While psalm 1 talks about the Lord Christ who is without sin, the Grantor of blessing; the psalm of Asher is the psalm of the Christian who enjoys the blessing through his union with his Christ.

B- In verses 1 and 2, there is a reference to 4 terms of evil;

1- **Iniquity** (‘Pesha’ in Hebrew), meaning: {crossing the line somewhere}, or (committing some atrocity), in reference to a disobedience of a Lega ruler, or against the conscience of man.

2- **Sin** (‘hataah’ in Hebrew), meaning (missing a certain goal or sign), or (going astray from the paths of God), like a stray arrow.

3- **Disobedience** (awon in Hebrew), meaning (deflection from a certain route or a certain position); referring to a tree because of a violent

wind; or to a bump in the earth caused by an earthquake. This term implies all those meanings together.

4- **Guile**; meaning falsehood, deception, or malice, etc.

To heal these four evils, the following things are needed:

1- **Forgiveness**: The original Hebrew word for it, means (lifting up); like when a heavy weight that burdens man's shoulder is lifted up. If the sin implies a deed against the law, or disobedience of the divine commandment, the Lord Christ came, not to carry the doors of the gate of the city on his shoulders, like what Samson did (Judges 16: 3), but to deliver His life on the cross as a price to lift up the weight of our sins, to set us free of them; He came to call us, who labor and heavy laden to enjoy His rest (Matthew 11: 28). According to the Septuagint version it came as: "*Blessed are they whose sins are covered (or left)*" (1).

Being unable to carry our sins whose wages are eternal perdition, we (left) them to Him, who, alone, can pay the price on our behalf, through His divine will and love.

2- **Coverage**: "*Those whose sins are covered*" (1). This does not imply disregarding the sin; but, having been clothed with the righteousness of Christ by the cross, His righteousness came to be instead of the reproach of our sins.

The way the ark of the covenant is covered by the seat of mercy; through which God used to speak to His people; so it is with the cross, by it our heart is covered as a divine dwelling place, to enter with God into the debate of perpetual love, trusting that every weakness in us is covered, to carry in us the life and holiness of Christ, and to have the right, by His Holy Spirit to enjoy the fellowship with the Father, and to enter into the deposit of His glories.

- 3- **Vindication** from the charge: *“Whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile”* (2).

He did not say that he became without sin; as no man, after the fall, has so become, except the incarnate Word of God, who, for our sake, has become Man, albeit being the Most High. In weakness, we may sin, but by the faith working with love, the Lord does not impute the sin to us, for He Himself pays the price; as, according to the apostle Paul: *“because we judge thus; that if one died for all, then all died; and He died for all, ... Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has reconciled to us the word of reconciliation”* (2 Corinthians 5: 14-19).

The sinner who enjoys the forgiveness of his sins and covering them by the blood of the Savior, and is counted as innocent, bears no guile in his heart, nor in his mind or mouth. He receives the fellowship with Christ (the Truth), to be true to himself in his repentance and confessions, as well as in his faith and trust in God, worship, praise, and thanksgiving, faithful in his relationships with God, tells Him all what goes on in his life of weaknesses, of the experience of spiritual strength, of his love or fear of God, of his desire to serve Him, and of his deep longing toward setting forth to be together with Him; faithful to the others, knows no hypocrisy, nor guile; loves his brethren, yet not at the expense of the truth; has compassion on them, yet with firmness.

In the Holy Book, the word “guile” always refers to sin; being deceptive, vain, and lying. There is no faithfulness in doing wrong. Even if the aggressor is upright in men’s eyes, yet he would be deceiving himself, robbing God, lying to the Almighty, and a crook to His Creator, through jumping to take a different way, other than Christ, hence, he is a robber and a thief. St. Paul quoted the two verses 1 and 2 in his epistle to the Romans 4: 6 – 8, to confirm that there is no benefit of the

literal works of the law, like the circumcision of the flesh, to get the forgiveness of sins; but the need is for the inner work of God, to reform what has deflected from its natural course..

Having heard the words of the prophet Nathan, saying: "*The Lord also has put away your sin, you shall not die*" (2 Samuel 12: 13), he perceived that the forgiveness of sins is a free gift presented by God to His believers through His practical giving love; "*For love will cover a multitude of sins*" (1 Peter 4: 8). We, as well, have enjoyed this gift through the water of baptism, where we are buried together with our Christ, and are risen together with Him in the newness of life, to bear His resurrected life, being holy members in the body of Christ. That is why, according to many fathers of the church, the psalmist, in this psalm, speaks about the grace of baptism.

+ It is befitting of me to counsel those who are about to be worthy of this royal gift, namely, baptism, to let them know that no sin, whatever great it is, can stand against the goodness of the Lord; not even adultery, homosexuality, attachment to whores, robbery, deception of others, drunkenness, or idol-worship; As the power of this gift and the love of the Lord, are so great to make all those iniquities disappear, and to make the sinner shine with more splendor than the sun; ... Yet only if he showed a testimony of a good life.

+ It is faith in the Holy Trinity that grants the forgiveness of sins; It is this confession that grants us the grace of son-ship to God.

+ By that, you can realize the extent of your poverty, you who are received by the Lord; ... how, by His grace He covered your

nakedness; ...how, by the anointment, He clothes you with the fragrance of the good works; ... how, by the holy oil, He makes you shine with bright light; ... how, you forsake your corruption in the washing font; ... how the Holy Spirit lifts you up to a new life; ... how He clothes your body with splendid attire; ... how the lamps you carry in your hands refer to the enlightenment of the souls;and how David raises his voice to you, singing the song of conquest, saying: "*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered*" (1)

+ He does not say: 'Blessed is he who commits no transgression', but says: "*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven*". For if you search for someone who commits no transgression, you will find none; how then could he be blessed? He is blessed if his transgressions are forgiven, and what he has committed are covered.

By baptism we get the forgiveness of our transgressions, and be qualified to start a new holy life. Yet, on the way, being subjected to weaknesses, God's mercies anticipates our continuous repentance – the second baptism – to present forgiveness to us.

+ All those who wish for it (namely, for forgiveness) could get mercy from God; and as we are told by the Holy Book:: "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity*"; namely, repented his sin, to receive the forgiveness from God.

(St. Justine, the martyr)

Such blessing we enjoy through baptism and the continuous repentance, is presented to us, being the children beloved by God, who proclaim the truth of our son-ship to Him by obeying His commandment, and responding to His love.

+ Blessed are we, beloved brethren, if we keep the commandments of God in harmony with love; for through love, our sins are forgiven; as it is written: "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity; whose sin is covered; and in whose spirit there is no guile*". Such beatitude dwells upon those chosen by God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

According to the scholar Tertullian, the beatitude presented to those enjoying baptism -- counted as a martyrdom without blood shed -- when the believer accepts the burial together with the Lord Christ, believing in His salvation work, is also presented to the martyrs whose blood is shed for the sake of faith, with no chance of getting baptism, ... According to some, martyrdom is called the baptism of blood.

+ Another source of comfort, and an ultimate way of help, is designated by the battle of martyrdom and baptism. ... Referring to the happiness of him who partakes of those things, David says: "*Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity; whose sin is covered; and in whose spirit there is no guile*". ... Nothing is imputed to the martyrs who delivered their life by the baptism of blood.

So we can get the forgiveness of sins through baptism, as well as through true repentance, obedience with love to the commandment,

and enduring martyrdom. This forgiveness is set upon the blood of the Lord Christ, Grantor of the forgiveness.

+ Saying: *"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity; whose sin is covered; and in whose spirit there is no guile"*; David refers to the forgiveness of sins that followed the Lord's coming, *"having wiped out the handwriting of requirement that was against us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross"* (Colossians 2: 14). We thus became indebted to the Lord; for by His cross, our sins are forgiven, and our iniquities are wiped out.

"While I kept silent my bones wasted away, through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me. My vitality was turned into the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. And You forgave the guilt of my sin'" (3-5)

The prophet David tells us his experience: how he attempted to hide his sin, and how he kept silent for several months, probably two years after falling with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite. The child, the fruit of that sin was born before the visit of the prophet Nathan to him (2 Samuel 11: 2; 12: 14). Although he perceived his transgression, yet, because he did not seek forgiveness, he had neither peace nor comfort, and his bones started to grow old and waste away. He knew for sure that he is committed to repent, to seek the forgiveness of his sin, and to confess to Him who sees everything, and for whom nothing is hidden.

a- **A deadly silence:** *"While I kept silent, my bones wasted away"* (3)

David probably thought that time will put everything right. Having sinned to God, to himself, to Bathsheba, to her husband, to his people, and to his army, there was, according to him, no solution for the situation, other than to keep silent. So he did, and it so seemed that everything was going naturally as he

wished it to be. Nevertheless, his bones within his body started to grow old and waste away, and his inner being started to shake.

Man often tends to postpone the confession of his transgressions until his condition gets better; yet this postponement, and keeping silent about his wrong doing, will give the sin in his depths the chance to reign a longer period in the darkness, and to assume the position of leadership of his inner life, with the sure fruit, that man's inner being would be shaken.

+ *While I kept silent, my bones wasted away* (3). As my lips refrained to present a confession for the sake of my salvation, my bones wasted away, and grew frail. *"through my groaning all day long"* (3), as my lips uttered words of blasphemy against God, in an attempt to defend myself, and to justify my transgression.

+ His situation looked contradictory: On one aspect he kept silent, and on another, he did not. He kept silent about what could have done him good; and did not keep silent about what bring harm upon himself. He kept silent about confessing his sin; and did not keep silent, trying arrogantly and publicly to justify his transgression.

(St. Augustine)

+ Remember how God said on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah: *"State your case that you may be acquitted"* (Isaiah 43: 26).

Remember as well that He will rebuke him who does not confess his transgressions; saying: *"Behold, I will plead my case against you, because you say, 'I have not sinned;'"* (Jeremiah 2: 35).

Search the words of the saints, one saying: "The righteous accuses himself at the beginning of his talk", and another saying: *"I*

said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord', and You forgave the iniquity of my sin'" (Psalm 32: 5)..

(St. Cyril the Great)

According to St. John Chrysostom, God opens before us many ways to wipe out our iniquities, one of which is to confess our sins, and to perpetually remember them, to bring ourselves into account. Man truly stands before God, and submits to Him, if he is utterly faithful to himself, confessing his sinful nature. At the same time, he would discover and experience God as the Forgiver of sins, and the Grantor of the new nature.

There is no other way before man other than to start confessing his sins; saying together with the prophet Isaiah: "*Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips*" (Isaiah 6: 5).

Before his confession, David's health almost wasted away and was about to collapse; his bones grew old, through groaning all day long; he came to be like a hungry lion roaring in the wilderness.

The fathers often tell us their experience concerning confession::

+ The wrong thought weakens, once it is exposed; like an unclean serpent coming out of its hidden dark cave, and fleeing away when exposed.

The satanic thoughts have authority over us, as much as they are hidden in our hearts.

(Father Moses)

+ What man is ashamed to reveal, is a proof that it is bad, and a temptation from the devil.

(St. John Cassian)

+ Nothing the devil hates more than to see his tricks exposed.

(Father Dorotheos)

b- The sin and the thorns of the wilderness: Having kept silent, and refrained from confessing his sin, presenting justifications for his deed, David's life turned into a barren wilderness, that does not enjoy the waters of the divine grace, to end up producing thorns and thistles, as the natural fruition of sin.

"For day and night, Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer" (4)

If, by "the finger of God" he refers to the Holy Spirit – the Author of the law – His hand supports us to live according to His statutes and commandments. But hiding our disobedience, and concealing our sins, His helping hand would become heavy on our conscience, to find no rest day or night. The divine hand that would carry us to His heavens, and lift us up to His bosom, will stand against us; How would we be able to endure it?!

"The divine hand came upon Elijah, and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel" (1 Kings 18: 46).

And that same hand was very heavy upon the inhabitants of Ashdod, and the cry of the city went up to heaven" (1 Samuel 5: 11,

12). The hand of God was heavy upon David to chasten him with the spirit of fatherhood. His child from the wife of Uriah the Hittite died soon after birth; Then came the scandal of David's daughter 'Tamar' with her brother Amnon, to be a disgrace to his royal household; and ended up in the murder of his very beloved son by the hand of his brother Absalom (See 1 Samuel 13 and 14. who then, rebelling against his own father, he was killed in war (See 1 Samuel 18).

God's hand got heavy upon David to make sin bitter in his mouth; yet His other hand embraced him to support him amid his bitterness; according to words of the Song of songs, saying: "*His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me*" (Song 2: 6). God may deprive us of some temporal blessings to qualify us to enjoy the eternal glory; He brings us forth into tribulation, to find in Him, alone, our help.

Before his fall, David used to be perpetually growing, and exultant even in the moments of his affliction, for God's hand supported him. But having deceived been by sin, and having hidden his iniquity within himself, he got back to trouble, and the garden of his soul traversed by a river of living water, turned into a barren wilderness, or into a lamp without oil like those of the foolish virgin in the parable mentioned by the Lord in Matthew 25: 3. His heart became like a desert that produces thistles and thorns.

+ As you may notice in the Holy Book, sin is called a "thorn"; a thorn that not just prickles us on the outside, but pierces deep in our flesh; if not taken out completely, the little part left will hurt as though all of it is still there; and even if taken completely out, the pain caused by it will linger, and the wound will need further treatment and care for a long time until it completely heals. It is the same with sin, it is not enough to take it out, but there will be need for a long treatment of the trace of the wound it caused until it completely heals..

(St. John Chrysostom)

c- Reveling his sin: It was not possible for the wilderness of his heart to receive the rich grace of God to pour on him the water of God's love, to turn it into a garden, unless he reveals his sin and acknowledges it.

"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden" (5)

The hand of the surgeon had to use the scalpel to open the wounds up to expose and cleanse the corruption in them. If our pride makes it difficult for us to confess our sins, humility is the only way to proclaim the truth; to get the forgiveness of our sins. And as humility exhorts us to confession, confession, in its turn, will crucify the self-ego, and teach the soul to be humble, and take away its hidden pride. And as the soul learns the true humility, it will encounter love, by which a multitude of sins are covered; and as long as it escapes from confession, it will come close to pride, and far from love, to end up losing its peace.

+ *"Love covers a multitude of sins"* (1 Peter 4: 8). If pride takes love away, humility makes it stronger; and can wipe sins away.

Humility walks hand in hand with confession; Pride motivate us to confess that we are sinners; yet, not just by the tongue, or out of fear of the anger of men, when they see us pretend righteousness.

If you wish for the forgiveness of your sins, confess them to God, for then you can say to Him: *"Hide Your face from my sins"* (Psalm 51: 9); and may also add: *"For I acknowledge my transgressions"* (Psalm 51: 3). *"If we*

confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all our unrighteousness” (1 John 1: 9, 10).

(St. Augustine)

- + If we reveal our sins, not only to God, but to those capable of treating our wounds, our iniquities will be wiped out by Him who says: *“I have blotted out, like a thick cloud your transgressions, and like a cloud your sins”* (Isaiah 44: 22).

(The scholar Origen)

- + Condemn your own sins; for that would be enough defense before Your Lord; for it would be difficult for him who so does, to fall again into sins.

Wake up your conscience, your inner prosecutor; so that you will have none on the great day of judgment.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The law is my helper; for through it I started to confess what I previously used to deny (that I am a sinner). I started to acknowledge my sin, and not to hide my oppression; which I started to condemn myself before the Lord, who forgave the iniquities of my heart.

(St. Ambrose)

David proclaims that he has not hidden his sin (5), for he knows that whoever hides his sin, does not deceive God but deceives, and destroys himself. He did not want to act like a child who, putting his hands on his eyes, thinks that others would not see him.

c- Holding fast to a life of prayer: As it is impossible for the sinner to enjoy confessing his sin, unless he practices the life of prayer, the psalmist, perceiving that all saints are men of prayer; and that prayer is the breath of those who fear God, says:

“For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You, in a time when You may be found” (6)

God wishes to be found, to grant His godly men salvation from affliction, as though in the midst of a flood of great water; the psalmist adds:

“Surely in a flood of great waters, they shall not come near him” (6)

As long as we seek Go, we shall find Him; and not even *“all the fountains of the great deep burst forth”* would be able to come near us.

Salvation depends upon God’s presence in us; It depends upon our faithfulness in prayer; to enjoy the sweetness of His dwelling, and of His salvation work.

2- THE DIVINE PROTECTION: (7)

“You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance” (7)

God who forgives our sins through our confession, and justifies us, is our refuge, our hiding place, our rescuing ark, in which the waters of the great flood of judgment would not be able to come near us (6). He who forgives our sins will not leave us on our own,

but will keep on granting us His protection. We are committed to set forth to Him to enjoy the grace of His Holy Spirit.

- + “*You are my hiding place’ You shall preserve me from trouble*”. You are my refuge from the pressure of the sin that caused my heart to bleed. “*You shall surround me with songs of deliverance*”. My whole exultation is in You; Save me from sorrows, which my sins have brought forth upon me.
- + “Save me, O my exultation”. ... If you are already exultant, why then would you seek salvation?! ... Do you exult and groan at the same time?! ... Yes, I exult in hope; and I groan because of my situation now!

(St. Augustine)

3- THE DIVINE GUIDANCE: (8 – 10)

God, the Forgiver of sins, and the faithful Refuge of the soul, is our Guide, who is ready to lead His children along His royal path; “*the path of the inner righteousness*”; He will keep His eyes on us, as long as we keep ours on Him.

“I shall instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eyes” (8)

- + This psalm is known as “The psalm of understanding”
I shall grant you understanding to let you perpetually know yourself; and to perpetually exult in the joy of hope before God, until you reach your ultimate home; where there is no more hope, but the true actuality.

“I will guide you with my eyes” (8). I shall not turn my eyes away from you, as long as you do not turn your eyes away from me.

(St. Augustine)

“Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not stay near you” (9)

As long as the believer delivers his life to God, the Lord will guide him along His path, granting him the spirit of wisdom and understanding; And as long as he hold his eyes fast upon the Lord, the Lord will hold His eyes upon him. But he, who rejects the counsel of God, will become without understanding, counted by the psalmist as a horse or mule; for the understanding is what distinguishes us from the irrational beasts. By Christ Jesus – the Wisdom of the Father – we would be upgraded to become like the angels of God; And by rejecting God, we would lose even our own humanity.

It would be enough for a father to look at his son; for through understanding, the son would hasten to correct his probable fault; Whereas, for the horse or the mule, the mere looks of their master would not be enough, but they would need a bit or a bridle to harness and lead them.

The looks of her Savior would be enough for the humble soul, to weep together with Simon Peter who could not endure the admonishing look of His Lord during His trial; Whereas the proud soul would need the bridle of cruel temptations to make her come back close to Him by repentance, and to know the path of her salvation; Hence the psalmist goes on saying:

“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked, but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him” (10)

+ With a bit and bridle He controls those who come near you; for under certain circumstances, they would bow their necks to God, even though against their will.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + Indeed, man has been enjoying a place of honor, but has fallen in iniquity, as it happened to Samson, who was forsaken by virtue, wisdom, and grace, and was punished by blindness and humiliation. By denying himself the light of reason, man would be qualified for the task of beasts.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

4- **THE DIVINE JOY:** (11)

“Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart” (11)

If the sorrow is the portion of the wicked, the double joy is the portion of the righteous, the upright in heart. The secret of this joy is “the Lord”. They rejoice in the Lord as the Forgiver of their sins, as their refuge, as the Guide of their life, and as the source of their glory. Their joy is in the Lord, not by the temporal riches, nor by the earthly things.

The psalm started by giving blessing to those whose sins are forgiven; and ended by rejoicing in the Lord, and not in the riches, nor in the relief from suffering. By the forgiveness of our sins, our hearts would become faithful to God, and the Lord would proclaim His joyous kingdom in us.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 32

FORGIVE MY SINS

- + Let Your Holy Spirit give light to my heart;
Let me not hide my sins, but confess them;

- + Grant me pure tears, to shed them before You;
Hold my right hand, to consummate Your commandment;
Lead me to Your path, and fill me with Your wisdom and understanding;
Cover me with Your precious blood, and do not impute my iniquity.

- + By You I enjoy wisdom; and without You I perish by foolishness.
By You I am filled with joy; and without you, I will be swallowed by sorrow;
By You, my soul would find comfort forever; and without You, I shall find no comfort.

- + The looks of Your eyes would be enough for me, to know Your will, and to return to
You;
Draw me by Your love, and make my heart rejoice by Your grace.

=====

PSALM 33

A SONG OF CONQUEST AND JOY

Its relationship to psalm 32:

It is obvious that this psalm was written as a consummation of the line of thought that came in the last psalm; adding additional reasons for the exultation of the righteous, and their rejoice in the Lord.

In the last psalm the psalmist proclaims beatitude for those whose sins are forgiven through baptism, as well as through continuous repentance and confession; and it ended with a call to the people trusting in God to rejoice, exult, and shout for joy in the Lord. Now the psalmist presents to us a psalm of praise, in which he refers to the new condition of the repentant believer, in whom fountains of praise and inner joy spring up as a divine gift; about which the Lord Christ says: *“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst, but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4: 14). We are not able to enjoy the sweetness of praise, unless we walk along the way of repentance, and live it.

If the last psalm is the psalm of repentance, it ends with a call to joy, gladness, and shouts; namely, to a life of praise. The present psalm, on the other hand, as a psalm of praise, ends up with a supplication: *“Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us”* (22); namely, seeking the mercy of the Lord, the Forgiver of sins. ... Hence, as we may see, there is no separation between the life of repentance and that of praise; they are one and the same integral life; God’s single royal path.

A psalm of praise, wisdom, and liturgy:

The purest of singing is the praise of God, for His own sake, as well as for the sake of His dealings with His people. For which this psalm would be a marvelous example. It is

a glorious symphony of praise presented to the Lord, the Creator, the Lord, the Judge, and the Savior.

This psalm could have been written as a thanksgiving for the sake of an enjoyment of a conquest or victory, or as a memorial of the glorious works of God in the wilderness after the crossing of the Red Sea, and His high arm with His people. It is a song of love sung by every heart that experienced the amazing works of God and His personal care.... He looks down from heaven, preoccupied with those on the earth, embracing them with love, to carry them up to His heavens.

The musicians in the temple used to sing this psalm, as though on the tongue of both the heavenly and the earthly creatures; proclaiming the joy of the heavenlies in their Creator, the Grantor of strength; and the faith of the earthlies, glorifying the Creator who cares for them. The works of creation harmonize with the Word of God, and with His works along the history to save with His high arm.

The psalm starts and ends with presenting two elements of worship: Presenting a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God, the great and glorious King, and trusting in Him, in whom, all, humbly hope in His salvation.

This psalm of praise could be considered as a psalm of wisdom, teaching, and liturgy, at the same time. ... According to some, it is a praise concerning a certain feast, commemorating a covenant with God, celebrated at the commencement of the new year; glorifying the plan of the great God in His care of His people, something that brings forth hope in the future. It is a new praise (3), used in the circumstances concerning the renewal of a covenant with God.

The Word of God in the Old Testament:

The Word of God – as proclaimed here – is a Being: Dependable, Lover, Faithful, Provider of all the needs and requirements of His created universe, through His church,

who renews our life, particularly through the words of His Holy Book, which are read on and on in the liturgical assemblies.

Its liturgical construction:

As suggested by some, its liturgical construction is as follows:

- Verse 1 -- A call to praise, sung by the whole congregation together.
- Verses 2 & 3, sung by Choir 1
- Verses 4 & 5, sung by choir 2
- Verses 6 & 9, sung by Choir 1
- Verses 10 to 12, sung by choir 2 (Quoted from the human history concerning the nations)
- Verses 13 to 19, sung by choir 1 (Quoted from the human history concerning individuals)
- Verses 20 & 21, sung by the two choirs 1 & 2 together.
- Verse 22, sung by the whole congregation together.

Its general frame:

1- A call to praise	1 -- 3
2- God's faithfulness	4 -- 5
3- God's dealings with the nations	10 - 17
4- God's goodness	20 – 22

1- A CALL TO PRAISE: (1 – 3)

The last psalm ends with a call to praise God with joy, gladness and boasting. Now, the present psalm starts by the same call, in which the psalm presents additional motives to praise:

“Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous!, For praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the Lord with the harp;

Make melody to Him with an instrument with ten strings. Sing to Him a new song. Play skillfully with a shout of joy” 1-3)

In this call, we notice the following:

1- According to some, the Hebrew word meaning “*rejoice*” originally means (dance for joy); a strong expression of living exultation, when

the inner being of man shakes for joy, for the sake of his encounter with God; as the prophet David danced before the ark of the covenant of

the Lord; (2 Samuel 6: 14; 1 Chronicles 15: 29); and as the babe leaped in Elizabeth’s womb, when St. Mary visited her.(Luke 1: 41).

This praise, or this dance of the inner being, is a divine gift as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of Joy.

2- The secret of rejoice or praise is the Lord: “*Rejoice in the Lord*”. We rejoice in Him, and not in ourselves; We rejoice in His presence, and not

in His temporal blessings. For the rejoice in the temporal things is mortal, and the rejoice in sin is perishable; whereas the rejoice in the Lord is eternal. It is the task and the language of the heavenlies. Whoever intends to partake of their glories, let him learn their language, and start here by the inner joy, namely with the praise of the heart and the tongue.

3- “*For praise from the upright is beautiful*”. If praise is a divine gift, the fruit of the Holy Spirit to the believers, to make them practice the joyful

heavenly life; It is, at the same time a commitment; For it is befitting of the believer who practices the godly life, to enjoy his privilege, and praise God like an exultant angel.

The praise emerging from a heart, holy to the Lord, is the wedding garment worn by the believer before the divine throne. Whereas that, emerging from a wicked heart, is like *“a ring of gold in a swine’s snout”* (Proverb 11: 22)

4- Use the inner instrument of praise: ... The psalmist counsels us to use a harp and an instrument with ten strings.

Here, some may ask: May the church of the New Covenant use musical instrument to praise the Lord?

According to ‘W. Plumer’:

[It is positive that the early Christians have not used any musical instrument in their collective worships; which is obvious in the teachings of

Justine the martyr, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Theodort. In Chrysostom’s commentary on psalms 143 and 149, and Theodort’s

commentary on the present psalm, both present a definite testimony concerning this issue ... According to St. John Chrysostom, the musical

instruments, God allowed only for the Jews, because of the hardness of their hearts, for they have only recently forsaken idol worship.... But,

as far as we are concerned, we use our bodies instead of the harp, to praise God.

The early Christian church did not use musical instruments anywhere, until it was recently used in the middle of the thirteenth century A.D., as

stated by Thomas El-Akuiny, saying: [Our Church does not use musical instruments like the harp or flute to praise God, to distance herself

from the Jews; as testified by the Protestants and the Catholics, until the time of the great Sharleman, in the year 1250 A. D.].

It is obvious, according to the Holy Book, that the musical instruments were used before the time of the prophet Moses, to express the joyful feelings of the heart (Job 30: 31).

How can we then praise God spiritually with a harp and an instrument with ten strings?

a- Since her beginning, the church acknowledged the name “Jesus” as the source of joy and strength; and used to utter it with the spirit and truth to enjoy His presence. This name for them was the harp of the spirit, on which the melody of gladness and salvation was played.

+ What is the instrument with ten strings but the word “Jesus”, proclaimed through the Greek letter ‘Juta’, (the first letter in the name ‘Jesus’ in Greek), which represents number 10 in the Greek alphabet

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

b- The psalmist mention two musical instruments, namely the harp and the one with ten strings, probably to proclaim that we are committed to praise God with our bodies, as well as with our souls; with our tongues, as well as with our hearts; or in public, as well as in secret.

The righteous, praise God “*with their bodies which they present a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God*” (Romans 12: 1). According to St. Augustine: [Use your body members to minister to the love of God and of your neighbor; by which you may observe the three commandments (concerning the love of God), and the seven commandments (concerning the love of the neighbor)]. I wish no one consider the use of the musical instruments of the theaters; as it concerns here inner issues, as it is written: “*Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God, I will render praises to You*” (Psalm 56: 12)].

The harp refers to the holy body that glorifies God, praises Him, and gives Him thanks, not only by the tongue, but by the whole being of man -- The body with its

five senses, and the soul with its five inner possibilities. It is as though the letter 10 refers to the body, the soul, the mind, the emotions, and the feelings.... All praise God with harmony under the leadership of the Holy Spirit through the possibilities, manifest and the hidden.

According to St. Didymus the blind, in the harp, the tunes come from its lower extremity, referring to the body which was created from the earth; Whereas, in the instrument with ten strings, the tunes come from its higher extremity, referring to the soul, soaring high up in the heavenlies with the spirit of thanksgiving.

c- The ten strings refer to the ten commandments. He who does not keep the commandment would be like a musical instrument with no strings, which would not be able to produce a sweet tune that bring joy to heaven.

d- The musical instrument with ten strings refers to the church whose members enjoy many gifts, like different strings, which, although producing several tunes, yet in harmony; produces a sweet symphony by the Holy Spirit, Grantor of unity and of harmony.

5- A new song: *“Sing to Him a new song”* (3)

We often read about “the new son” in the book of psalms (96: 1; 98: 1; 149: 1); as we hear about “the new song” in heaven (Revelation 5: 9; 14: 3).

If “*the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before the Lord*” (Isaiah 55: 12); “*valleys shout for joy, and sing*” (Psalm 65: 13), “*the trees of the woods shall rejoice before the Lord*” (1 Chronicles 16: 33), and “*the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted of joy*” (Job 38: 7); ... Namely, if the heavenly and earthly creatures, the rational and the irrational creations, all praise God, being their Creator, who cares for all; We, who have enjoyed His salvation work, as new mercies which we experience every day in His dealings with us, should Sing to Him “a new song”.

Here he refers to “a new song” without any reference to musical instrument; for it is a heavenly song that needs no earthly musical instrument.

The psalmist counsels us to sing to Him “a new song”, which comes from the inner man, perpetually renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit; to praise Him for the sake of His mercies, new every day; as the Son of Righteousness shines in us, granting us a spiritual enlightenment; to sing to Him by our new man; on account of that the old man was crucified with his evil works.

The newness here, may be literally understood, as being a new role given to the old praises, or as a new experience for God’s care, the Grantor of salvation, new in our life through the cross.

+ Now you know the new man, the new covenant, the new song.

The new song does not belong to the old man, for only the new man can learn it, he who is born anew for the new covenant, namely, for the kingdom of heavens.

+ Sing the song of grace of faith ... Sing with your whole energy, to Him, for the sake of the joy itself.

(St. Augustine)

It is befitting of him who sings the new song of salvation, to be prepared for it by his holy life, as a befitting musical instrument; not to practice it with the spirit of slothfulness, but with the strength of the Spirit, with the shouting of the heart; hence the psalmist goes on to say:

“Play skillfully with a shout of joy”

(3)

“*skillfully*” means preparing the heart with all the energies of man to produce spiritual tunes that would bring joy to heaven. Saying: “*with a shout of joy*” means with the shouts of conquest and gladness for seeing the victorious King dwell in our hearts.

2- GOD’S FAITHFULNESS: (4 – 5)

*“For the Word of the Lord is right; and all His work is done in truth.
He loves righteousness and justice.*

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord” (4, 5)

Here the psalmist presents to us one of the motives that bring forth in us the spirit of praise; namely, our enjoyment of the Word of God. For the divine Word – as presented by the psalm – is not a voice nor letters, but a living Being with divine features; Right, faithful, Lover of righteousness and justice, and Creator of heaven and earth (6). He is worthy of every praise from His creation, which encounter Him through His just work, full of love and compassion.

- + *“For the Word of the Lord is right”*; Capable of making you in a state, which you cannot be on your own ... Man should never think to attain faith for the sake of his own works; For by faith itself, work may be well received by God.

(St. Augustine)

- + *“All His work is done in truth”*, means that heavens and its systems testify to their Maker; and the earth and its systems increase your faith in God. However, it would not be through us, by our physical eyes, that we believe in Him; But, by the power of the mind, we can perceive the unseen through the evidences of the seen.

(St. Basil the Great)

“He loves righteousness and justice” (5).

In His creation, He proclaims His righteousness and justice; And in His divine economy of the entire universe, all shine with unutterable splendor in His salvation work.

How amazing is the Right Word of God, He who created nothing unclean or pervert; ...

Any perversion is caused by our sins; and every corruption is a product of our own will. If we return to Him, righteousness would return to our life, and even to our earth; For He is merciful, and anticipates to proclaim His love and compassion, without committing or forcing us to return to Him.

When the glory of the Lord passed before the prophet Moses, he got in touch with the amazing righteousness and justice of the Lord; It is said:

“The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty” (Exodus 6, 7).

On the cross, God’s righteousness and justice were realized, when the Word of God delivered His life for our sake, and paid the price in full. By the cross, *“the earth is full of the goodness of he Lord” (5)*; For faith is no more confined to a certain people, but all nations received the gospel, and exulted in the exalted righteousness of God. It became possible for every man to call the Lord and be saved, to encounter His Savior wherever he is.

God’s righteousness and justice are un-separable; He is fully Righteous, Just in His righteousness, and righteous in His justice. We can, however, say that we live in the era of grace, where the righteousness of God transfigures to bring us up from the pit of perdition, to carry in Himself, by His justice, the price of our sins. But, in the time of judgment to come, He will act as the divine Judge to deal with everyone according to his own works. He who acquires the righteousness now will escape the condemnation later on; whereas he who is slothful, would fall under the divine justice.

- + *“He loves righteousness and justice”*. For “He loves”, you should experience this righteousness and this justice. Now, it is the time of righteousness, while later it will be that of the justice.

(St. Augustine)

- + Although He is Righteous, yet He is Just as well. You may see how He grants His righteousness; Yet He is not Righteous without justice; nor Just without righteousness. *“Gracious is the Lord and righteous”* (Psalm 116: 5).

(St. Basil the Great)

3- GOD’S JUSTICE: (6 – 9)

a- The justice of God, who founded heavens and gave them strength:

If the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord (5), it is befitting of the earthly creatures not to despise God’s mercy and longsuffering; but *“all the inhabitants of the world should stand in awe of Him”* (8), For *“by the word of the Lord, the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth”* (6); *“For He spoke and it was done”* (9).

“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them; by the breath of His mouth” (6)

God who suffers long on the man of dust, is the Creator of the high heavens with all their host; namely, He is in no need of the service of man; but He condescends to love man, and to care for his salvation and eternity. The psalmist probably intends to confirm that man will never escape from the divine justice; on account of that the heavens, with

all their possibilities and capabilities are His handwork... Where then, would he escape? And what power would support him if he chose to oppose his Creator?

According to St. Athanasius the apostolic, St. Basil, St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine, this phrase refers to the Holy Trinity: The Father, His Word, and His Holy Spirit.

+ You should then perceive three things: The Father gave the order, His Word created, and His Spirit abides.

(St. Basil the Great)

+ Here, is a hint to the Holy Trinity.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

The Word of God, the Savior, who descended to us, is the Creator of heavens; *“By the Word of the Lord, heavens were made”*.

+ *“The Lord said”* is explained in *“the Word”*; for it is said: *“In wisdom You have made them all”* (Psalm 104: 24); *“By the word of the Lord, heavens were made”*; *“For us there is One Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live”* (1 Corinthians 8: 6)

(Pope st. Athanasius the apostolic)

+ For the care for all things is referred to Him, by whom they were created; namely, the Word of God, about whom it is said in the psalm: *“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them, by the breath of His mouth: (6);* We were told that *“Everything by and in Him, everything were made”*.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + *"All things were made through Him"* (John 1: 3); and, *"By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made"* (6). This makes it clear that everything was made by the Son; in order not to separate the Son from the Father by any means, but unifies them together.
- + There is no doubt that all things in heaven draw their power in the Holy Spirit, as is clear in: *"By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made, and all the host of them, by the breath of His mouth"* (6). He, then, is above all, through whom all the power of the heavenly and earthly things originate, and to whom is the privilege of the divine authority.

(St. Ambrose)

- + God is in no need of all these things; For by His Word and Spirit, He creates, ordains, and controls everything; *"For He spoke, and it was done"* (9).

(St. Erinaos)

- + Everything, whether angels, archangels, thrones, or rulers, were founded, and created by God, who is above all, through His Word, as said by John; who, speaking about the Word of God, being in the Father, he added: *"All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made"* (John 1: 3). Also, telling us about the praises of God, David mentioned by name, all what I referred to: *"the heavens were made, and all the host of them"*; He gave the command, and they were created; *"He spoke, and it was done"*. ... Who gave the command? He, no doubt, was the Word, by whom *"All the heavens were made, and all the host of them, by the breath of His mouth"*.

(St. Erinaos)

The Holy Trinity is the Creator, and who renewed His creation through His salvation work; realized in the water of baptism, through burial together with the Lord Christ, and the enjoyment of the Holy Spirit (John 3: 3-6).

+ Man was re-created in the water of baptism; For, in Christ, man is a new creation.

(St. Basil the Great)

+ Not by father and mother; nor by the union of men; nor through the pains of labor, we are re-born; but by the Holy Spirit, the tissues of our new nature are woven; in the water they are conformed; and from the water we are secretly born, as though from the womb.

In the womb, though, it takes a long time for the body to be conformed, but from the water and the Spirit, the life of the Spirit is conformed in a moment, in the blink of an eye.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Talking about the Word of God as the Creator and the Founder of heavens, St.

Augustine does not raise his eyes up to heaven, but brings his sight into his own depths, to see the inner heavens, founded by the Lord Christ by His precious blood, to say: [In the righteous man, our Lord looks with His mercy to all those born in the newness of life].

b- *“He gathers the waters of the sea as in a bottle; He lays up the deep in storehouses” (7)*

If the righteousness of God, that filled the earth exhort us to praise Him; His righteousness as we already said, is not separated from His justice; For He is God the Just, who is to be feared... If man attempts to escape up to heaven with its highness and might, there, he will find God, its founder and who gives it strength; ... And if he gets down to the depths of the oceans, in an attempt to hide from the face of the divine Judge; he will find out that all the oceans and seas, in the sight of God, are like little water in a small bottle; the water, easy to leak and pour, are in God's strong hand; For He gathers the waters, and knows their volumes.

The waters of the sea, here, refer to the persecution against the church, with all its waves and currents stirred against her. God, who gathers the waters, however, does not keep the affliction away from His church, but controls its impact, and turns its bitterness into sweetness, worthy of being gathered in a small bottle, as a precious treasure.

+ Having been before stirred up beyond control, the bitterness of the seas came to an end; for He who has put a limit for the sea, caused its currents to chase and cancel one another.

(St. Augustine)

If God allows for the afflictions, they are, however, like the waters of the seas or the oceans, which, although their currents could swallow many, but they are a blessing in the life of humanity, that knows how to benefit from them. To them, God has set limits, which they could not go beyond; saying to men: *"Do you not fear Me? Says the Lord; Will you not tremble at My presence, who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it? And though its waves toss to and fro, yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it"* (Jeremiah 5: 22).

“Who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth, and issued from the womb” (Job 38: 8).

“Who has set a boundary that they may not pass over; That they may not return to cover the earth”(Psalm 104: 9)

Now, according to scientists, if the balance between earth and moon is disturbed, tides would be created in the oceans to drown the entire earth ... But God has set a boundary for the water that they may not pass over.

If the depths of the oceans are extremely terrifying; that people of the old counted the waters as the center of the kingdom of the devil, whom they called the greatest dragon; Yet, according to the psalmist, the waters are storehouses of goods set by God for man, His beloved creature. And in the new covenant, we see the waters of the River Jordan a fountain of the new birth, where God opened in them the doors of baptism as a precious treasure! ... Now, we can understand the psalmist's words: *“He lays up the deep in storehouses” (7)/*

c- God is worthy of awe:

God, the Creator of the higher heavens, who controls the water depths, and turns its bitterness into sweetness, is truly an extremely fearful Being; and a greatly awesome Lord; with limitless glory, to whom worship should be given with reverence; whose goodness should be perpetually blessed; and whose un-perceptible wrath should be feared; about whom the psalmist says:

“Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast” (8, 9)

+ Let all the inhabitants of the earth fear the Lord, because of their past condition, having been idol worshippers.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

Let us fear Him, being the Creator of heaven and earth with wisdom and justice; And let us fear Him as a Savior, who set us children for the Father; lest we wound His compassionate fatherhood, or hurt His eternal righteousness.

+ This earth is created by His Word, We are told by the book of Genesis; that He made everything.

(St. Erinaos)

3- GOD'S DEALINGS WITH THE NATIONS: (10 – 17)

Turning back to meditate in history, the psalmist demonstrates the majesty of God's power, in a way not less than that demonstrated by God's creation of nature. God, mighty in His creation of heaven and earth, is mighty as well in His care for man along the history. The eyes of faith see the hand of God behind the controversies and bonds between the nations; the hand that conforms the history of the world according to His divine goal. History is nothing but an extension of the work of creation, which shows more perfectly God's justice through remembering the promises of His abiding love.

In this psalm, after presenting God's might that tells us about the greatness of His presence, the psalmist refers to God's dealings with His creatures as worthy of praise and thanksgiving, being the whole in wisdom, who sees everything, and controls all nations.

“The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel

of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations” (10, 11)

God did not create the world with all its mighty laws of nature, to forsake and to separate Himself thereof; but created it to move it by His laws, granting man the whole freedom, to remain, Himself, the Creator and Controller of His creation... He may leave the wicked to think and to plan, and probably to start putting their plans into action, with the hope that may return from their evil and repent. But if they persist on their evil schemes, He intervenes at the right moment, either to turn their evil into blessings for His children, or to scatter and to put an end to their plans; as according to the prophet Isaiah: *“Thus says the Lord God: ‘It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass” (Isaiah 7: 7); and, “Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces! Give ear, all you from far countries, gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces; Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing. Speak the word, but it will not stand; For God is with us” (Isaiah 8: 9, 10).*

He brought the counsel of Ahithophel, against the prophet David to no avail (2 Samuel 17: 23); So He did to Haman’s plots against Mordecai and his people (Esther 6, 7); and that of Diocletian against the church in the whole world! ... In every generation God was oppressed in His children; yet oppression did not prevail for long, affliction eventually came to an end, and God’s children were glorified forever. The wisdom of the wicked was always brought to nothing; whereas God’s plan for salvation always prevailed and stood fast. It was said to the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God, that *“they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed” (Revelation 6: 6: 11).* God will realize His plan in all ways, even if it implies the martyrdom of some of his children; His eyes will always be upon His children, even in the moments of their sufferings and martyrdom.

God’s children are not disturbed by the plots and plans of the wicked, for history is in the hands of God their Father -- the whole in wisdom, might, and love; He who is able to

destroy the counsel of the wicked, or to turn them into good, even if He allows them to kill His own children;.... But what preoccupy them is the beatitude that came to be theirs, not for their own righteousness, but through God's choice of them to become His people and His children, and of Him to become their God and Father.

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people He has chosen as His own inheritance" (12)

Let us then rejoice and be glad that God has chosen us, Him to be our portion, and for us to be His people. The psalmist joyfully testifies that God proclaims Himself as being our God, whom we acquire as the source of our blessing, protection, guidance, peace, joy, and success, to need nothing more.

+ *"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (12) ... You have heard that His nation possesses Him; ... Now you also hear that He possesses them: "The people He has chosen as His own inheritance".*

Blessed is the nation in what it possesses; and blessed is the inheritance in Him who possesses it.

(St. Augustine)

The psalmist praises God for the sake of such mutual possession: We have Him as our portion; and He has us as His inheritance.

Let the Lord be my God; Let me possess Him, so as not to seek any physical covetousness, the love of the riches of the world, vain glory, or a human look of compassion! Let Him have me as His inheritance; Let Him be glad in His work in me; in His righteousness dwelling in me, and the joy of His kingdom in my depths. I wish I become His servant, and not to be enslaved to many other masters, for my servitude to Him is the perfection of my inner freedom.

While exchanging love and possession, God's eyes will never forsake me; for the psalmist says:

"The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His habitation, He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth" (13, 14)

Speaking about how God looks on men, we should discern between His look, being the Creator, who search everything; and His looks, granting grace to the souls that received sonhood to Him. God knows everything, searches all minds and hearts; Yet He has the knowledge of attachment and unity with those who receive Him as a Father and Savior. God is Omnipresent; Yet He has the presence that grants grace in the hearts of His believers, who work with love.

God looks on His church, recognizes her as His bride; is present in her, being His own kingdom on earth. He looks as well on the world, and searches its hidden things, and knows its secrets. Although He is Omnipresent, yet there is great difference between His dealings with those who seek Him, and those who deny Him.

The Lord looks on His people as a Father on His beloved children, and not as a negative by-stander. He sees us in His beloved Son, to find us bearing the righteousness of Christ, and counted the subject of His pleasure.

He looks "*from heaven*", "*from the place of His habitation*", namely, from the hearts of His believers and those who preach Him; not only looking on us as a Father, but He dwells in us, and looks on others through us.

- + *“From the place of His habitation, He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth”* (13). He looks on us through those who preach the truth; He looks on us through the angels He sends, being His perpetual place of habitation, being the heavens that reveal His glory.

(St. Augustine)

Looking on us, He looks into the depths, into the hidden secrets of the hearts; Being the Creator of the hidden soul, he knows our works, not according to appearances, the way men look, but through the inner intention, without partiality to a king or a ruler.

“He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works. No king is saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain hope of safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great strength” (15 – 17)

The Maker of the heart knows its secrets; as according to Solomon the Sage: *“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water, He turns it wherever He wishes. Every way of man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts”* (proverbs 21: 1, 2); and according to the blessed David: *“O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my standing up. You understand my thoughts afar off; ... my frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret”* (Psalm 139: 1, 2, 15).

- + *“He fashions their hearts individually”* (15). By the hand of His grace; by the hand of His mercy, He made and fashioned our hearts, individually, one by one, yet kept our unity together.

“He considers all their works” ...Man sees the work of another through his apparent physical actions, but God sees the depth of the heart, hence it is said: *“He considers all their works”*.

(St. Augustine)

Considering all our works, God is capable of setting us kings, of saving us, not by our own strength, by our own mental, by our material possibilities, nor by horses and chariots, but by His strong arm, and by dwelling in us.

By the gift of His Holy Spirit, God granted us the grace of royalty, to make us spiritual kings, united to the King of kings, and trust in Him.

Salvation, even from death, could be realized by God alone; Our life is in His hands, and He can keep it, even amid any tribulation, unconquerable by man. He granting us Himself as our strength, let us therefore, trust in Him, not negatively, but, positively strive by Him, being our strength; for it is written: *“The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the Lord”* (Proverbs 21: 31).

+ Let God be your hope, your ability to endure, your strength, your propitiation, your praise, your goal, your place of comfort, and your help in your strife.

A *“mighty man”* is an arrogant man who haughtily raises himself above God, counting himself as something. Such a man will not be delivered by his own strength... In the time of danger, if he thinks that his strong, sound, and a swift horse can deliver him? Let him hear the words: *“A horse is a vain hope of safety”*.

We may take the horse as symbolizing the possessions in this world, or of any kind of honor on which we may proudly trust, wrongly assuming that the higher we get, the more secure we are. Do not you perceive that the higher you get, the more

severe would be your fall?! ... How then could security be realized?... It would never be realized by strength, nor by authority, honor, glory, or by the horse!

(St. Augustine)

In the old, chariots used to be the main support of armies, giving to their rider a feeling of security, enabling him to flee in the time of danger. Yet, many have perished while riding on chariots and horses. Sennecherib, with his mighty army could not stand before a single angel of God; and Pharaoh, with all his chariots drowned in the Red Sea.... Whereas he, who leans on the chest of God will be secure, even from death, according to the words of the Lord: *"He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live"* (John 11: 25)

According to the scholar Origen, the horses here, refer to the devil and his hosts, saying: [The horses represent those who were in heaven, then were brought down from it because of their pride and haughtiness Those who followed him who said: *"I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High"* (Isaiah 14: 14). For this reason, I assume, the prophet David says: *"A horse is a vain hope of safety; neither shall it deliver any by its great strength"* (17). Likewise it is also said about those who trust in the devil: *"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God"* (Psalm 20: 7)].

Let us then forsake the chariots of this world, and ride on that of the fear of God, that divine chariot, capable of raising us high above all tribulations and afflictions; of delivering us from death, and of keeping us alive in famine; as according to the psalmist:

"Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine" (18, 19)

4- GOD'S GOODNESS: (20 – 22)

“Our soul waits for the Lord, He is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name. Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we hope in You” (20 – 22)

Those who fear the Lord enjoy His compassionate looks, the Grantor of graces, that reveal His personal care, and His appreciation of the human soul Something that bring joy to the His believers' hearts.

Together with his enjoyment of salvation, and his perception of the power of the holy name of God, the psalmist does not cease to cry out seeking the mercy of God, even in the midst of his praise, perceiving that what he gets here is only a deposit of inexpressible glories in the eternal life; as though, with every conquest, and every success, his longing for the perfect satiety in the eternal kingdom would increase; that the joy would mix with the hidden cry-outs of the heart; and the groaning with the enjoyment of the everlasting encounter with God, face to face.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 33

O ETERNAL LOVE

- + O, Source of Love, Teach me how to love You!
Perpetually, renew my depths, to sing for You with the harp of the Spirit;
And in my depths, I would play music on the strings of Your ten commandments.

- + By Your word You have created heavens; and by Your Spirit all their host;
Work, O divine Word in my heart, Your new heavens;

And, with Your Holy Spirit, ignite all the possibilities and strengths, You have granted me;

- + Grant me Your fear, as a divine chariot that supports me in the time of affliction;
Having neither horses nor chariots, let Your fear be my strength;
Let Your fear carry me above all the currents of affliction.

- + Look on me with Your eyes; for I am in need of Your love;
Look on me, that I would forsake everything and run after You.

PSALM 34

THANKSGIVING FOR THE SAKE OF DELIVERANCE

What the first epistle of St. Peter (chapters 1 and 2), and other epistles have richly quoted from this psalm, and his commentaries on it, are a strong evidence of how much all the generations are indebted to this psalm.

The prophet David went to the land of the Philistines twice, the first time accompanied by few men (1 Samuel 21: 1 – 15), filled with fear, having come to 'Gath' the city of the mighty Goliath, whom he killed long time ago, carrying his sword. It was not possible for the inhabitants of 'Gath' to give him refuge as a fugitive from king Saul, but counted him as a crafty spy, and intended to kill him in retaliation for killing their hero. Bringing him before their king, David had to pretend to be out of his mind, changed his behavior, and feigned madness before 'Abimelech', who hastened to send him away. Mad men had certain privileges, and were not punished for their actions, on account of a belief that they had some kind of a fearful spirit. Sent away by the king, David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam, where he wrote this psalm. There, he was joined by those who were in distress, in debt, or discontented, and became captain over them; and there were about 500 men with him.(1 Samuel 22: 2).

The second time, when he came to 'Gath', he was accompanied, beside his own family, by 600 men, the Philistine did not doubt his intentions, for Saul's chase of him has become publicly known by all the surrounding nations. He was well received by the king of 'Gath' who gave him 'Ziklag' to dwell, probably to have his support against king Saul.

David's pretense of madness to deceive the king was an unjustified failure of faith, For truth, and faithfulness should always be the way of a believer. Contrary to the belief of

some that everything is permissible in war, a man of God should never resort to deception, which indicate weakness in faith.

Yet, even though David fell into weakness of faith, God did not forsake him, but saved him with His mercy; Hence his soul got filled with praise, and thanksgiving to God for the sake of His grace and compassion.

Considering the name of the king of the Philistines, it came in the historical records as 'Achish', and here it came as 'Abimelech', probably a title given to their kings at that time; meaning (the father king), the way the title 'Pharaoh' was given to the king of Egypt in the old times, 'Caesar' to the emperors of Rome, and 'Agag' to those of Amalek.

Concerning the material of this psalm, there is no contradiction. For, even though David's behavior did not conform with faith, but, on the contrary, it revealed fear and lack of faith; he, nevertheless, did not lean upon his own arm, but, in his depths, he trusted in the Lord; And once he was securely hidden in the cave of 'Adullam', he confessed his shameful failure before the Lord, and counted his salvation, not a fruit of his own actions, but a divine gift from God. That filled his soul with the spirit of praise, to proclaim with gladness the mercy and goodness of the Lord.

And as far as the language of this psalm is concerned, it is one of the alphabetical psalms, like psalm 25; both follow the Hebrew alphabetical order; except for the omission of the letter 'vow'.

Finally, whenever we feel that we have lost everything, and have utterly failed, we find help in this psalm, which encourages us to persevere. In it, as well as in the great saints mentioned in the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, we experience the sweetness of the goodness of the Lord, and hence we come to be able to partake of singing the heavenly praise here on earth ... We can take refuge in God here, as a deposit of the everlasting peace to come.

Its general frame:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1- Praising God | 1 - 3 |
| 2- Reasons for praising God | 4 - 10 |
| 3- <i>“Come, you children, listen to me”</i> | 11 - 14 |
| 4- The divine deliverance | 15 – 23 |

1- PRAISING GOD: (1 – 3)

“I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (1)

Verses 1 to 3, are considered a magnificent commentary on the counsel given to us in the new testament, saying: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice”* (Philippians 4: 4). The true spirituality is manifested through the internal perpetual joy, expressed in the perpetual praise, even in the darkest moments. It is befitting of us to thank and praise God at all times, and in all situations: in the time of joy, as well as in that of affliction; in health and sickness, in suffering poverty, and persecution, even amid the sufferings of death. For, at all times, God reveals His grace in the life of the believer. Every day, the godly believer gets in touch with God’s mercies, to sing a new song of praise to God. God is glorified in the life of the believer, who, cherishing the perpetual work of God in his life, says: *“My soul shall make a boast in the Lord”* (2). If we wish to have joy in the Lord, let Him be our joy and glory; something that grants our suffering souls, a true peace.

In his sojourn, and amid his outer deprivation, and intense pressures, David says: *“I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth”* (1). The psalmist perceived that no work on earth, nor in heaven, is greater or more honorable than to praise the Lord; It is an angelic work!

Whenever we fall into a new affliction, we are committed to remember God's past dealings with us, and His unceasing mercies; For then, our hearts will turn to joy and praise; as we hope with trust and confidence, for the new mercies of God.

In our human weakness, amid our sufferings, it may be sometimes difficult for us to praise and bless God; but our Christ who came down for the sake of suffering, presented praises of thanksgiving to His Father, even while drinking the cup of passion in the garden of Gethsemane; and about Him it is said: "*For the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame*" (Hebrew 12: 2). He alone, is truly able to realize these words said by the psalmist; but we are not, unless we unite with Him, to grant us the fellowship of His exultant life, so that, by Him, we come to be like angels, and shout with the tongue of thanksgiving: "*I will bless the Lord at all times*".

+ I wish the Christian so says; as for this goal, Christ became man, to make man like an angel, and cries out: "*I will bless the Lord ...*".

You are committed to bless Him when He give you gifts; and bless Him when He takes them back; For, although He is the One who gives, and the One who takes back; but He will never take "Himself" from those who bless Him.

Only the humble bless the Lord (2); the humility the Lord has taught us in His body and blood, which He delivered for our sake; and gave us as an example.

(St. Augustine)

+ The way the humble David praised God at the time of his affliction, saying: "*I will bless the Lord at all times*", the blessed Paul did not cease to give God thanks and glory in all his epistles. at the time of joy, as well as at that of tribulation, knowing that "*tribulation produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope; hope that does not disappoint*" (Romans 5: 3)

I wish we, as followers of those saints, would never cease to give God thanks all the time.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + Let Him who dwells in our hearts, talks as well on our lips; Let our lips serve Him, whom our hearts serve, to be qualified to say together with the prophet: *"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth"* .
- + Who is he who blesses the Lord at all times, but the man who is not corrupted by the huge wealth, nor terrified by severe tribulations. The first and true peace is to be in peace with God, for then, peace would also be realized inside us.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- + Our thanksgiving to God is more important than our breathing
According to Solomon the Sage, and as I also believe, everything has its time, yet thanksgiving to the Lord, is at all times.

(St. Gregory the Nezianzen)

If we have enjoyed the new man, according to the image of our Creator, and our hearts got filled with praise, we are committed to express what we have in our hearts by our mouth and tongue; to give Him thanks by the heart, the mind, the tongue, and the work; in order to experience the sweetness of the new life under all circumstances; For there is no special time for praise, but it is rather the pulse of the inner heart of man, which, if they stop, we would lose our fellowship with God, our life.

According to the scholar Origen, he who gives God thanks at the time of joy, is paying back a debt; Whereas he who give Him thanks at the

time of tribulation, becomes His creditor.

Praising and glorifying God is realized through humility; for by feeling our own weakness, we seek the greatness of His work in our life.

“My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; The humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together” (2, 3)

Boasting is natural in man; but if abused, he would be (Pharisee) in mind; whereas if he boasts in his weakness, like what St. Paul did, he will have God’s grace and strength, and will praise the Lord in His Person, features, promises, covenant, and His amazing works.

By humility and meekness, man, perceiving that what he has got of goodness is not out of his own worthiness, but is a free gift from God; he would give God thanks for His mercies that are not perceived by non-believers, and he would rejoice and become filled with hope to get the perfection of eternal glory.

+ Do not commend yourself, but be glorified in the Lord; for then you would be able to sing: *“My soul shall make its boast in the Lord”*.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

We are warned by the saintly fathers against misunderstanding the true meaning of meekness or humility; For, although we may perceive our own weakness, it is befitting of us to trust in the work of God, who grants us the ability to practice the impossible, according to the words of the blessed Paul who says: *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4: 13).

- + Beware lest you may bring yourself to perdition while practicing these things. Do not seek to appear more humble or godly than you should be, lest you would be seeking glory by abstaining from it; for many who attempt to hide their optional poverty, love, and fasting, from the eyes, would be secretly seeking the admiration of others, through their attempt itself; Namely, they would be seeking commendation, while pretending to be far away from it.

(St. Ambrose)

The humble, does not only glorify God, but draws the others, as well, to join him in glorifying God's name; for according to the psalmist: "*Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together*" (3).

God is in no need of being glorified; but we, with the spirit of humility, gather together to share with the heavenly creatures the sweetness of their glorification and praises.

2- REASONS FOR PRAISING GOD: (4 – 10)

a- God delivers us from tribulations:

"I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (4)

The psalmist experienced a great deliverance from all his tribulations; for great were his fears: He killed the mighty Goliath, the hero of the same king before whom he is standing now, a helpless refugee. Remembering what he has done to their hero, the Philistines must have brought it to the attention of their king. Although everything looked dark before his mind and thought, yet the Lord delivered him from the hands of the king, who allowed him to set forth to a

stronghold, where he was joined by his family and friends. God delivers with few and plenty, from the jaws of the lion and from the sword of the king.

God allowed for David to go through a multitude of troubles, to make him pray to seek help; He even delays His response to make his need for Him greater, and to cry more fervently; He would then give him a proof of His response, and delivers him.

The prophet David, having experienced that the Lord in heaven is God of the oppressed and the suffering, who leans with His ears to listen to their hidden sighs; says: *“He looked down from the height of His sanctuary, from heaven the Lord viewed the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those appointed to death”* (Psalm 102: 19).

Driven out from his country, people, and throne (which he has not yet acquired), David here stands as a captive, and even as a prisoner; ... Yet he finds God, dwelling in heaven, closer to him than all.

b- God grants us the enlightenment:

“They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed” (5)

What is greater than the deliverance from tribulation, is the enjoyment of God's shining upon his soul amid her sufferings. If we look at the world with all its tribulations or joys, we would be confused and depressed; Whereas if we look at God, we would be radiant, and our faces would not be ashamed; according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 3: 18).

Amid the sufferings, we look to the Crucified, to partake of His cross, and to enjoy the glory of His resurrection inside us.

+ Even if You become enlightened; and if your conscience becomes pure, yet the tribulations will still endure; for a certain weakness will always stay, until *“Death is swallowed up in victory”* (1 Corinthians 15: 54). We have to be chastised in this world, and we have to endure some tribulations and temptations. Then, God will make everything pure, and deliver you from all tribulations. ... Seek Him alone!

+ Let us approach Him and be enlightened ... For He is the true Light who came to the world, who gives it to every man. Being the Light, He will never be ashamed; and will never allow for those who get enlightened by Him to be ashamed.

(St. Augustine)

a- God surrounds us with His angels:

“The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them” (7)

There are two views about the meaning of *“the angel of the Lord”*. According to many, it means a heavenly messenger sent to protect the righteous, and to fight against their enemies; While, according to others, it refers to the Lord Himself, who came down to earth as a Redeemer and a Savior (Genesis 48: 16; Exodus 23: 20, 23; 32: 34; Judges 13: 15-22; Malachi 3: 1).

Angels were sent for designate missions to the account of those who fear God, who inherit salvation (Hebrew 1: 6, 7). It is befitting of us to think about the ministry of angels in a sound and joyful way; as it was often referred to in the Holy Book (2 kings 6: 15-17; psalm 16: 11; Luke 16: 22). If our enemies are a multitude and strong; yet those heavenly messengers who support us are greater in number and in might.

+ *"I planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it"* (Mark 12: 1)t. . It is a sure thing that the Lord calls the human souls, His own vineyard; those souls whom He surrounded by the authority of His teachings, and guarded by His angels.

(St.

Basil)

In His love for us, God dwells in our midst, even inside us, and sets His angels to guard us against evil. He sent an angel to get the apostle Peter out of prison; and to strike Herod, His persecutor, who was eaten by worms and died (Acts 12).

+ Preparing my soul to get married to the King's Son, the Firstfruit of the whole creation, the angels accompanied, and served me, and presented to me the law as a wedding gift.

+ These are the angels, guarding the children who behold the face of God in heaven.

+ Seeing the King of the heavenly hosts walking on earth, the angels entered the way He trod upon, followed their Lord, and obeyed the will of Him who distributed them to guard His believers... Angels minister for the sake of your salvation; ... They say among

themselves: [If Christ has taken upon Himself a mortal body, how could we stand tied-handed? Come on, O angels and let us all come down from heaven]. That was why the angelic hosts were glorifying and praising God at the birth of Christ; ... Angels were everywhere!.

+ “If the angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear God, and delivers them” (Psalm 33: 8), It so seems that whenever a number of people gather together for the glory of Christ, each of them will have his own angel encamping around him, to guard and to guide him. Therefore, when the saints gather together, there will be two churches: a church of men, and another of angels.

(The scholar Origen)

+ Those to whom the text (Song 5: 7) refers as “*the watchmen who went about the city*”, are the spirits sent to minister to those who are to inherit salvation. It is good for the soul to be found by the angels who go about the (heavenly) city.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

b- To experience the sweetness of God:

“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good” (8)

This verse was quoted in Hebrew 6: 5; and 1 Peter 2: 3; to describe the daring in faith, and to exhort men to enter into the practical

experience. Tasting is not just a haphazard experience, but it implies presenting a proof by the living practical experience.

The psalmist calls the believers to “*taste and see*”. Seeing means reaping the crop of tasting, and enjoying it. For it is impossible for a blind man to call his friends to enjoy seeing the rainbow; nor for the deaf to exhort the others to listen to music.

+ In case you still not understand, you would become like king Achish *1 Samuel 2: 15); David will change his appearance, desert you, and go on his way,

(St. Augustine)

+ According to the psalmist, if man truly tastes the Lord, namely, if the Lamb of God is inside him, he will be filled with Him, to whom he thirsts and hungers; according to His promise: “*My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him*”

(John 14: 23)... I believe that the great Paul, who tasted the unutterable fruits of paradise, was filled with what he tasted, and, at the same time, perpetually hungered to have more.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

+ Now he says: “*Taste*”, for the love of God, although may refresh the soul, yet it would not satisfy its longing; regardless of the magnitude of faith and the level of longing; on account of that, it would increase the thirst more and more, once it is licked by the

lips. That is why the Lord says about Himself: “Those who eat of Me will hunger for more; and those who drink of Me will thirst for more”; because of His sweetness that provokes a strong appetite for Him, a kind of sweetness that the soul would never despise.

(Father Caesarius,
bishop of Arle)

+ Every goodness you possess is a taste of the Lord. Men would become perfect, once they perceive that they are not perfect.

(St.
Jerome)

+ For those who taste and see, through experience, that “*the Lord is good*”, this taste would become a wish to have more; Therefore he who perpetually stands before the Lord, will experience such a continuous motive to have more progress.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

The words of the psalmist: “*Taste and see that the Lord is good*” (8), is a call to experience the true love; For “*God is love*”, and whoever gains Him will forever live in the true eternal love; and whoever acquires love, would acquire God to abide in God, and God in him! ... Let us then approach to the Lord; Let us recognize Him; let us experience and see Him!

c- God is a refuge for those who seek Him:

The young lions, though naturally strong, may get hungry; Whereas, for the men of God, who love Him, and fear Him, as their Father, lest they may probably wound His feeling of compassionate fatherhood by their sins, *“there is no want”*.

“Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The rich (the young lions) lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing” (9, 10)

+ The psalm says: *“Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints”*. If the saints who love the Lord fear Him; How could the Holy Book say: *“Perfect love casts out fear”* (1 John 4: 18)?!

St. John reveals to us two kinds of fear: a primitive kind, and a perfect one. The former is found in the beginners, called by some:

“the fear of slaves”; and the later is that of those perfect in holiness, who have reached the level of true love.

One seeks God for fear of chastisement, which is, as we said, the starting point; ... While another longs for God for the sake of His love for Him personally; he loves him, and knows what would bring Him pleasure. Such a man, tastes the sweetness of the presence with God, and fears to fall out of His favor; he fears lest he would be deprived of the presence of God.

Man would not reach the perfect fear, unless he has the primitive kind of fear; For, according to the Holy Book: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”* (Psalm 111: 10).

(Father

Dorotheos)

+ The Holy Book mentions three kinds of possessions or riches: What is good, what is bad, and what is neither good nor bad ...

About the bad possessions it is written: "*The young lions lack and suffer hunger*" (Psalm 34: 10); and, "*Woe to you, who*

are rich, for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6: 24). Forsaking such riches would be an exaltation of perfection; for

according to the Lord: (about those who do not have such kind of riches): "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom*

of heaven" (Matthew 5: 3); And it also came in the psalm: "*This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him*" (Psalm 34: 6); and,

"Let the poor and the needy praise Your name" (Psalm 74: 21)

The good riches is that possessed by him who acquires the virtues.

(Father

Pavnotius)

3- "**COME, YOU CHILDREN, LISTEN TO ME**" (11 – 14)

King David has been known for loving his people; talking to them as his own children. He was a statesman, a man of war, a psalmist, and a musician; Yet he did not care to teach his people how to use the sword or spear; how to play the harp, nor how to run the policy of the state; but cared to teach them how to fear the Lord, being better than all the arts and knowledge; and even greater than offering sacrifices.

"Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (11)

As David's heart and mouth exult for the sake of the amazing salvation of the Lord, he longs for his people to learn the fear of the Lord, to experience the sweetness of salvation. Here, according to the psalmist, the fear of the lord needs teaching and training. This verse was used by St. John Chrysostom to show that godliness is an art, which needs an instructor.

+ Acquiring the fear of the Lord needs teaching ... Do not you see that virtue needs to be taught? (See Isaiah 1: 16, 17).

(St. John
Chrysostom)

According to St. Clement of Alexandria, the Speaker here (verse 11) is the Son of David, the Savior Himself, who calls His believers to listen to Him, being "the Teacher", "The Grantor of knowledge", and "The Giver of perfection".

+ Is He not the heavenly Savior, Himself, who demands from the Gnostic (the knowledgeable believer) to become perfect; saying, "*Come, you children, listen to Me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord?*". The Lord does not intend for him to be taught by angels, but by Him; to be qualified to enjoy the divine protection through obedience.

(St. Clement of
Alexandria)

Although God has delivered the law through the hand of angels (Acts 7: 53); and talked to us through His prophets, apostles, and priests, Yet we actually receive the teaching from Him personally, being the Worker, in and by, us (Matthew 23: 9).

The psalmist asks:

“Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good?” (12)

St. Augustine says: [Wouldn't everyone of you answer, saying: “I am”? ... Is there among you anyone who does not desire life, or who does not love to acquire many days?... Do you desire good days, or evil nights? ... Let the Sun of righteousness shine in you, for then, your life would be days with no nights; and the darkness of sin would find no place in you.

He who unite with our Lord Jesus Christ will know no death, nor darkness will enter into his heart, or into his inner man; will experience life, and live a shining day, until the coming of the great day of light of the Lord.

The believer, however, will not negatively stand, but will have his own role, he will work by the Lord Christ dwelling in him. What will be his role?

a- The negative aspect:

“Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil” (13, 14)

Receiving the Word of God in yourself, He will keep you tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile; for there is no fellowship between the Greater Good and the evil, and between the truth and the guile. Our Christ is the Keeper of our mouth, and the stronghold of our lips; By Him, our words are sanctified, and no evil word will come out of our mouth.

+ God has not given us the tongue to utter evil, nor to become adversaries to one other; but to sing praises to God; and in particular,
that “*no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, and that it may impart grace to the hearers*” (Ephesians 4: 29).

He who utters evil will first bring shame upon himself, then upon him with whom he talks.

(St. John
Chrysostom)

+ Calm yourself down first; and if you cannot, set a guard over your tongue (See Psalm 141: 3).

(St.
Ambrose)

+ Contemplate in how the source of evil is cut off through the fear of God: “*Keep your tongue from evil*”; namely, do not harm your neighbor’s feelings by talking evil against him; and do not harass the others; “*keep your lips from speaking guile*”; namely, do not utter what would deceive your neighbor. Then he adds: “*Depart from evil*”; He first speaks about specific sins, like slander and guile, then goes on to talk in a general way about all evils.

(Father
Dorotheos)

+ By these words he refers to knowledge, through keeping away from evil, and doing good; teaching us that perfection is by the word

and action together.

(St. Clement of
Alexandria)

b- The positive aspect:

“and do good” (14)

He who acquires the Lord Christ, as a Teacher, and the Grantor of life and the good days, would not stop at departing from evil, but is committed to practice the good; for *“To him who knows to do good, and does not do it, to him it is sin”* (James 4: 17).

+ It is not enough for you to give your back to evil, but you should, as well, do good. To refrain from baring someone naked, you would be departing from evil; but by clothing the naked, and giving hospitality to the stranger in your house, you would be a good doer.

(St.
Augustine)

c- Seeking peace:

“Seek peace and pursue it” (14)

The psalmist does not stop at the positive aspect, but demands the strife to seek peace, namely, to seek the Lord Christ, and to pursue Him.

+ *“Seek peace and pursue it”* ... Our Lord Christ, being our peace, has preceded all of us, by resurrecting and ascending to

heaven... When you are risen as well, the mortal in you will be changed, and there, you will enjoy the true and perfect peace.

+ Here, in this world, it is impossible to avoid controversies between brethren, and even between saints; as it did happen between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15: 39); yet it is not the kind of controversy which distorts harmony, nor kills love; for you may come even against yourselves, but you would never hate yourselves.

(St.
Augustine)

5- THE DIVINE DELIVERANCE: (15 – 22)

If God as a heavenly Father, calls His children to listen to Him, and to learn His fear; to depart from evil, to seek good; to diligently seek peace, namely to enjoy the Lord Christ Himself, our peace; ... God, on His part, gives a personal care to the righteous who fear Him, particularly in the time of tribulation; With His eyes He looks on them, as though He is only preoccupied with them; He inclines His ears to the cry-outs of their hearts; as though He forgot all about the songs of praise and glorification, uttered by the heavenly creatures, to listen to those who love Him amid their affliction; and to opposes their wicked adversaries; while keeping their bones, and redeeming their souls.

a- *“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous”*
(15)

St. John Chrysostom likens God to a nanny or a mother who trains her toddler to walk; holds his hands, then releases them for a while, to let him fall and cry in admonition; but her eyes will always concentrate on him, and her ears will respond to his cry. Releasing his hands for a while is for the sake of his growth and self-dependence.... So are we, in need of the compassionate hands of God, and of Him releasing our hands for a while to

make us cry to Him... It would be enough for us to see Him look on us with His loving eyes, and listen to the cries of our hearts with His compassionate ears.

- + The eyes of God undoubtedly keep looking on us, as long as our life is worthy of this grace; reading in the psalm that "*the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous*".

(St. Basil the Great)

- b-** "And His ears are open to their cries"
(15)

- + The prayer of the humble reaches from his mouth directly to God's ears.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

- + Having been renewed by baptism, let us truly abide in this new life, Let us resume the reverence of our souls, and be sanctified; For "*the eyes of God are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil*"

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

- c-** "*The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth*" (16)

The good Lord looks by His eyes on the righteous, and inclines His ears to their supplications, proclaiming His personal care for them, and His longing to respond to them.... Such looks and listening, give them hope and life. Whereas the evildoers are

opposed by the Lord's face, they see His eyes as flames of fire, that cut off their remembrance from the earth. In other words, although the righteous may suffer, yet they enjoy the Lord's compassionate looks, and His care here on earth, as well as there in heaven. The evildoers, on the other hand, will lose their remembrance here, and will be denied the heavenly glories. The names of the wicked, like Cain, king Saul, and Diocletian were cut off; Yes, we may still read about the stories of their evil doings, but with their abhorrent smell, no one reveres their remembrance, nor fears their tyranny; While millions remember the righteous, like Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, David, Hannah, St. Mary, the apostle Paul, etc.... anticipating to see them soon in the glory, and to join their fellowship.

d- Responding to the cries of the righteous:

Probably, the greatest enjoyment for the righteous, amid their tribulation, is their perception of the Lord's response to their cries; their feeling that they are the subject of His care; that He will save them from all their spiritual, mental, and physical afflictions; that He is aware of all their needs and longings; will grant them the grace of salvation, and will crown their life with a continuous conquest.... Yes, He may allow for them to pass through times of trouble, but He will never close His ears to the voice of their serious, humble prayers; He rejoices in their trusting voice; and they rejoice in His great care for them. He comes very close to them, proclaims His dwelling in them, to save their souls:

"The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (17, 18)

+ *"The Lord is near..."*; The Lord responds to us even before we call Him. His ears are open, and He takes our prayers very seriously.

- + God is High up; and it is befitting of the Christian to be humble, if he wishes for the High up God to be near to him; On his part, he has to be humble, and of a contrite spirit.... If you are humble, He will come down to you.

(St.

Augustine)

- + The apostle Paul says: "*I know how to be abased*" (Philippians 4: 12). Humility with ignorance is not worthy of commendation, but humility bearing meekness, and self-recognition of weakness, is worthy of commendation. Some humility is founded upon fear, upon lack of experience, or upon ignorance; Hence it is written: "*The Lord saves as such as have a contrite spirit*" (18).

(St.

Ambrose)

By a broken heart, and humility with knowledge, we will enjoy the Lord's company, His closeness to our hearts, and even His dwelling in them;
and we will enjoy salvation as well.... Now, **What does salvation mean?**

Our hearts may feel contrition for a diversity of reasons, of which:

- * My perception that my sin has broken the commandment of the Lord, the Grantor of life, and has opposed the work of the fiery Holy Spirit in me.
- * The sins and ignorance of my brethren also bring sorrow to my soul; as "*Who is weak, and I am not weak; Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?*" (2 Corinthians 11: 29).
- * The Lord's chastisements on me and on my brethren will also break my depths! ...

Such a contrite, set upon a spiritual knowledge, and faith in God, will heal those contrite in heart ; and will make God intervene to forgive my sins;

to work for the edification of the congregation; and to bring me forth to the glory of His resurrection. ...

Salvation for me, therefore, is to experience the new resurrected life, set in my depths, as well as in those of my brethren!

The psalmist presents to us divine promises to intervene for the salvation of the children of God, saying:

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (19)

+ Does the psalmist say: ‘If the Christians become righteous, and listen to my words, they will not suffer tribulations?’ ... No, that is not his promise; but actually, the wicked may suffer less tribulations; while the righteous may suffer more of them. But the former, passing through less tribulations, or no tribulation at all, will reach an everlasting tribulation, from which they will have no deliverance; While the righteous will come to enjoy the everlasting peace after their long suffering.

(St.

Augustine)

God may give His saints a multitude of sorrows, on account of that they are of much benefit to their salvation, and to their everlasting glory; confirming to them the salvation of their souls. ... Yes indeed! He may sometimes deliver them from physical troubles, like what He did with the three young men in the furnace of fire, and with Daniel in the lions’ den; But He allowed for Steven to be stoned to death, during which the saintly martyr was exultant in spirit, having seen the heavens open, and the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of God (see Acts 7: 56).

St. Augustine presents to us a living example of the longing of true believers to enter into tribulations and sufferings for the sake of the Lord, when he wrote to the Romans, strongly forbidding them from striving to save him from martyrdom, saying: [Let fire, crucifixion, confronting hungry wild beasts, tearing of flesh, and breaking of bones; ...let all that come on me, if they make me reach my Lord Jesus Christ. ... He, who is close to the sword is close to God; and he, who is with the voracious beasts is with God; if that occur in the name of Jesus Christ, of whose passion, I can endure anything to partake].

“He guards all his bones, not one of them is broken” (20)

This verse literally applies to the Lord Christ, as is clear in what came in the New Testament (see John 19: 31-37); And symbolically applies to the prophet David and to all the believers who fear the Lord, as not a single bone (of their living faith) is broken; ... God’s exalted care and His compassion on them is amazing; *“The very hairs of your head are all numbered”* (Luke 12: 7), none will fall without His permission. ... Yes, He may allow for His martyrs to have their material bones broken, but for a certain time, then they will be risen in everlasting glory; but the bones (of their souls, namely, of their faith), no one could break.

+ It is not befitting, brethren, to take these words (20) in a literal sense; for the bones of the righteous refer to the foundation of his faith; namely, to his perseverance, and endurance of tribulations.

(St.
Augustine)

That is regarding the righteous who fear the Lord; But as far as the wicked are concerned, having corrupted their life on earth, even their death will be evil; for they will go down into an everlasting bitterness, and into an utter and ultimate deprivation of the presence of God, the Grantor of graces.

“Evil brings death to the wicked, and those who hate the righteous shall be condemned” (21)

The Lord Christ presents to us the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16: 19-31), to compare between the death of the righteous and that of the wicked; He says: *“So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torment in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said: ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame”.*

- + Man’s death could be either good or evil, according to the circumstances of his soul, and not according to how his dead body is honored or insulted by men.

(St. Augustine)

- + He does not say that violent death (like in an accident) is evil; but what he means to say, is that the death of the wicked is evil.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + How bitter are the worms, and how cruel is the sorrowful darkness, earned by the wicked after their death.

(Pope St.

Athanasius the apostolic)

The psalmist ends the epistle by a spirit of exultation, glorifying God, the Savior of those who fear Him, saying:

“The Lord redeems the soul of His servants; and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned” (22_

He delivers us from every bitterness, and particularly, that of the sin, destructive to the soul.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 34

THANKSGIVING FOR THE SAKE OF DELIVERANCE

- + My soul will keep praising You;
You allow for me to go through tribulation, that I may recognize the truth of my weakness;
That I may recognize You much the more;
I see You look on me, and incline Your ear to listen to my prayer;
As though there are no one but me in existence;
You care for me, and listen to the sighs of my heart, precious to You;
You send Your angels to keep me and to deliver me;
While You approach my soul, and enter into her as Her Groom.

+ Amid tribulation, experiencing the sweetness of Your presence, I cry:
"Taste and see that the Lord is good"

+ You talk to me as a Father and a Teacher;
You grant me Your fear, the grantor of life, to make me see good days;
Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.
By You, I hate evil, and I love good;
I seek You, O Peace of my soul, and I follow Your lead, O my beloved.

+ Accompany me until the end;
Let my death be with You, and together with Your righteous;
Let me not die the death of the wicked.

+ Be my refuge;
Increase my faith;
For You alone is my hope.



PSALM 35

A CRY-OUT SEEKING HELP

Whether this psalm was written as an annex to psalm 34 or not, it is as well that it came directly after it; not only for the sake of the likeness of texts, and the presence of analogies between them, (particularly concerning the talk about the angel of the Lord, which is not found anywhere else in the book of psalms except here in psalm 34: 7 and psalm 35: 5, 6), but the reason is also in talking about the kind of darkness that scattered in the last psalm.

Here, we also see that the salvation celebrated in the last psalm, is not soon realized, nor without suffering; but the believer is exposed to sufferings that may take a long time according to the will of God. The prophet David, however, never doubted that the day of deliverance is definitely coming. With every cry-out coming out of his heart, seeking help, his eyes anticipate the certain moment of deliverance; Hence he ends each of the three divisions of this psalm with hope. ... This psalm is considered as a personal lamentation.

In this psalm, the prophet David supplicates the Just divine Judge against his enemies who hate him and persisted on persecuting him; supposed to be king Saul and his followers (1 Samuel 24: 9-15). According to the Syrian version, this psalm was written on the occasion of the attack of the Edomites; while according to the Arabic version, it is a prophecy concerning the divine incarnation; and the troubles confronted by the prophet Jeremiah from the people.

The whole psalm is a strong supplication to the Just God, to condemn his enemies, those who persecute his people who fear the Lord. His cries do not imply that the prophet David bore a personal hatred against his oppressors, but, as we already said, they represent a prophecy concerning what will dwell upon those who persist on oppressing God with no repentance; They also represent a cry against the man of sin

(the anti-Christ), the violent and vicious oppressor of the church of God, during the days of the great tribulation; And they represent, as well, the cries of the martyrs, and the righteous who departed from this world (Revelation 6: 10).

As the prophet David, in many circumstances was a symbol of the Lord Christ; Our Lord quoted a part of verse 19, and applied it to Himself (John 15: 25); And this psalm could be counted as a statement by the Greatest Intercessor who was hated without a cause. According to St. Augustine: [The Talker here, without doubt, is the Lord Christ Himself, who was subjected to tribulation, once being the Head; and other times in His body – the church. Nevertheless, He grants all His members, the eternal life through sufferings; a promise that became the object of longing of every man.

Its general frame:

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|---------|
| 1- | A supplication to the Righteous God | 1 - 10 |
| 2- | A description of the sufferings | 11 - 16 |
| 3- | The intervention of God | 17 – 28 |

1- A SUPPLICATION TO THE RIGHTEOUS GOD: (1 – 10)

“Plead my cause, O Lord, with those who strive with me; Fight against those who fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help. Also draw out the spear, and stop those who pursue me. Say to my soul, ‘I am your salvation’” (1 – 3)

The military terms mentioned here bear symbolic concepts. The spiritual war is running now, and we are in urgent need of help from God. And as the enemy has sought David’s soul, he is also chases us to destroy our whole being, our bodies and souls, to corrupt our minds and hearts, and to distort our energies and talents.

The psalmist pleads his case before God, the Just Judge, to defend and avenge him. The psalm as a whole is a supplication coming from a heart that has a daring with God, and from a pure conscience, yet bitter because of what he suffers of persecution; ... It is indeed tough to endure persecution and denial. but with the holy life in Christ Jesus, and with prayer by a contrite spirit, God will stand by our side, and work to our account.

When someone is wronged by another, he pleads his case with the ruler of the land; the way the apostle Paul did when he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25: 11). And in case he is not given justice, he resorts to the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Supreme Judge of the whole universe. When king Saul, his judges, and leaders stood against the prophet David, he resorted to God, crying: "*Plead my case, O Lord, with those who strive with me*".... And we, encountering oppression and tribulation, and perceiving that it comes, not from our brethren, but from the devil who finds pleasure in controversies, dissensions, and provocation of the spirit of oppression; we lift our hearts up to God, who alone can help us against our evil enemy. Our complaint is not against men, for, according to the apostle Paul: "*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Ephesians 6: 12). "*The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*" (1 John 5: 19);... It is a war against the devil and his evil hosts.

Seeking from God, not only being a Judge, but a leader of war, as though He bear His weapon to lead the battle by Himself; we say to Him: "*Fight against those who fight against me*".

+ "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8: 31)

How marvelous to see the Lord put on a shield to fight to our account!

But, what is his shield? What are His weapons? ... The Holy Book calls the soul of the righteous "*the sword of God*", "*the throne of God*". and "*the throne of wisdom*". The Lord, who makes our souls according to His goals; and has them in His hands; Let Him use them according to His will.

We call Him to fight by Himself, and by His divine weapons. He allows for the battle; precedes us, provides us with His weapons, gives us the strength to strive, let us enjoy conquest, and gives us the crown, and be crowned in us.

Telling us about the unseen spiritual weapons, capable by Christ Jesus to destroy the unseen enemy, the apostle Paul mentions: "*the shield of faith*", "*the helmet of salvation*", and, "*the sword of the Spirit*", which is "*the Word of God*" (Ephesians 6: 16, 17). The apostle sees in faith, in holding fast to the cross (salvation), and in getting attached to the Word and promises of God, "*the spiritual weapons*" of the believer.

+ Lord, You know the alertness of my enemies;
My Creator, You are aware of the weakness of my nature;
In Your hands I commend my spirit;;
So give me a shelter under the wings of Your goodness,
Lest I may sleep to death;

Give my eyes the light
Through Your great sayings;
For You alone are the good One, and the lover of mankind.

(prayer of the veil – Agpeya – first piece)

- + In our souls, there should be zeal against the demons.
- + The devil is allowed to fight against the saints, to test the extent and abidance of their love for God..

(Mar. Isaac the Syrian)

- + No one is stronger than him who enjoys the heavenly help; And no one is weaker than him who is deprived of it.
- + We should have no fear. For, in order to overcome the devil, we should know that our own strength will be of no benefit to us; and that everything is a grace from God.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Confirming that the spiritual weapons, in essence, are nothing but the enjoyment of God, the Savior Himself, and the Grantor of conquest; the psalmist sings: “*Say to my soul, ‘I am your salvation’*” (3). What would be my profit, if the devil is destroyed, together with all his works; if I have no portion in the bosom of the Father; enjoy fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ, and bear His Spirit in me?! ... My salvation is the Lord, who came down to our earth, presented Himself to me, to unite with Him, and to enjoy His life in me! ... Entering into battle with the enemy; it is not that I love war in itself, nor that I seek a crown, if the Lord Himself is not my crown!

There is a great difference between reading a book, listening to a sermon, or entering into a debate about salvation, and the configuration of the Savior Himself in me, to proclaim to me, personally: "*I am your salvation*"; and to present to me salvation through dwelling in me!

Moving from supplicating to God for the sake of deliverance (1 – 3) to proclaim what would dwell upon the persecutors and oppressors, of curses (4 – 6); the psalmist says:

"Let those be put to shame, and brought to dishonor, who seek after my life; Let those be turned back, and brought to confusion who plot my hurt" (4, 5)

They sought the soul of the Lord Christ, not to enjoy it, but to destroy it; But the Lord did not deny it to them, but said to them: "*Whom are you seeking?*" (John 18: 7); and instantly, the prophecy was realized, when "*they drew back and fell to the ground*" (John 18: 6). He delivered Himself into their hands; And when St. Peter asked Him to escape from His oppressors, saying: "*Far from it for You, Lord*", He answered him, saying: "*Get behind Me, Satan!*" (Matthew 16: 22, 23).

- + Having delivered Jesus into Pilate's hand, they brought perdition upon themselves; for the Roman enemy destroyed them by the sword, and burned their land by fire, even the Holy temple, most revered by them.

(Pope Cyril of Alexandria)

- + "*Let these be put to shame, and brought to dishonor, who seek after my life*" (4). He did not utter curses against those who caused him material losses, robbed his land, or plotted to have him physically killed; but cried out against those who sought to sojourn his soul from God. ... Yet, as the human soul would never be

sojourned from God, except if the mind is enslaved by lusts, he prayed, therefore, seeking the help of God to conquer his enemies; namely, the lusts.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

According to some fathers, the psalmist cries, not against outer enemies, but against inner ones; against the sins, and lusts, corruptive to his relationship with God, and destructive of His eternal life.

“Let them be like chaff before the wind; and let the angel of the Lord chase them” (5)

By “*the chaff*”, the psalmist imagines the Lord Christ as a farmer winnows the crop, to separate the wheat from the chaff and dust, by the action of the wind. By His Holy Spirit, the Lord Christ separates the sins and covetousness, and blows them out of the heart. Sins could not endure before the Holy Spirit of God, who dwells in our hearts – the temple of God; and grants us the righteousness of Christ working in us, if we respond to His work.

According to the Hebrew text, by the word “chaff”, the psalmist exposes the enemy, however violent and voracious, and even “if sin is very sinful”; but before the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, our enemy the devil would become like chaff before the wind, or like particles of dust, powerless and helpless.

I wish we do not fear the devil, nor the sin; for the Holy Spirit in us, grants us strength, turns our life from dust to heaven! And the Lord sends His angels to overcome the evil one together with his works.

In the last psalm the psalmist talks to us about the angel of the Lord, dwelling around those who fear Him, to save them. Here, in this psalm, the angel of the Lord appears to oppress those who oppress the godly men ... He brings joy to the hearts of the good, and brings the enemies who persist on not repenting to perdition. When king Hezekiah prayed, God sent an angel, who, for his sake, stroke the Assyrian army, and killed in one night 185, 000 men, like chaff before the wind.

“Let their way be dark and slippery, and let the angel of the Lord pursue them” (6)

Persecuting the children of God, who liken His angels, God sends His angel to persecute them. In their pride they rejected the Lord Christ, the meek and humble in Spirit, the Sun of Righteousness, and their way became dark and slippery. ... He who rejects Christ as his Way, the devil will become his way;... Instead of the Light, he chose the darkness.

Weeping for the sake of his people who, in their pride, chose the darkness as their way; the prophet Jeremiah says: *“Give glory to the Lord your God, before He causes darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains; and while you are looking for light, He turns it into the shadow of death, and makes it dense darkness. But if you will not hear it, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; My eyes will weep bitterly, and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock has been taken captive” (Jeremiah 13: 16, 17).*

Having diverted to the way of darkness, and the angel of the Lord came to persecute them, it was befitting of them to return to the Lord, and seek Him as Light to them; But, instead of repentance, they set snares in the darkness to catch the souls of the righteous; eventually to fall into

them themselves. That was the long experience of the prophet David with king Saul, on whose heart the kingdom of hatred had authority against David; that he dedicated the rest of his life, his possibilities, and those of his counselors, to destroy and kill David; ... Eventually to find himself fall into the pit; while David increased in glory and splendor before God and men.... The psalmist says:

“For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit, which they have dug without a cause for my life. Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly, and let his net he has hidden catch himself; into that very destruction let him fall. And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord; it shall rejoice in His salvation” (7-9)

The wicked, with their blindness and foolishness, who set their nets for the righteous, on a dark way without a cause; soon forget all about them, to pass through, and eventually fall in them, because of the blindness of their insight.

The wicked sow thistles in the darkness to persecute the righteous; to have them pierce their own bodies; ... They set nets to fall, themselves into them; ... They seek the destruction of others, to have destruction dwell upon their heads through their works; according to the words of Solomon the Sage: *“Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him”* (Proverb 26: 27). On the same cross the wicked Haman prepared to crucify Mordecai on it, he himself was crucified; and the cross set by the devil to destroy the kingdom of the Lord Christ, destroyed his own kingdom.

While the wicked are preoccupied with setting nets and snares, and acquire the work of their hands snares and bitterness; the righteous, on the other hand, being preoccupied with God, who listens to their prayers, and cares for their salvation; acquire Him as the secret of their true joy; and rejoice in the Lord and His salvation.... Here we notice that

the soul of the righteous is not preoccupied with deliverance from the tribulation itself, as much as with the Lord Himself who transfigures amid the tribulations, giving salvation.

- + The commandment, general for them all, saying: *“Rejoice in the Lord, O righteous”* (Psalm 9: 14; 35: 9; 33: 1); exhorts them to gather together to sing this psalm concerning feasts: *“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord, let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation”* (Psalm 95: 1); and not to rejoice in ourselves.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

“All my bones shall say, ‘Lord, who is like You?’, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him; Yes, the poor and the needy from him who plunders him” (10)

Rejoicing in seeing the Savior, the inner depths of the soul of the psalmist, namely, the skeleton of his inner being (his bones) cry out, saying: *“Lord, who is like You?”*; quoting what the prophet Moses previously said: *“Who is like You, O Lord among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness; fearful in praises, doing wonders?”* (Exodus 15: 11). The psalmist, with the eyes of prophecy, probably seeing the Lord Christ, his Savior from the real enemies, hanged on the cross for his sake, cried out, saying: *“Lord, who is like You?”*... You delivered me, the poor, from the strong enemy who plotted to devour me! ... *“Who is like You?”* in Your love, dying for my sake? ... *“Who is like You?”* in might, granting me the strength of Your resurrection? ... *“Who is like You?”*, glorious in holiness, sanctifying me by Your Holy Spirit?

Preoccupied with God’s love, care, compassion, might, etc., the psalmist says: *Lord, who is like You?”*, with the perception that the Savior intends to grant him Himself, to make him bear His might, to live a conqueror of his strong enemy, and to enjoy the fellowship of His glories.

That is the true work of the church: ... To praise her Savior, saying: “*Lord, who is like You?*”, He who entered the strong man’s house (the devil’s), plundered his goods (the believers’ souls), after binding him to the cross (See Mathew 12: 29); disarmed him, and made a public spectacle of him, triumphing over him (Colossians 2: 15); ... To praise her Head, her strength, glory, righteousness, holiness, and everlasting inheritance; ... To praise Him, who became poor to encounter her in her dwelling place, granting her His riches; To praise Him, who came down to her earth, to liberate her, and to bring her forth up to the bosom of His heavenly Father.

In the name of the whole church, singing amid his tribulation, and trusting in the salvation of the Lord, the psalmist says: “*Lord, Who is like You?*”. In a sermon about “the work of grace”, Mar Isaac the Syrian says: [If man is worthy to receive the strength of the Lord in himself, his thoughts become swallowed in an awesome way, his senses become muted, and his tongue becomes unable to talk; Yet his bones, in their silence, glorify God].

2- A DESCRIPTION OF THE SUFFERINGS:

In a concise way, the psalmist describes his sufferings in the following way:

a- Unjustly accused:

“Fierce witnesses rise up; they ask me things that I do not know” (11)

Being the prince of the kingdom of darkness, the devil provokes the witnesses of the darkness, to falsely testify against the Lord Christ, Himself, and against His church, through the blindness of their hearts, and the darkness of their souls.

Unjustly accusing David, of national treason, rebellion, and partaking of idol worship; king Saul provoked the rulers and the whole people against the man of God (1 Samuel

24: 17). Our Christ, likewise, was accused of being "*Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons*" (Luke 11: 15); an evildoer, a provoker of mutiny, and refraining to pay taxes to Caesar; all of which he knew nothing about, and never did.

He who attaches himself to Christ, will not be disturbed if unjustly accused; as in that he would have a fellowship with Him who says: "*If they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?*" (Luke 23: 31)

b- They pay His love back with hatred:

"They reward me evil for good, to the sorrow of my soul" (12)

King Saul, himself, admitted it, when raising his voice crying, he said to David: "*You are more gracious than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil*" (1 Samuel 23: 17)

The Lord Christ presented His love to mankind, to be rewarded with hatred; ... He came to heal their wounds, to have His hands and feet nailed, and His side pierced; ... He granted them His life; to be brought forth to death; ... He intended to honor them; and they sought to crucify Him.

Revealing his amazing love, even to his oppressors, with a spiritual evangelic thought, the psalmist says:

"But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting, and my prayer would return to my own heart" (13)

That was what the psalmist has practically done; hearing that king Saul and his son Absalom were killed, he wept with bitterness.

While under the law, the prophet David knew how to pass forth to the evangelic thought; to reward the evil of the wicked with the true inner love. Seeing his enemy sick, he wore sackcloth for his sake, humbled himself before God, and prayed for him. ... Putting on sackcloth were not done for minor issues, but in circumstances of losing a son, a great man, or in case of a bitter national disaster. .

What does he mean by saying: “*My prayer would return to my own heart*”?

-- According to some, it means continuous prayer; as though his supplication, coming from the heart, goes up, then return back to him, to go up again, and so on without ceasing.

-- According to others, it means that his prayer returns back to his heart and depths; not benefiting those who despised it.

-- It may refer here to the eastern custom, when praying fervently and with sorrow, to bow the head toward the chests; implying herewith, that the prayer would return to where it came from.

-- Being sure of the truth of his heartily wishes for them, the prophet David intends to say that, iWhether he sought evil or good for them, let it return to him either way.

c- They paid his friendship back with persecution:

The psalmist saw his sick enemy as a friend and a brother, for whose sake he humbled himself before God, fasted, and prayed, not just in his secret place, but publicly proclaimed it with the spirit of humility, in his dealings with the enemy, saying:

“I paced about as though he were my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns for his mother” (14)

My enemies have no more excuse in oppressing me, for I did my best to please them. As a member of the congregation. I count myself a friend, and a brother of all, partaking of their feelings, particularly amid their sickness and sufferings. They nevertheless persisted on persecuting me!

“But in my adversity they rejoiced and gathered together; attackers gathered against me, and I did not know it; they tore at me and did not cease; with ungodly mockers at feasts, they gnashed at me with their teeth” (15, 16)

A great difference between the attitude of David and that of his enemies:

a- While David partook of their sufferings in his depths, worship, and behavior, they gathered together, rejoicing in their plots against him.

b- While, for their sake, he humbled himself before God and before them, to appease them, they prepared whips to strike him, and he did not know it.

c- While counting them as his friends, brethren, and fellow members of the congregation; they, like vicious beasts, gathered together, as though around a fold of sheep, gnashing their teeth to devour one of the lambs.

What the psalmist proclaimed was realized as a prophecy in the Person of the Lord Christ, He *“who came to His own, and His own did not receive Him”* (John 1: 11); they tore at Him and did not cease; tempted Him, ridiculed Him, and gnashed at Him with their teeth to devour Him.

According to St. Augustine: [What dwelt upon the Head, also dwelt upon the body. What happened to our Lord Jesus on the cross, happen to the members of His body through the contemporary persecution (probably that provoked by the ‘Donatists’) ... who, when they encounter a Christian, used to slander and ridicule him, call him idiot, crazy,

coward, and with no experience in life; ... Yet, let them say and do whatever they wish, for Christ has glorified His martyrs, and sealed their foreheads with the sign of His cross].

4- THE INTERVENTION OF GOD: (17 – 28)

After describing what he goes through of sufferings and persecution, despite having a heart wide with love for His adversaries, the psalmist proclaimed the intervention of God in his life, and in chastising the wicked who persist on their evil ways:

a- An enjoyment of a personal salvation:

“Lord, how long will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages; my precious life from the lions” (17)

Amid his tribulation, feeling lonely, and that no father, mother, or friend, can partake of his sufferings, man feels a great need for the intervention of God Himself, to rescue his soul from the ravages of the wicked.

Saying “*Rescue me*”, the psalmist, through the eye of prophecy, refers to the supplication of the Lord Christ, saying: “*O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was*” (John 17: 5). For what the Lord Christ, has got by His resurrection and His ascension, are a payback for what He has done, of emptying Himself for our sake, to bear our reproach and shame, presenting His glory to us; and of bringing His precious soul down to Hades, then came back to His body, as a young lion, to set strong young lions, out of our souls.

b- An enjoyment of collective salvation:

“I will give You thanks in the great congregation; I will praise You among many people” (18)

God rescued the psalmist's soul, who fulfills his vow, to praise God and to give Him thanks among the congregation, for the sake of the blessings of salvation; he gets as personal gifts, that touch the congregation as a whole; and of what the congregation enjoy, that he tastes as personal gifts. There is no separation between the believer's personal life, and his life as a member of the congregation (the church).

What is *"the great congregation"* (18), praising God, but the church of the new covenant, that embraces many peoples and nations, who testify to the salvation work of God, and unceasingly praise Him! ... A church, strong with her Christ, honored in Him, and partakes of the angels' praises for Him.

c- The rejoice of the wicked will come to an end:

It is as though the wicked have dedicated their whole time and energies to ridicule and scoff the believers, for no profit for themselves, and without any cause or reason, except for their love of evil and hatred, for their own sake.

"Let them not rejoice over me, who are wrongfully my enemies; nor let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause. For they do not speak peace, but they devise deceitful matters against those who are quiet in the land.

They also opened their mouth wide against me, and said, 'Aha, aha'! Our eyes have seen" (19 – 21)

The wicked have dedicated their hearts for hatred; their eyes for winking in ridicule; their lips for uttering deceitful words, sweetened with false peace; their minds with craftiness and anger; and all their members and energies for doing evil... Yet, God, the Creator of the body and the soul, will turn all their works against His children, hidden and manifest, to no avail.

Having become a fugitive, David's enemies rejoiced, and publicly ridiculed him, saying: "*Aha, aha, Our eyes have seen*"; as an expression of rejoice over their conquest on others, and humiliating them.

Those who crucified the Lord Christ, ridiculed Him, saying: "*Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You!*" (Matthew 26: 68); and, "*You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross*" (Matthew 27: 40); and, "*He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him*" (Matthew 27: 42).

d- "Wake up, O Lord"

By the resurrection of Christ, the Conqueror of death, the rejoice of His enemies comes to an end; as though He wakes up among those falling asleep.

"This You have seen, O Lord; Do not keep silence, O Lord, do not be far from me. Stir up Yourself, and awake to my vindication, to my cause, my God and my Lord. Vindicate me, O Lord my God, according to Your righteousness; and let them not rejoice over me. Let them not say in their hearts, 'Ah! so we would have it'. Let them not say, 'We have swallowed him up'. Let them be ashamed, and brought to mutual confusion, who rejoice at my hurt; Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor; who magnify themselves against me. Let them shout for joy and be glad, who favor my righteous cause, and let them say continually, 'Let the Lord be magnified, who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant. And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness, and of Your praise all the day long'" (22 – 28)

These verses reveal the following fruits of the work of the cross and the resurrection in the believer's life:

- a- While the wicked assumed that the Crucified became utterly mute by His death and burial; the psalmist, on the other hand recognized Him as the Word of God who would never become mute, but continually works in His people's life: "*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working*" (John 5: 17).

Crying out to Him: "*O Lord, Do not keep silent*", we ask Him to proclaim His resurrection in our life; to say a Word, and we are risen, and would not remain any longer in the tomb of lusts and sins.

- b- The wicked assumed that by the burial of Christ, He was separated from His people and disciples; not perceiving that, while in the grave, His soul set forth to carry the souls of those who have fallen asleep on the hope, to bring them forth as living spoils into His paradise. His resurrection proved that He will never forsake us, but will bring us into His everlasting kingdom.

- c- Let us say, together with the psalmist: "*O Lord, Stir up Yourself, and awake to my vindication*"; namely, awake our faith in You, so as not to be counted asleep, slothful, and dead, but living with You, O Conqueror of death!

- d- Rejoiced over His burial, the Jews cried: "*Ah, so we would have it*", commending themselves over getting rid of Him. But their joy did not last long, being risen to congratulate those who partook of His passion, crucifixion, and burial.

Saying, "*We have swallowed Him up*", namely, death has swallowed Him, they did not perceive that He entered into it by His own authority to save His believers, whom death has previously swallowed. As, according to Mar Isaac the Syrian: {Death, like a wolf swallowed the Lord Christ the Lamb; but his stomach, not enduring His presence inside it, exploded, and He came out together with His

believers. ... By His resurrection, neither the grave, nor the whole world, or even Hades, could swallow us! By His resurrection, the church swallowed the world, and turned it from atheism and idol-worship to the living faith.

e- By His resurrection, the wicked entered into shame and disgrace; whereas the church set forth to an unceasing joyful life of praise, magnifying and glorifying the Lord.

f- By His resurrection, the Lord shone on us, to turn our life into a day without night. He scattered the darkness of our inner grave, and turned it into a holy temple for Himself.

+ The psalm ends with a shout of joy and praise for God who raises us from the death of sin; So let us give Him thanks, and say together with the psalmist: *My tongue shall speak of Your praise all the day long*".

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

AN INPIRATION FROM PSALM 35

A CRY-OUT TO THE ONE, RISEN FROM THE DEAD

+ Look on my humiliation, You who entered into the battle of the cross;
Be my weapon, conquest, and crown;
Be my salvation; for I wish to acquire You.

+ Teach me how, together with You, I would be delivered for the sake of my oppressors and persecutors;

Let them plot against me; but as for me, I shall die together with You for their sake;

Let them set nets for me in their dark way;

For You will lift me up by Your Holy Spirit, and bring me forth safe to Your heaven;

Let my prayers for their sake return to my own heart; to enjoy what I desire for them;

+ If my tongue is silent, my bones shall not cease to glorify You;

You are the divine Word whom the grave could not keep silent

Resurrect, and raise me up together with You, to make me live by the light of Your resurrection;

O Sun of Righteousness, turn my life into a day that knows no darkness of sins;

To sing Your praise as long as Your light shines in me

=====

PSALM 36

THE WICKEDNESS OF MAN AND THE GOODNESS OF GOD

In the last psalm we read about David, as the servant of the Lord; The present psalm talks about the wicked who sojourn from God.

This psalm includes strong contradictions; showing man with his utter wickedness, and God, in His multisided perfection.

According to the Hebrew text, this psalm refers to king Saul's persecution against the prophet David. Its title is: A psalm of David "the servant of the Lord", or "the young man of the Lord", implying that the author talks by a divine authority. According to some, what came in it is a divine talk against the evil talks uttered by the wicked.

The general frame:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------|
| 1- The features of the wicked | 1 - 4 |
| 2- The covenant of God | 5 - 11 |
| 3- The fall of the wicked under curse | 12 |

1- THE FEATURES OF THE WICKED: (1 – 4)

The psalm shows the secret of the evil features of the wicked, as follows:

a- The corruption of his heart:

The wicked cannot present external excuses for himself; for his evil comes from the corruption of his heart, or from his inner nature. In his bosom he bears evil intentions. His fallen nature is the source and foundation of his evil; according to the words of the Lord Christ: *“Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies”* (Matthew 15: 19).; And the psalmist starts this psalm with the words:

“An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked (the breaker of the law); there is no fear of God before his eyes” (1)

According to the prophet Jeremiah: *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”* (Jeremiah 17: 9)

The heart became so corrupted that it, no more seeks goodness, and finds no pleasure in it, but desires and longs for evil. Commenting on this verse, St. Augustine says:

[The psalmist here, does not talk about a specific person, but about the wicked as a whole, who, with no understanding, fight against themselves, to lead the wrong kind of life; Not that they are unable to do good, but they have no desire to do it.... There is difference between someone who seeks to understand some issue, yet, because the weakness of the body, he fails; according to the words of the Holy Book, saying: *“For the perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind”* (Wisdom 9: 15); ... and that the heart does evil intentionally to harm itself].

The psalmist here, calls the wicked (the breaker of the law), for, on account of the corruption of his heart, he takes the position of oppression and disobedience to the Word of God; not out of misunderstanding, but, actually, out of his own evil will, contradictory to the truth.

b- *“There is no fear of God before his eyes”:*

The psalmist often talks about “**the fear of God**”, being “*the beginning of wisdom*”, and the source of blessing; and discerns between the fear of the beginners, and that of the perfect; namely, the fear of the servant and that of the son.

Once the fear of God is taken away from the heart, or from the insight, namely, the eyes of the soul, man becomes ready to commit any evil.

- + “*There is no fear of God before his eyes*” (1); Having the fear of men before his eyes, the wicked does not dare to confess his iniquity before them, lest they would rebuke him; he avoids their looks, and retreats into himself, into his inner being, where he is not seen by anyone; and there, he plans falsity, deception, and evil. He would tend to refrain from practicing them, even within himself, if he perceives that he is seen by God. But, having lost the fear of God, he only cares for how he is seen by men.

(St. Augustine)

c- He deceives himself:

“For he flatters himself in his own eyes; when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates” (2)

The book of psalms often presents the wicked man as deceitful, belonging to Satan, called (a liar), and (father of liars); Whereas it presents the righteous as bearers of the truth of Christ, and belonging to the truth itself. ... The wicked, in his deceit, does not only deceive the others, but he deceives himself as well; and flatters himself by himself, concerning his iniquity and hatred. ... He distorts the facts, as his iniquity is not hateful in his own eyes, for he clothes it in a garment of virtue. ... He finds excuses for himself in all things, and flatters himself by calling his transgressions by nice names, mixing vanity with truth, and iniquity with virtue. For instance, he calls his hatred for others,

(defending the truth); his meanness to give as (faithfulness to what is entrusted to him); and his partiality to some as (wisdom), etc.

How easy it is for man to deceive himself, by justifying committing sin, that he was not aware that it is a sin; something done by many within the church; Or that the circumstances that God has put him in, has led him to do it.

d- His evil will:

“The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; he has ceased to be wise and to do good” (3)

He refrains from being reasonable or understanding; for he has no more intention to do good. Here, the psalmist proclaims the full responsibility of the wicked not to practice goodness.

If reason (or wisdom) motivates us to do good, the wicked by his own will, wishes for neither of them ... There is no separation between wisdom and goodness; for, by rejecting wisdom, we reject goodness; and by rejecting goodness, evil will crawl into us.

+ To do no evil is something, and to do good is something else; for it is written: *“Depart from evil and do good”* (Psalm 34: 13); by which we may be perfect.

(St. Jerome)

e- He prefers the darkness to light:

bed” (4)

“He desires wickedness on his

Having sinned, David *“drenched his couch with his tears”* (Psalm 6: 6). Whereas the wicked desires wickedness on his bed, and would not go to sleep until he plots it.

All day long, the righteous meditates in God, to bear with him to bed holy thoughts that shed light on his life; whereas the wicked bears with him to bed a dark heart, that plots evil, and thinks of it even in his sleep.

Our thoughts on bed often reflect what we think about during the day, and our hidden longings. ... According to some, “bed” here, refers to the heart, in which will appear the confusion of the wicked conscience; and in which we find comfort in case we have a good conscience. ... And according to St. Augustine, [Let us diligently cleanse and purify our hearts, to find comfort there]. ... About that “bed”, the Lord Christ says: *“When you pray go to your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 6: 6). Let us shut the door of our secret place that opens to the outer world, and let us open up that on which the Lord of glory will knock (Revelation 3: 20), to let Him enter into our depths and dine with us. Once the former is shut, the later will be opened *“to see what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man”* (1 Corinthians 2: 9).

f- He hates goodness:

“He sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil” (4)

In the darkness of the night he thinks of evil on his bed; and in the light of the day he sets himself in a way that is not good. He does not abhor evil because he does not hate it but loves it. At night sin captivates his thoughts, and in the day he consummates its counsel by his behavior.

2- THE COVENANT OF GOD: (5 – 11)

After talking about the hidden causes of evil, and the features of the wicked, the psalmist opens up the doors of hope for every soul that enjoys God's covenant and mercy.

This section includes a song for the Lord who sets His covenant with His church (5-9), and a supplication presented to the Love of God who sets the covenant for protecting the righteous (10-11). Now David talks about God whom the wicked rejects and does not know, whereas, in Him, the righteous finds a refuge, and protection under His wings; he finds God, whole in love, whose mercy and goodness never cease.

a- God's mercy and justice are heavenly:

"Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heaven, and Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds" (5)

* God's covenant with His church is set upon His rich mercies, not separated from His faithfulness or righteousness. .. By "*in heaven*" here, he

probably means that His features are unlimited; His mercies are high and exalted. However great, deep, and strong are our troubles,

God's mercies will remain higher, greater, and deeper. They grant hope for everyone wherever he is, and however great his sins are, or however intense his inner and outer tribulations are.

* "*Heavens*" refer to the true believers who enjoy the divine mercy and the heavenly righteousness, to turn their earth into a heaven, through

proclaiming the kingdom of God inside themselves. According to St. Augustine, {the saints enjoy the heavenly and not the earthly mercy, the

eternal, and not the temporal: Let us then look up to the mercy, to the heavenly mercy].

+ There is a heavenly mercy and an earthly mercy; one human, and another divine. The human mercy cares for healing the poor; whereas the divine mercy undoubtedly grants the forgiveness of sins. What the earthly mercy present of gifts on the way, it shall get back through the divine mercy in the heavenly city.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

* God's mercy in heaven, no one can reach on his own; but it needs the descent of the Heavenly One by Himself to lift him up to it; and of the Holy Spirit to reveal it to him; Hence the Word of God incarnated, came to accompany us on the way, and sent His Holy Spirit to us.

+ For the interpretation of the prophetic secrets were not to be proclaimed before the coming of the Lord.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

By the descent of the Heavenly One, He initiated His love to us, while we are still His enemies; And by sending His Holy Spirit, He revealed to us the heavenly truth hidden under the shadows, and symbols of the law, and in the prophecies of the prophets.

* According to St. Augustine, "*the clouds*" (5), refer to those who preach the gospel, through whom God performs wonders. He as though says:

[God who, by His mercy grants His righteousness to His saints, in particular to those who preach the gospel, they rise up to the clouds, to rain the water of the divine grace over the wilderness of men, to turn it into the joyful paradise of God].

If sin is as heavy as lead, the faithfulness of Christ makes us like the clouds that soars up without hindrance, not with the haughtiness of the spirit, but through the work of His meek Spirit; that our heart would become wide with love instead of with condemnation, and we present the joyful gospel of Christ that renews and sanctifies the hearts by the Spirit of God, as a holy temple for Him.

b- The steadfastness of God's righteousness, and the strength of His judgments:

"Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep" (6)

If our sins bring us down into the deep pit; God's judgments or ordinances, will, not only lift us up from the deep, but will also grant us His righteousness, to turn us into the high mountains of God, on which the Sun of Righteousness shines, and rains His grace, to give them fertility and beauty.

+ Like the sun which shines first upon the high mountains, then shines upon the lower reaches; When our Lord Jesus Christ came, He shined with His light first upon the apostles, as high mountains, then brought it afterwards upon the hidden valleys of the world. If you abide on the mountains, your hope will never be shaken; ... Through them, help will surely come to you; for the Holy Book has been preached through the mountains, namely, through the great preachers who testified to the truth. .. Yet, do not put your hope in them, for although help comes down from the mountains, yet it does not originate from them; but from the Lord who made heaven and earth.(Psalm 121: 1, 2).

"Your righteousness (faithfulness) is like the great mountains of God"; namely, the mountains are full of your righteousness.

“Your judgments are a great deep”. Here, the psalmist uses the word “deep” to refer to the depth of sin, into which man goes down through disregarding the judgments of God. ... The way the mountains of God refer to His faithfulness, the exaltation up to which His grace lifts us; by His judgment, as well, the wicked will go down to the very deep pit.

(St. Augustine)

c- The generality of His mercies:

“O Lord, You preserve man and beast”

(6)

God’s limitless mercies are proclaimed through His care that embraces both man and beast; As a compassionate God upon all his creation; *“He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good; and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”* (Matthew 5: 45); He cares, as well, even for the irrational creation. How much more would He send His grace upon the righteous who trust in Him?!

By *“men”* he probably refers to the (believers) who, walking with wisdom, they came into His bosom; And by *“beasts”* he probably refers to the (wicked), who, letting their physical lusts loose, they have become like irrational beasts.

By *“preserving men”*, he probably refers to the everlasting salvation of the soul; and by *“preserving the beasts”*, he probably refers to His care for the body as well; on account of that He is the Creator of man with his whole being.

The Lord Christ came, *“the Bread of Heaven”*, born in a manger, to be received, as spiritual food, even by those who have perverted to the life of beasts.

+ If you are human, eat the “Bread”; And if you have become a beast, come to the manger, and there, you will enjoy Christ (Luke 2: 7).

(St. Jerome)

+ How great are Your mercies, when security dwells upon the body of the mortal man, as well as upon the beasts! ... Could there be more for us? Yes there are! ... Listen to the words: *“The children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings”, “They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures”* (8 – 11).

Christ is *“the Fountain of life”*; ... We have got the physical security like the beasts, until *“the Fountain of life”* came to us; ... and died for our sake; ... That is the true salvation; Why? Because it is everlasting.

(St. Augustine)

d- The flow of His compassion:

“How precious is Your loving kindness, O God; Therefore the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings” (7)

Perceiving the abundance of the mercies of God, the children of men resort to the cover of His two wings; namely, to the New and the Old Testaments, where they find the treasures of His amazing promises, and the concepts of the covenant of His amazing love; and where they enjoy the prophecies, and perceive the secret of salvation, presented by the Messiah, through delivering His life for their sake.

The psalmist has already proclaimed God’s compassion and care for men and beasts (6); but the *“covenant”* concerns the children of men

alone, those, “*who take refuge in the shadow of His wings*” (7).

Portraying putting trust under the shadow of God’s wings, is drawn from:

- * The two wings of the cherub that cover the Ark of the covenant, from where God used to talk to His people.
- * The two wings of the hen by which it protects its chicks..
- * Training the little eagles to fly, after breaking down the nest.

Boaz quoted the same portrait in his talk to Ruth (Ruth 2: 12); and our Lord Jesus Christ used it in His talk about Jerusalem (Matthew 23: 37), in which He, by His great humility and love, revealed His compassion on His children, and His longing for their salvation.

+ “*Men*”, are those who exult in the material things, just like the beasts; Whereas “*the children of men*” are those who take refuge in the shadow of God’s wings; who exult in their hope. The former, share with the beasts, seeking the present goods; whereas the later share with the angels their looking forward toward the goods to come.

(St. Augustine)

e- “*The fountain of life*”:

“They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house; and You give them drink from the (flood) of the river of Your delight.

For with You is the fountain of life” (8, 9)

In the house of the Lord – the church – the true believers are refreshed by the wine of the divine love; become filled with joy and gladness; are watered, never to thirst any more to the fountains of earthly covetousness, the temporal pleasures, and the delights

of this life. In the Savior they find the secret of their true joy, their gladness, and satisfaction.

The talk here refers to an analogy to guests received by God in His house, to live all their life in an unceasing feast; where, "*set on their daily table would be full of richness*" (Job 36: 16; Psalm 63: 5; Isaiah 55: 2; Jeremiah 31: 14). God will bring His people forth to His bosom to enjoy the river of promises; and will satisfy them with His grace, not to thirst again. Outside God, there would be no drop of life; whereas in Him, the fountain of divine delights would never be exhausted.

- + The term "flood" refers to the torrent river of water; the mercies of God that spring to water and satisfy those who take refuge under His wings; ... What a pleasure?! ... All what the thirst has to do is to hope, to have the right to get satisfied with the truth; ... Who is "*the Fountain of Life*", but the Lord Christ, who came in flesh to sooth your enflamed mouth; ... He who gave us the deposit of watering the thirsty, will satisfy those who take refuge under His wings, to the fullness.

- + We have hope for such a paradise; Being hungry and thirsty, we feel the need to be fed (to eat and to drink). ... Anyway hunger and thirst will only be on the way, whereas, once we get home, we shall find a flood of goods; ... When shall we be satisfied? "*I shall be satisfied when I awake to beholding Your likeness (glory)*" (Psalm 17: 15). ... As for now, the glory of our God, our Christ, is hidden, and with Him our glory is hidden as well; Where, "*When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*" (Colossians 3: 4). ... Then, "Alleluia" will be a fact; while now it is mere hope.

(St. Augustine)

- + What is the "*Fountain of Life*" but our Lord Jesus Christ ...?! He is the good Fountain who grants us coolness after going through the flaming fire of this life; and who, by His flood, soothes the dryness of our hearts.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- + According to the psalm (8), those who are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of God's house, and who are given drink from the river of His delight, will be watered. This way, David himself got drunk; and came to behold the divine beauty, not to be seen by a mortal.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

- + The river of paradise floods for our sake; and the "*Fountain of Life*" in Christ, is ours, as we are told by the prophets, saying: "*Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream*" (Isaiah 66: 12).

(St. Cyril the Great)

f- The light:

"In Your light we see light"

(9)

Here he refers to the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of enlightenment....

By saying: "*For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light*" (9), the psalmist talks about the Holy Trinity.

The Son is "the Fountain of Life", who is with the Father, and is One with Him.

The Holy Spirit is the Light of the Father "*In Your light*", by whom we behold the Father and the Son (*the Light*).

No one can give light to himself; as the whole light comes from heaven; "*The Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father*" (John 15: 26); By Him we see the Son -- the Word, as well as the Father; And by Him we see the truth of ourselves, for, enlightening our

insight, we may discover our weakness, and feel our need for salvation; By Him, “*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*”; ... *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of the darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Corinthians 4: 4 – 6).

- + It is written: “*In Your light we see light*”, Namely, by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, “*the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world*” (John 1: 9), the glory of the only begotten Son will appear, and the knowledge of the glory of God will be given to the true worshippers.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + Without the light of the Holy Book we would not be able to behold God – “*who is Light*” (1 John 1: 5), and would not be able to perceive His righteousness, full of light.

(Father Martyrus)

- + In Your Son, who is Light, we behold the light of the Holy Spirit; as shown to us by the Lord Himself, saying: “*Receive the Holy Spirit*” (John 20: 22); and as said in another place: “*Power went out from Him*” (Luke 6: 19).

Who could doubt that the Father is Light, when we read that His Son is the splendor of the eternal light? ... Of whom will the Son be splendor except of the Father? He, who is perpetually with the Father, and perpetually gives light, not with a different, but with the same splendor.

(St. Ambrose)

- + The Spirit of God is both a drink and light. If you find a fountain in the dark, you would need light to help you reach it; A luminous Fountain, would, however, shine on

you, and lead you to itself.... When you come to drink, approach Him; and in order to be enlightened, come to Him.

(St. Augustine)

Finding himself standing on a land of controversy between the evil of man (1 – 4), and the mercies of God (5 – 9), the psalmist resort to fervent prayer, seeking the continuation of God’s loving kindness, full of compassion “*to those who know God; and His righteousness to the upright in heart*”; and for the sake of their enjoyment of salvation amid the tribulation, lest “*the foot of pride*” of the arrogant tyrant would come against them, and “*the hand of the wicked would drive them away*”. We are in need of His unutterable mercies, as well as of His righteousness, by which He chastises the wicked, lest the upright would perish.

“Oh, continue Your loving kindness to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright in heart. Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked drive me away” (10, 11)

The psalmist seeks the continuation of God’s mercy upon those who know Him; on account of that what they enjoy of knowledge is not due to them, but is a divine gift from His mercies, and a generous free grace. The continuation of mercy refers to the perpetuity of the enjoyment of knowledge, and the growth in it. For if God’s mercy is taken away, man would return to his ignorance, and would lose the grace of knowledge.

The psalmist seeks the continuation of God’s righteousness to the upright in heart, who abide to His divine will, lest their heart may pervert because of a temptation or comfort. The upright would be more crowned amid tribulations, as they would not cease praising God, saying

together with the suffering praising psalmist: *“I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth”* (Psalm 34: 1).

+ *“Your righteousness to the upright in heart”*

As I often said, the upright in heart are those who submit to the will of God in this life. ... It is the will of God, sometimes, to be healthy, and other times to be ill. If you see God’s will sweet when you are healthy; and see it bitter if you are ill, you would not be upright in heart! Why? Because you would let your own will conform to God’s will; but you want God’s will to submit to your will.

As God’s will is upright, while yours is pervert; your will should conform to God’s will; not that His perverts to suit yours; For then you would be upright in heart.

(St. Augustine)

Having seen *“the foot of pride and the hand of the wicked”* approaching him, the psalmist cried out to God to keep him from falling under the authority of evil, and from being driven away, and wandering in this life without a goal.

+ The fear from *“the foot of pride”*

When man’s strength is renewed, and when he becomes very fruitful through drinking from *“the fountain of life”*; he is committed to beware against pride. lest he would become like the first Adam, against whom *“the foot of pride”* came, and was driven away by *“the hand of the wicked”* ... By pride we have fallen almost to perdition. ... Having been wounded by pride, we would be healed by humility; ... The Lord came in humility to heal man from the bloody wounds of pride.

+ Fearing both *“the root and hand”* of sin, the psalmist prayed, saying: *“Let not the foot of pride come against me, and the hand of the wicked drive me away”* (11).

(St. Augustine)

4- THE FALL OF THE WICKED UNDER CURSE: (12)

The psalm ends with a confirmation that the workers of iniquity, who persist on their evil ways, will fall under curse; into the same spot where they intended for the children of God to fall into.

“There the workers of iniquity have fallen. They have been cast down, and are not able to rise” (12)

The wicked fall and are not able to rise again; Yet, the doors of repentance will remain open; as according to St. Augustine:

[If you have fallen down, get up; If you are up, stand aright; and if you are sitting, beware of evil]

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 36

HOW GREAT IS YOUR COMPASSION, O LORD!

- + Your mercies are heavenly;
They turn my heart of stone into a love-filled heaven;
Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds;
It lifts me from the mire, high up.

- + Men and beasts You save, O Lord;
You have compassion on my rational soul;
And You sanctify my carnal body, to make it almost spiritual.

- + I take refuge under the shadow of Your wings;

I hide in You, that the enemy would not come near me;
I am abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house;
Not to feel need for the bread of bitterness.

+ You water me by Your Holy Spirit, the Fountain of Life;;

And flood on me, O River of eternal paradise.

+ In Your light I behold light'

Beholding You, I get enlightened, and rejoice in You;

You are the Sun of righteousness;

You shine on me, that night would no longer approach me;

You turn my life into a perpetual day; and enjoy the deposit of eternity.

+ The foot of pride, the root of every sin, will not come against me;

When You dwell in me, O humble One;

The hand of the wicked will not drive me away; When I am in the palm of Your hand.

+ By Your great loving kindness, bring me up;

And "*Lead me away*" (Psalm 1: 4).

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PSALM 37

THE MEEK SHALL INHERIT THE LAND OF PEACE

Verse 25 in this psalm shows that the prophet David wrote this psalm in his old age, after long years of experience, and of meditation in his case with king Saul, Napal, Absalom, Ahitophel, and others. According to some scholars, he wrote it three years before his departure from this world.

The prophet David intended to find an answer to the question, asked by men along the generations; namely: [Why do the wicked prosper, and the righteous suffer?]. That answer to this question would become easy, if the heart goes beyond the seen world, to see by its inner insight the glories of eternity prepared for those who are unjustly oppressed; when the righteous would not envy the wicked; and would not be destroyed by what he confronts of sufferings and troubles. This psalm gives peace to the heart, and takes away every grumbling from the soul, when the believer perceives the truth of the dealings of God with him.

This is the third of the alphabetical psalms, almost complete in its order.

It is a great prophetic psalm that reveals the riches of the blessings granted to the church of the New Covenant. Although this psalm, in its wholeness, does not speak only about the Person of the Lord Christ, Yet its main topic is the Lord Christ. Some liken its words to a series of pearls put together in one string to form a precious necklace.

This psalm is not a prayer raised to God, nor a liturgy, but a psalm of wisdom, teaching, and instruction. It goes around one idea, which it intends to confirm to man in different ways. It presents eight commandments, supported by practical experiences, the same way like psalms 73 and 94; beside the books of 'Job' and proverbs.

Its general frame:

1- The blessing of faith	1 -- 11
2- A comparison between the righteous and the wicked	12 -- 20
3- The end of the righteous and the wicked	21 – 40

1- THE BLESSING OF FAITH: (1 – 11)

The prophet David, who has confronted limitless tribulations, having been often attacked, even for moments, by such a thought:[Why do the wicked prosper, and the righteous suffer?]; wrote for himself this psalm, set upon faith in God, the Just Judge. He set eight commandments to be committed to, six of which are included in this psalm; which are:

- a- Not to be envious of the workers of iniquity on their temporal prosperity (1)
- b- To concentrate his sight on God, and on dwelling in His house (2)
- c- To take delight in the Lord, not in the temporal things like the evildoers (4)
- d- To trust in the Lord (5, 6)
- e- To submit to the Lord (7)
- f- To refrain from anger and forsake wrath (8)

These six commandments are set upon faith in God, who alone will lift up our inner insight, from the tribulations and pleasures of this world; from the actions and oppression of men, to enjoy God Himself, in whom we find our pleasure; who sustains, crowns, and protects us.

a- The first commandment: Not to be envious of the workers of iniquity on their temporal prosperity:

“Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity, for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb” (1, 2)

The psalm starts by counseling the righteous not to fret because of evildoers; confirming to them that the day of their judgment is definitely coming. When God brings them to account, they shall soon be cut down like grass, and wither as the green herb.

Seeing the prosperity of the workers of iniquity, realized by their pervert ways, should not provoke us to envy them, or follow their lead, for that would bring us to a condition of grumbling even against God Himself. On the contrary, the more prosperous the evildoers are, the more sorrowful we should be for their sake, on account of that the day of their perdition is approaching, and their horrible end is neigh. The **xxxx** of God's justice will come upon them all of a sudden, for their life has dried up, and would be corruptive to the earth. St. James says: "*For no sooner has the sun risen, with a burning heat than it withers the grass, its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuit*" (James 1: 11).

- + "*Do not fret because of evildoers; ... for they shall soon be cutt down like the grass*". ... Tell me what would be the destiny of the robber after his departure? Where would be his shining hopes? Where would be his awesome name? All that will vanish from existence. All what he had, was no more than a dream and fantasy?..... This, however is not the case of the righteous; their condition would never be described as a dream or fantasy!

(St.

John Chrysostom)

- + The evildoers are valueless, they live superficially on the face of the soil, and their roots never go deep in its depths; hence they are like the green grass of winter, which will wither once the sun of the summer come with its heat. Now it is the winter, but the summer is approaching.

(St.

Augustine)

It is befitting of us not to be envious of someone enjoying a temporary prosperity; on account of that he may drop dead in a moment. Reaching their goal of prosperity with no repentance, God will cut off the remembrance of the workers of iniquity from the earth; the way we saw in the cases of King Saul and king Ahab, Who, after their wealth extensively grew, enemies were sent by God to take it away. That happened as well to the wicked Nabal who died ten days after the prophet David turned away from him (1 Samuel 25: 38).

The evildoer is like a flower that opens up, to fall down eventually with no return.

b- The second commandment: To concentrate his sight on God, and on dwelling in His house:

“Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness (on its riches)” (3)

Someone may wonder: [How can I not be envious of the evildoers who prosper while the righteous suffer? From where shall I get the perseverance to wait until I see the end of the workers of iniquity?].... The answer is: From faith in God, and the enjoyment of the church life with her spiritual riches!

In the first commandment, the psalmist warns us against being envious of the prosperity of the evildoers; Here, he presents to us the positive aspect; namely, to cast ourselves into the bosom of God, and to enjoy the blessings of the church evangelic life.

The word “*land*” or “*earth*” was repeated several times in this psalm:

“Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness (on its riches)” (3)

“Those ho wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth” (9)

“But the meek shall inherit the earth” (11)

What is the “*land*” in which, those who trust in, and wait on the Lord, will dwell, and the meek will inherit? The psalmist probably meant “*the land of Canaan*” or “*the promised land*” as a symbol of the blessed heavenly life, where the believer dwells “*under the shadow of the wings of God*” among His people; which was the most prominent wish of the true believer in the old covenant.

According to St. Jerome, “*the land*” here is “*the land of the living*”, namely the church of the new covenant, where the believers are born anew to reach the eternal life. And according to St. Paul: “*Our citizenship is in the heavens*” (Philippians 3: 20)... As to its “*riches*”, it is God Himself, where the Father opens His bosoms to grant us unity with Him; The Son grants us His precious blood, an atonement for our sins, and a source of our righteousness; And the Holy Spirit grants us His dwelling in our hearts.

In order to gain “*the riches*” of the church, the land of God, the deposit of His heavens, the icon of eternity, we are committed to trust in God, His promises, His salvation work, and proclaim our faith by working and practicing the spiritual church life with all her riches.

+ You may be doing good, yet you do not dwell in “*the land*”; For God’s land is His church; “*His true vine, and the Father is the vinedresser*” (John 15: 1), who waters and cares for it. ... Many do good, yet do not dwell in *the land*”, and do not belong to the vinedresser.

What are “*the riches of the land*”?... Its Lord and God, about whom is written: “*You are my Portion, O Lord*”. Listen to what the psalmist adds: “*Take delight in the Lord*” (4)

(St. Augustine)

c- The third commandment: To take delight in the Lord:

*“Take delight in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord; Trust also in Him,
and He shall bring it to pass” (4, 5)*

Every commandment lifts the soul up in the way of faith: The first commandment starts with the negative aspect, namely, not to be envious of the temporal prosperity of the evildoers; The second exhorts the soul, being His bride, to lean on the chest of her heavenly Groom, and to practice the spiritual church life; The third commandment, to give Him her heart, and to seek Him as her satisfaction; He will give the soul the desires and the longings of her heart; and will grant her Himself, being the Grantor of good and goodness, to let her need nothing more. Revealing to Him her way, telling Him all her secrets, and trusting in Him, He will work by His grace and Holy Spirit in her.... The third commandment to the soul is to get preoccupied with the Lord; Being her Groom, she is committed not to hide nothing from Him, and not to seek her needs from anyone else. ... The prophet Moses, finding his joy in the Lord, sought to behold His glory (Exodus 33: 18), and enjoyed it as much as he could endure. ... Solomon was thirsty to be watered by the wisdom and knowledge of God, and God made Him the wisest of all men.

Comparing between taking delight in the temporal, and rejoicing in the spiritual things, St. John Chrysostom says: {I cannot count the sufferings of those who seek the temporal pleasures; But I can figure them out in the following analogy: Those who sit at a huge luxurious table, do not enjoy the food as much as those who sit at a modest one. Moderation is the father of pleasure and health; whereas the gluttony is the source and origin, not only of sickness, but of sorrows}.

- + We are told by the Lord that He has an abundance of such kind of food, saying: *“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work”* (John 4: 34). We enjoy that food about which the prophet says: *“Take delight in the Lord”*; ... Let us feed on the bread of wisdom, and fill ourselves with the Word of God! For man, who is created according to the image of God, *“does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4: 4). As to the cup, as well, the righteous ‘Job’, said clearly: *“They waited for me as for the rain, and they opened their mouth wide as for the spring rain”* (Job 29: 23).

(St. Ambrose)

d- The fourth commandment: To trust in the Lord:

“Commit your way to the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday” (5, 6)

Finding in the Lord our gladness and pleasure, it is befitting of us to tell Him all our fears and worries, all our big and small things, and He shall bring our life to pass according to His good counsel.

The word *“commit”* (5), in Hebrew came to mean (pass); It is as though it is befitting of the believer to get rid of all his burdens and worries by passing them to God.

Believing in God in our daily practical life, we would not fear the clouds around us, but would trust in the Sun of Righteousness hiding behind them; He who shines on His godly believers to proclaim their innocence and right; the psalmist says: *“He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday”* (6).

While the evildoers prosper, the righteous suffer, and are unjustly accused of being evildoers. Their reputation may become distorted by slanders for some time, but they would be like a sun hidden behind clouds and fog, which once scattered, the uprightness of their life would be manifested, would shine as the light of the sun at noonday; and their life would turn into rejoicing; according to the words of the prophet Isaiah : *“Then your light shall break forth like the morning; your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard”* (Isaiah 58: 8).

The Lord shone upon humanity at noonday when He proclaimed the perfect splendor of His love on the cross, to scatter the darkness of sin from our hearts.

- + At noonday, God appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre (Genesis 18: 1); shining on him with the eternal light of the divine presence. And at noonday, the true ‘Joseph’ enters into His house to dine (Genesis 43: 25). It shines more when we celebrate the holy sacraments (when the crucified Lord Christ shines on the altar among His people).
- + *“Where you make it rest at noon?”* (Songs 1: 7)
Talking about the Word shining on us with His light, the soul would say to Him: *“Tell me, O whom I love, Where you feed Your flock; where You make it rest at noon?”*. ... It was at noon when ‘Joseph’ took his place among his brothers to dine; when he revealed to them the secrets of the coming times (Genesis 43: 15); ... And St. Paul proclaimed that light shone around him from heaven like noon, turning him from a persecutor of the church into grace (Acts 9: 3).

(St. Ambrose)

e- The fifth commandment: To submit to the Lord:

“Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret over those who prosper in their way; over those who carry out evil devices” (7)

Enlightened by the light of the cross like at noonday, and perceiving God’s perfect love and care, man would completely submit to Him, and would never fret over the prosperity of the evildoer, nor his evil devices. He who is preoccupied with the cross of the Lord of glory, will never grumble, even if the devices of the wicked seem successful; For God the Savior and the Beneficent, will turn even the evil devices of the wicked into our salvation; as He, by His cross, will turned the oppression of the Jews, and the betrayal of Judas to the salvation of the world.

f- The sixth commandment: **To refrain from anger, and forsake wrath:**

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret – it leads only to evil. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait for the Lord, they shall inherit the land. Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more. Though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in an abundance of peace” (8 – 11)

If the wicked are crafty and evil, it is befitting of the righteous to refrain from anger, lest they would fall into what the wicked have fallen through loss of perseverance and meekness. While, by his evil, the wicked shall be cut off; By his perseverance, the righteous shall inherit the land (the promised land, or the church of the new covenant with her spiritual riches); and by his meekness his inheritance will be confirmed, and he will enjoy the exalted peace of God.

The psalmist warns us against the anger (the light wrath), lest anger would take root in the inner life, and turn into evil hate, to end up like the deceptive wicked.

Instead of grumble that provokes anger, then leads to evil; let us concentrate our sight on the eternal inheritance for which we hope with perseverance, and acquire with meekness; for then the eternal peace would dwell in our life.

The psalmist presents the best definition of the meek, that they are those who chose the way of faith with perseverance, instead of trusting in pleasures While the whole world is overwhelmed by caring for what is vain and profitless, the meek, in an amazing peace cross over from earth to heaven. Not being filled with grumble nor anger, there will be no place in them for malice They will have God's peace as a deposit of the perfection of the eternal blessing.

In His care for us, God allowed for us to suffer troubles by the wicked, so as to experience perseverance, meekness, and peace during our journey from the valley of tears, until we come to encounter our Christ, face to face, and to have our life satisfied with eternal glories. The wicked will end up with perdition; whereas death for us is glory.

+ What are your pleasures? ... Peace will fill every longing in you.... For you, God will be everything: He will be your food, that you will never hunger; your drink, that you will never thirst; your light, that you will never be blind; and your comfort and help, that you will never be disturbed. He, Himself, perfectly and utterly, will wholly and utterly possess you.

(St. Augustine)

+ When the meek assumes that he has lost everything he got, he will get a different promise, saying: [The righteous who does not get haughty nor puffed up, will possess all what he has in security; whereas the wicked will most probably lose his inheritance, and even his life itself.

(St. John Chrysostom)

2- A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE RIGHTOUS AND THE WICKED: (12 – 20)

a- The wicked plots against the righteous:

“The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth” (12)

There is an ancient plot, put for so long by the wicked against the righteous; about which the Lord Christ says: *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you”* (John 15: 18). It is as though the two sides of the battle are actually, not the wicked and the righteous, but the devil and the Lord Christ. This battle started since the creation of man, and will remain in the life of every believer until the perfect conquest of Christ is proclaimed in him; ... As to the land of the battle, it is the believer’s mind.

The wicked – the devil – using every possible way, plots against the true believer, to make him fall into the snares of sin; and if he fails, he gnashes at him with his teeth, *“like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5: 8).

Since Cain killed Abel in the old; and since St. Steven was stoned to death by the Jews, and until the second coming of the Lord Christ, the true believers have been, and will be persecuted; yet will never be forsaken.

b- The wicked will perish by their own weapons:

“The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn the sword, and have bent their bow,

to cast down the poor and needy, to slay those who are of upright conduct. Their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken” (13 – 15)

The wicked ridiculing the saints, the Lord laughs at him, for He has set the day of his chastisement (Job 18: 20; psalm 137: 7; Isaiah 9: 4; Jeremiah 12: 3; Hosea 1: 11). The Lord despises all his evil plots.

The wicked use all their weapons to cast down the poor and needy; yet God would not allow this tribulation to endure for a long time, nor leave the wicked unpunished. They draw their swords to kill the bodies of the righteous, but will never be able to touch their souls; the sword shall enter their own hearts; hence the Lord Christ says: “*Do not fear those who kill the body, and cannot kill the soul*” (Matthew 10: 28).

Their sword shall enter their own heart, for “*For all who take the sword will perish by the sword*” (Matthew 26: 52)

- + What then? Will the wicked do you harm and will not himself be harmed? Will his hate, provoked by his anger, to cast you down, not destroy him first, and end up with the perdition of his own depths?

Their sword shall enter their own heart. Their sword may reach your body, the way it did when it pierced the bodies of the martyrs; yet, their hearts and souls remained intact and not harmed. But definitely, he who drew his sword to slay the body of those of upright Conduct, will not go unharmed.

(St. Augustine)

- + According to the testimony of the psalmist, “*Their teeth are spears and arrows; and their tongue a sharp sword*” (Psalm 57: 4). But what is amazing is that, while

attacking the righteous, they do themselves more harm, for, carrying inside them anger, hate, envy, malice, and guile, they are torn apart by their own weapons.

While unable to do real harm to the righteous, their weapons shall first enter their own hearts (15); and, *“His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin” (Proverb 5: 22).*

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

That is concerning the sword that enters the heart of the wicked.... The bows that are broken, refer to the hidden plots of the evil enemies, when they become revealed and exposed.

c- The wicked will be denied the blessings of God:

The wicked often persecute the righteous to confiscate their possessions; but the righteous will remain rich in their faith and the blessings of the Lord that fills their depths, while the wicked will perpetually remain needy, however great they may have of temporal riches (Proverb 15: 16, 17); and according to the psalmist:

“A little that a righteous man has, is better than the riches of many wicked” (16)

d- The arms of the wicked shall be broken:

“For the arms of the wicked shall be broken; but the Lord upholds the righteous” (17)

Breaking the arms implies the utter inability to work; as it was said about Pharaoh:

“Therefore, thus says the Lord, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, both the strong and the one that was broken; and I will make the sword fall out of

his hand; ... I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put My sword in his hand; but I will break Pharaoh's arms, and he will groan before him with the groaning of a mortally wounded man" (Ezekiel 30: 22 – 24). The wicked holding his weapons, God will break his arms, his power will collapse, and he loses his weapon. God Himself remains a Support for His righteous, who bear Him in themselves, as arms to perpetually work to the account of His kingdom.

e- The ways of the righteous are well known by the Lord:

"The Lord knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever" (18)

As we already said, the word "*knows*" refers to the close relationship between God and His believers; He knows their way; for He is "*the Way*"; He carries them in Himself, to become blameless, bearing His righteousness; and presents Himself to them an eternal Reward, and inheritance.

About the suffering angel (bishop) of the church of Smyrna, the Lord Christ said: "*I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); ... Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer, Indeed the devil is about to throw some of you into prison; ... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Revelation 2: 9, 10). ... God knows the works of his love; and knows that days of tribulation are waiting for him; yet He does not forsake him, and promises him the crown of life. That is what the psalmist also meant by saying:

"They will not be ashamed in the evil time; and in the days of famine, they shall be satisfied" (19)

The evil times are coming, and the days of famine shall dwell, yet the believers will not lose their hope, nor will be ashamed, or have an inner hunger, but will be satisfied by the Lord. The blessed St. Paul says: "*We also glory in tribulations, knowing that*

tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character hope; now hope does not disappoint” (Romans 5: 3, 4), “because the love of God has been poured out in our heart by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5: 5); supports us in the valley of tears, until we cross over to the higher Jerusalem..

f- Like smoke, God’s enemies shall vanish away:

“But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord, like the splendor of the meadows; into smoke they shall vanish away” (20)

He probably means that the enemy enters into the pasture – the church of Christ – like a lion to devour, or like a robber who daringly slays and grill the sheep to eat, but out of this sacrifice of oppression, will come dense smoke that haughtily rise up, to be smelled by God as a fragrance of pleasure; whereas their oppressors, like smoke shall vanish away.

+ The enemies of God – death, the devil, and the evil spirits – will all perish. We, therefore should not fret because of the prosperity of the enemies of God; for in a moment their glory will fall down, and like smoke they shall vanish away.

If you see an enemy, rich, armed with weapons, and followed by many hypocrites, do not get discouraged, but you should rather have pity on him, and cry out to God to haul him up together with his company; the more intense his animosity against God becomes, the more you should grieve for him. We are committed to lament those who will perish, particularly the rich among them, who enjoy good days, on account of that they are sick and are overfeeding themselves.

3- THE END OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED: (21 – 40)

a- “The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives” (21):

If the wicked do their best to rob the righteous of their possessions and rights, and even seek their souls, they will, even in this world, lose the blessing of the Lord in their life; will borrow and will not be able to repay; whereas the righteous will have the blessing of the Lord fill their life, to give mercy and joy. Borrowing here is not confined to material things, but extends to psychological needs; for the wicked may be rich with wealth, but miserably feel an inner poverty, humiliation, and deprivation; and lack love, joy, and peace.... They may seek from men a word of true love, or a jest of peace; ... while the righteous, even during the moments of their martyrdom, will pour on everyone around, joy and gladness of heart; and the day of their martyrdom will turn into joyful feasts.

The wicked got from God the grace of existence, and the blessings of emotion and reason; ... but, instead of using them to the account of the kingdom of God, as tools of righteousness to God, he presents them as instruments of unrighteousness to sin (Romans 6: 13). He borrows and does not repay, but oppresses his creditor; whereas the righteous, bearing the nature of His Savior, is merciful, and gives, even his own soul for the sake of the salvation of his brethren. While curse will dwell upon the wicked, and perish, the righteous will inherit the promised land – the church of the new covenant, with her spiritual riches.

Of the blessings promised to the believers who keep the commandment in the old covenant, was the ability to lend the others, and not to need to borrow from anyone (Deuteronomy 15: 2; Isaiah 24: 20). And of the curses to dwell upon the oppressors of God, was to have to borrow, and be unable to repay their debts (Deuteronomy 28: 44). The transgressions and ungodliness of the wicked bring them forth into need.

- + He borrows and does not repay; ... he does not repay thanksgiving to God from whom he was given gifts; but, on the contrary, he repays His goodness by evil, blasphemy, grumble, and denial.... The righteous, on the other hand, shows mercy

and gives, his ways are generous; and even if he is poor, he is rich; probably not with external wealth, but with internal compassion.

(St. Augustine)

b- The wicked will lose his inheritance and his life; whereas the righteous will inherit the land of the living:

“For those who are blessed by Him shall inherit the earth; but those who are cursed by Him shall be cut off” (22)

It may seem that the righteous have nothing, when they actually have everything, and make many rich; as according to the apostle Paul: *“As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing but possessing all things”* (2 Corinthians 6: 10); possessing the grace and blessing of God.

While the wicked are filled with oppression and greed, and will end up cursed and cut off; the righteous, on the other hand, being known for generosity and compassion, will inherit the earth.

+ They possess the Righteous (God), the only true Righteous who justifies; He, who, although was poor on earth, yet He came forth with great gifts, to make all those He found poor and needy rich. He is the One who gives the Holy Spirit to the hearts of the poor, purifies the souls by confessing their sins, and fills them with the treasures of righteousness. He is the One who could make the poor fisherman rich by forsaking his nets aside, not caring for what he possesses to put his heart upon what he does not possess (the ministry).

(St. Augustine)

- + God promises those who seek His kingdom and righteousness, to have more of these; For, as everything is God's, he who possesses God will need nothing more. Daniel was given divine food when he was cast in the lions den, by the order of the king. Although the wild beasts were hungry, they did not touch him. Elijah, as well, while escaping and persecuted, was fed and ministered by the ravens

(Cyprian the martyr)

c- God upholds the hands of the righteous:

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; and He delights in his way. Though he falls, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholds him with His hand” (23, 24)

God, on a personal level, has a plan in the life of every man; whether he is a priest, a monk, or one of the people; an elder, a young man, or a child; a man or a woman; Every soul has her own appreciation and mission in the sight of God. As a Father He does not entrust anyone else to realize this mission. He, indeed, uses angels, prophets, apostles, ministers, and even nature itself, to minister to those who are to inherit the earth; but He shall remain their true Savior, and presents Himself a Way for them.

- + [Neither an angel nor an archangel, neither a patriarch nor a prophet, have You entrusted with our salvation, but You without change, were incarnate and became man, and resembled us in everything, except for sin alone, and became for us a Mediator with the Father, and a middle wall You have broken down, and the old enmity You have abolished. You have reconciled the earthly with the heavenly, and made the two into one]

(The liturgy of St. Gregory the theologian)

He (Christ) entered into the way of passion and crucifixion to uphold our steps; to make us love the suffering, not for their own sake, but for the sake of partaking of the way of the Lord Christ; and of Him partaking of our sufferings.

- + For man to love the way of God, the Lord Himself directs his steps; lest, being actually his nature, he would probably be lost on the way of sin; And being lost for long along a pervert way, it would be impossible for him to return (without His help).

(St. Augustine)

The Lord upholds our hands like a father training his own children, directing them, finding pleasure to lead them on His way, and they find pleasure in Him as well; For He accompanies them, proclaims Himself to them, and supports their weakness.

Along the way, He may probably allow for them to fall down, to make them discover their own weakness, and perceive their needs for the leadership of His Holy Spirit, and for the support of God's grace. They may fall, but will never be destroyed, as His eyes are on them, and will stretch His hand to lift them up if they cry out to Him. St. James says: "*For we all stumble in many things*" (James 3: 2). Yet we should not be discouraged, but raise our eyes up to God, who is able to set us aright.

According to some, falling here does not mean falling into sin, but falling into troubles; as God will never let His believers collapse.

d- The righteous experience the grace of God:

"I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful and lends; and his descendants are blessed"

(25, 26)

Speaking about the blessings of God dwelling upon the righteous, filled with love and compassion; and about the miserable end of the oppressive wicked; If the psalmist is asked: whether his talk is practical and actual; his answer would be “*I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken*” (25). God will always stand by him, and by his descendants. God may sometimes, allow for them to get hungry or needy, but, ultimately, He would never forsake them to the end; He would allow them to suffer for sometime, yet He would stay with them, partake of their troubles, and save them. He will even grant them Himself, as their satiety and riches

- + The Lord would never allow for the soul of the righteous to perish by hunger; the psalmist says: “*I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread*”. Elijah has been “fed by the ravens”, and “by the widow of Sidon who prepared food for him, and not for herself and her son, despite the fact that she expected to die out of hunger together with her son on the same night (1 Kings 17).
- + “*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*” (1 Timothy 6: 10); The apostle talks about “*covetousness which is “idolatry”* (Colossians 3: 5); And the Savior Himself counsels us to “*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matthew 3: 5).
God will never allow for the righteous to die out of hunger,

(St. Jerome)

It is befitting of the righteous, who opens his heart and arms to the poor and needy, not to worry about the future of his children after his departure from this world; having given them his holy life an inheritance to support them. The wicked, on the other hand, “*wanders about for bread, saying, ‘Where is it?’* (Job 15: 23); “*and would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him*

anything" (Luke 15: 16).

- + Let God be the Guardian of your children;
Let Him be their Surety;
Let Him, by His divine majesty, be their Protector against all temporal harms.
This is the secure inheritance kept safe with God.

(Cyprian the martyr)

- + You would be counted as a traitor and an oppressor, if you do not present to your children a sound counsel, and do not keep them in true religion and godliness.

You who care about providing them with temporal things, and not with the heavenly possessions; ... You who put them under the guardianship of the devil, instead of Christ;... You are committing two sins, and a double crime; you deny your own children the help of God, their Father; and you instruct them to love their temporal possessions more than Christ.

(Cyprian the martyr)

According to St. Augustine, He who says here: "*I have been young, and now am old*", is the Lord Christ in His body, the church; presenting her experience along the generations.

- + The body of Christ, namely, the church, like any human being, has been lithe at the beginning of her life; Now, at the end of the world, she has reached the fruitful old age; for the words: "*They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing*" (Psalm 92: 14), is said about the church, flourishing among all nations. Like someone, concerning his young days and growing old; she has searched everything; by the Holy Book knew all times; and now, she warningly proclaims: "*and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants*

begging bread". The "*bread*" here is the Word of God, from which the lips of the righteous are not denied (See Matthew 4: 3, 4).

(St. Augustine)

e- The righteous experiences the good eternal life:

*"Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell
forevermore" (27)*

This is **the seventh commandment**; which commits the righteous, not only to depart from evil, but to practice the positive work, "*to do good*"; namely, it is not only befitting of the righteous to keep from likening the wicked in practicing oppression, but it is befitting of him, as well, to walk by the good Spirit of God.

This commandment carries its reward; as the psalmist adds: "*and dwell forevermore*". Namely, departing from evil, and doing good, are an entrance into the deposit of the eternal life, where there is no iniquity, but perpetual goodness. Evil may give temporary pleasure, which will soon go away, and will even turn into bitterness; Whereas good will bring us forth into tasting the eternal divine rejoice.

We have already dealt with the positive and the negative aspects in the life of the godly believer (Psalm 34: 13).

- + Do not think that you do good, if you do not rob somebody's clothes. Yes, by that you depart from evil; but it is befitting of you not to stop at that level without giving fruit. For what is greater than not robbing somebody's clothes, is to clothe a naked man.

(St. Augustine)

- + It is befitting of him who wishes to be saved, not to stop at departing from evil, but he is committed, as well, to do good.... It is not enough for him who is used to get angry, to cease to be angry, but he is committed to learn how to be meek. Every transgression has a virtue as its opposite.

(Father Dorotheos)

f- The righteous will forever enjoy the faithfulness of God:

“For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; They are preserved forever” (28)

God, being “the Truth”, loves justice or (truth), It brings Him pleasure to give it to the oppressed; and remains faithful to those He loves, and who love Him. He may allow for them to go through troubles, yet for a certain time, in order to proclaim His care for them eternally. He preserves them forever, as though they are the treasure of heaven.

- + *“For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints”*. So He does by having the life of His saints hidden in Him. While laboring and suffering now on earth, and look like trees, barren with no leaves nor fruits in winter; Once He shines on them as a new Sun, behold, the vitality hidden in the roots will suddenly emerge in their fruits. .. You may despise a saint while under chastisement, but you will tremble with surprise when you see him clothed in honor.

(St. Augustine)

Someone may ask: Does God indeed not forsake His saints?... Yes, He has kept the fire from touching the three young men who praised Him;
But, how about the Maccabees, His saints as well, who perished in fire, although they have never forsaken their faith?!

Responding to that, St. Augustine says: [Listen to what follows: “*They are preserved forever*” (28). If you wish for the saints to live few additional years, your assumption would mean that God will never take His saints. ... God who has not forsaken the three saintly young men in public, has not forsaken, the saintly Maccabees in a secret way. The former saints were granted the mortal life in the body, to bring the non-believers to shame; Whereas the later, He secretly crowned to condemn the vanity of their persecutors].

g- “*The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell in it forever*”(29):

We have already spoken about “*the land*” that the “*meeek*” (11), and “*those who wait on the Lord*” (9) will inherit.

h- The righteous shall enjoy the heavenly wisdom:

“The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom; and his tongue talks of justice” (30)

This is the first time we encounter the word “wisdom” in the book of psalms; which refers to the knowledge of the divine will, and the holy things that come from the Word of God, through the dwelling of His Holy Spirit, and the experience of fellowship with the Savior.

God’s gift to His saints is to let them enjoy the Lord Christ work in their mouth, on their tongue, and in their heart and behavior.; as He is the Wisdom, read by the righteous; the justice (the truth) uttered by his tongue; the law of God, transfigured in his heart, and the leader of his steps.

It is befitting of the believer to strive by God’s grace, to enjoy the fellowship with the Lord Christ; and according to St. Augustine: [God will be with you, on condition that His

Word would not depart from you]. At the same time, it is befitting of him to perceive that his enjoyment of the Word, is a free gift granted by God to His beloved, who respond to His love.

The Book of Psalm often concentrates upon “the mouth”, being, either a tool of the devil the liar, and father of liars; through which he presents deception, falsity, and blasphemy; Or it is the tool of God, through which He proclaims His wisdom, and His exalted secrets.

The godly believer is like a harp that plays the secrets of God, whose strings are the heart, mouth, and work, play together in harmony. What the mouth utters, conforms to what is in the heart, and responded to by the behavior.

i- None of his steps shall slide; nor deflect from the royal path:

“The law of God is in his heart; and none of his steps shall slide” (31)

The secret of his commitment to the royal path, is his love for the divine commandment from his whole heart, and obeying it in his practical life. For him, the commandment is not a burden, but a support that keeps him on the royal path, and none of his steps shall slide. By it, he likens God his Creator, and enters into the divine bosom, through the Holy Spirit, who commands us by the Word, and supports us to do according to it.

j- The wicked has no authority over the righteous:

“The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him. The Lord will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged” (32, 33)

It may seem that the righteous is perpetually in the hand of the wicked; Yet God would never leave him as such; but will save him, as He did when He saved David from king Saul's hand; Mordecai from Haman's; and Peter from Herod's. And if there is no escape from the enemies' hands for some reason or another, according to God's purpose, He opens up the gates of heaven, and takes His saints to paradise, like what He did with St. Steven, and the rest of the martyrs.

The Father left His own Son Jesus in the hands of His enemies, Yet, not for long; as the Lord Christ said to Pilate: "*You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above*" (John 19: 11); and, "*This is your hour and the power of darkness*" (Luke 22: 53). It is as though the darkness has got authority over the Lord Christ, until salvation is consummated by His crucifixion.

The psalmist may refer here to the ultimate judgment, when justice is done, and the just verdict is issued; as it happened with the two women who fought against one another over a new born infant, each of them claiming him to be hers. While Solomon the Sage appeared impartial, yet he ultimately secured the right of the genuine mother. ... As such, God may, for a certain purpose, keep silent for some time, but at the designate time, He issues the divine verdict.

+ The body may be delivered into the hands of the persecutors; but God will not leave it there; For from the captive body, God will bring forth the triumphant soul.

You should be aware, not to fall prey through lust into a wicked hand; lest, through your desire for temporal life, you would fall into the claws (of the lust), and would accordingly lose the eternal life.

(St. Augustine)

The righteous do not fear falling into the hands of the wicked; for God with His love, righteousness, and justice, will save them from their hands;

and eternally glorifies their souls. Yet, they truly fear evil itself, lest they would fall under the verdict and perish. They are the saints of God who gain *“the glorious liberty of the children of God”*, and no one could do them harm; as according to St. Clement of Alexandria, [For the righteous, even earth would become heaven; And once the devil is taken away from his inner life, God will set His kingdom inside him; and no one could ever do him harm.

k- By God, the righteous will be exalted , and the wicked will slide or cut off:

The eighth commandment in this psalm is:

“Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it” (34)

Waiting on the heavenly Lord, He will “exalt” us, as though from the trash to partake of His eternal glory; while, being denied of this gift, they will be cut off from God, the Source of their life, and will slide down together with the devil, their father.

l- Contrary to the righteous, the wicked, seeking the vain glory, would lack the inner glory:

“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree; yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found” (35, 36)

In vain, the wicked seek the glory of this world; for they will perish together with their glory. Yes, they may look flourishing in this world, yet for sometime; they may look haughty like the cedar of Lebanon, But, *“Now, the ax is laid to the root of the trees; Therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”*

(Matthew 3: 10; 7: 19). The proud Nebuchadnezzar, “*saw himself as a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, its height reached to the heavens, and could be seen to the ends of all the earth. Its leaves were lovely, its fruits abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it. The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. ... Then the Holy one coming down from heaven issued His order to chop down the tree, and to cut off its branches; strip off its leaves, and scatter its fruit; let the beasts get out from under it, and the birds from its branches. Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze to the tender grass of the field ...*” (Daniel 4).

Nebuchadnezzar, the great king was “*driven from men, his dwelling came to be with the beasts of the field, was made to eat grass like oxen; was wet with the dew of heaven; and seen times passed over him, till he knew that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whoever He chooses*”.

According to the psalmist, the wicked pass away and behold, they were no more. They are like actors in a theatrical play, who, once they finish their act, they go on their way, together with their alleged names, riches, glory, and authority. Eliphaz the Temanite says about the foolish wicked one: “*I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation*” (Job 5: 3); and, “*Dreadful sounds are in his ears; In prosperity the destroyer comes upon him*” (Job 15: 21).

- + Pride, arrogance, haughtiness, and boasting, are all not according to the teachings of the Lord Christ, who taught us humility; but according to the spirit of the antichrist whom the Lord rebukes by the prophet saying: “*For you have said in your heart, ‘I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God’*” (Isaiah 14: 13).

(Cyprian the martyr)

- + Let us flee; for what is there is like nothing; what we assume to be honored is empty; and what we think to be something, will soon be no more. *“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree; yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more”* (35, 36). ... Pass like Moses to behold the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; such a great vision; but to be able to see it, you have to take your shoes off your feet; namely, to take off all the earthly bonds of evil, all the bonds of the world; like what the Lord Christ did when He sent His apostles *“without money bag, sack, nor sandals”* (Luke 10: 4) so as not to carry the temporal things along with them.

(St. Ambrose)

- + Whoever exalts himself will be brought down. Cain exalted himself over his brother Abel, and killed him, to become a cursed fugitive on earth. So did the people of Sodom, over Lot; And God brought over them fire from heaven, to be burnt together with their city. So did Esau over his brother Jacob, who got his first birth rights and blessings; So did Jacob’s children over their brother Joseph, to end up prostrating themselves before him in Egypt; and so did Pharaoh over Moses and his people, to end up drowning in the Red Sea, together with his army; etc.

(Father Aphrahat)

The psalm ends by confirming the commitment of the righteous to meekness and uprightiness, to gain salvation and conquest from the Lord, in whom they trust, confirming that the end of the hypocrites, breakers of the law, is perdition.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 37

YOU ARE MY JOY AND CONQUEST

- + The wicked is puffed up by his temporal success;
And trusts in his authority and possibilities;
As for me, I find in You, O Lord, my gladness and conquest.

- + Open my eyes to see the land of the living;
And enjoy its spiritual riches;
Your church is the land of the living; Your spiritual House;
And You are her riches; Hence I acquire You in my heart.

- + Grant me not to be envious of the wicked, lest I fall into malice;
Grant me Your heavenly wisdom, to be clothed with Your meekness;
Teach me to trust in You, and to anticipate Your heavenly reward.

=====

PSALM 38

THE THIRD PSALM OF REPENTANCE

This psalm is a personal lamentation; one of the seven psalms of repentance.

The prophet David, passing through a great tribulation, and his sufferings reaching their climax, this psalm revealed four things that made his sufferings greater:

- a- A serious sickness dwelt upon him, which prevailed upon any other aspect of his life (5 – 8); his body utterly failed, and his soul was embittered . The psalmist appears broken-hearted, knows no taste of comfort, as though a fever has come over him, that weakened his heart, and withered his eyes.
- b- His very close friends (11 – 14; 19, 20) forsook him, and looked upon him as a fugitive, assuming that health, honor, and riches, are all fruits of good works; whereas sickness, poverty, and loss of good reputation, are all fruits of evil works (Deuteronomy 32: 23, etc.; Job 6: 4; 16: 12, etc.).
- c- He faced persecutions by wicked deadly enemies (12, 19); endured their vain accusations in silence (13, etc.), trusting in the mercy of God on him.
- d- He suffered more because of feeling his own sin, which he openly confessed before God (4, 8); he felt swallowed by his iniquity (4, 5); Beside feeling that the good he did was paid back with evil (20 etc.). ... Anyway, he returned to God, and cried out to Him with no despair, hoping in

His compassion.

He found before him no one to resort to for help, except the Lord, who is alone able to wipe out the foolishness of his past, and the misery of his present, together with their activities.

The Ashkenazi Jews (whose origin is in Eastern Europe), use this psalm in the evening prayers of the third day of the week; on account of that, in the evening, a feeling of loneliness and doubts usually dwell upon man; and with the darkness with its horrible sounds and nightmares, there is a greater need of this psalm.

This psalm is suitable as a prayer that brings us forth into a personal retreat with God, in which we tell Him about our serious spiritual and physical ailments; to enjoy the Holy of Holiness.

This psalm includes 22 verses, alphabetically founded

According to some, the sufferings mentioned in this psalm concern the Lord Christ; Hence are sung by the church choir during the prayers of the great Friday in the Catholic church. In some of the Greek texts, it came as: They rejected Me, the beloved, "*like a corpse trodden under foot*" (see Isaiah 14: 19); as a hint to the crucified Christ. Whereas in the Coptic text, it came more obvious as: [They nailed my body].

The title:

With this painful cry-out, this psalm shares with psalm 70 the title: 'To bring to remembrance', probably referring to the sacrifice of remembrance (Leviticus 2: 2, 9, 16; 5: 12; Isaiah 66: 3). Singing praise with this psalm was probably offered together with a sacrifice. In the

Aramian Tergom, the title is spread to be: (a daily offering of remembrance).

As remembrance to God is work, the word here implies a presentation of a case before God, crying out for His help. In other words, feeling his continuous need of God, his Helper, particularly at the time of tribulation, man lifts his heart in prayer, and offers sacrifices of love, to proclaim his inner cry-outs, mixed with thanksgiving and praise, for the sake of his past experience of God's dealings with him, to proclaim his acceptance of the good will of God, and to anticipate His salvation, unceasingly working in our life.

Whom, or what, to bring to remembrance?

1- The prophet David put this psalm as a remembrance for himself as well as for others; so as not to forget soon the Lord's chastisement on him; and the temptations through which he passed. So did King Hezekiah (See Isaiah 38); And the prophet Jeremiah did not forget his sufferings and past misery (See Lamentations 3: 20).

2- Being, ourselves, God's remembrances, we remind Him of our sufferings, and what we need of His help.

3- According to the Septuagint version, the title of this psalm came as: (to bring to remembrance, for the sake of the Sabbath); which implies that the psalmist remembers the true comfort, the spiritual Sabbath. However great are his sufferings from his enemies, hidden and manifest; here he confesses that, there is only one way to reach that Sabbath; namely, through repentance, confession, and trust in God.

The general frame:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1- A Repentance and confession | 1 - 4 |
| 2- A serious illness | 5 - 8 |
| 3- The r eturn to God | 9 - 15 |
| 4- Confidence in confronting the enemies | 16 – 22 |

1- REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION: (1 – 4)

“O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath; Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure” (1)

Although these are almost the same first words of the first psalm of repentance (Psalm 6: 1); yet, according to the Hebrew text, they are not completely similar. As we previously said in our interpretation of psalm 6, the psalmist is not asking God not to rebuke him, but not to rebuke him in His wrath; For he is in need of God’s rebuke in His divine care, and not in His wrath.

Because of sin, we fear God’s anger and wrath; But looking forward to His fatherly compassion, we see in His chastening, love and care: *“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; For whom the Lord loves, He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights”* (Proverb 3: 11)

- + Confess these things before God; Confess your sins before the divine Judge in prayer; if not by the tongue, do it by remembrance, to be qualified for His mercy.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“For Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down” (2)

Feeling that his iniquities have covered his head; and that the arrows of the battle have stabbed his conscience; and pierced his heart, the

prophet David perceived that the hand of the Holy God presses him in chastisement.

What are “the arrows of God”, but His chastisements emerging from His love for us; that wound, yet do not kill; separate the truth from the vain; and enflame the soul toward the new life holy in the Lord, to come to be “*lovesick*” (Songs 2: 5; 5: 8). Our hearts are wounded by “the arrows of God”, in order for us to experience the life of repentance from the depths of the heart, and to have our hearts burn with love for God our Savior.

“The arrows of the Lord” are His promises proclaimed in His Holy Book; Or His Word that grants alertness and true knowledge of the soul and of God, and an ability to repentance; by which the soul would be wounded, to enjoy the true Sabbath; namely, comfort in the Lord.

“The arrows of God”, are the incarnate Word of God, who was stabbed for our sake, and His side opened up to let us enter into His heart, and perceive the secrets of His love. They, themselves, are “the arrows of the Father”, which never miss the goal, but pierce the heart to grant it the wounds of comfort, set upon unceasing exalted love! They are “the Hand of the Father”, by whose incarnation and crucifixion, He took hold of me; approached me, entered into my depths, became my Head, and in Him I came to have fellowship with Him! ... It is as though the psalmist says: [Chasten me; but send Your arrows; namely, send the Word of God to my world; ... Let Him enter into my depths; ... Let Him receive my heart, mind, and body; ... Let Him take complete hold of me.

+ What made the arrows pierce him? ... the punishment; and probably the pains of the mind and the body, which we are committed to endure in this life; which he called the arrows.

The righteous 'Job' mentioned these arrows when he suffered severe pains; proclaiming: "*The arrows of the Almighty are within me*" (Job 6: 4).

The words of God, even if they are like arrows, yet they produce love and not pain! ... Loving something we do not possess, we feel pain The bride of Christ, in the person of the church utters these words in the Song of songs: "*I am lovesick*" (Song 2: 5; 5: 8); She was sorrowful for she loved something she has not yet (perfectly) possessed; She is wounded; yet her wound will soon bring her forth into perfect health.

(St. Augustine)

"For Your hand presses me down" (2)

The children of God perceive that the hand of God presses them down because of their sins::

- a- To reveal to them the extent of the bitterness of sin
- b- To protect them by His divine care, even while they suffer from His chastisements.
- c- To grant them the repentance and the return to Him, to "*seek the Lord of hosts*" (Isaiah 9: 13)

"The hand of God", as we already said, are His arrows; which, on one aspect, refer to His chastisements, meant for the salvation of His children; And, on another aspect, refers to the Lord Christ who, being "the working Hand of the Father", consummated the salvation; on account of that He and the Father are One; "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son....*"; proclaiming by the cross, the divine love.

If God desires to grant salvation to His children, using every means possible; His children, on their side, perceiving His love, seek from Him to keep His anger away from

them, but to take away their sins which deprived them of the security of their inner life, and destroyed their bones; namely, their inner strength; expressed by the psalmist as:

“There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger; nor is there any health in my bones because of my sin” (3)

Because of man’s sins, God’s anger will dwell upon him. Unless he is supported by the divine mercies; he would lose all the health of his body; as though having a destructive illness; and his inner bones; namely his inner being will tremble. The mighty David, known for his courage; who was not terrified, as a boy with no weapons, by the lion, the bear, nor by Goliath with all his weapons; ... Now, as a king, is greatly terrified and tremble by his own sin. The sweet psalmist has lost all gladness, and forgot all glories, to confront a sure eternal perdition.

“For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (4)

The psalmist proclaims the multitudes of his sins, whose burden has gone over his head, too heavy for him, they bowed his head down to the dust. He proclaims that he became in need of God’s amazing salvation.

- + There is no more arrogant than the proud wicked who lifts his head up in haughtiness against God ... How would God deal with such a man? He will bring his iniquities over his head, as a heavy burden over his crown.

(St. Augustine)

- + If, after all that, virtue seems to you as a heavy burden, you should know that iniquity is heavier. That is what the Lord Christ revealed by saying *“Take My yoke upon you”* (Matthew 11: 29), He said: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11: 28); to show that sin, as well, is

a heavy burden, too heavy to endure. He did not only say: “*all you who labor*”, but said: “*and heavy laden*”, the way it was described by the psalmist, saying: “*like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me*”; and as described by Zechariah as “*a lead disc*” (Zechariah 5: 7)..

Sin is extremely heavy like lead; as said about Pharaoh and his soldiers who “*They sank like lead*” (Exodus 15: 10). And when the sin of doubt entered into the life of St. Peter, “*He began to sink*” (Matthew 14: 31).

2- A SERIOUS ILLNESS: (5)

The hand of chastisement by the Lord came down over him as a serious illness, because of his sin; there was no health in his body; nor in his soul; in humiliation he mourned all day long, and groaned because of the turmoil of his heart;.

“My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness” (5)

+ Sin is not only a heavy burden, but is foul smelling ... Foolishness is the cause of all our evils.

+ Nothing is more filthy, unclean, and foul-smelling than sin; that led the psalmist to say: “*My wounds are foul and festering*”

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ The beauty or ugliness of the soul is a product of her virtues or iniquities, and of the color thereof; it either makes her glorious, to hear the prophet say to her: “*The king will greatly desire your beauty*” (Psalm 45: 11); or ugly, to confess the foulness of her shame, saying: “*My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness*” (5); and to hear the Lord ask: “*Is there balm in Gilead? Is there no*

physician there? Why then there is no recovery for the health of the daughter of Mt people?" (Jeremiah 8: 22)..

(Father Pavnotius)

- + Sin has an abhorrent odor; and virtue ha a fragrant one.
- + Your good works are your fragrant perfume; otherwise, your sins would produce the festering odor of foolishness.

(The scholar Origen)

The psalmist showed that foolishness is the beginning of every sin.

- + The arrogant and the anger-ridden man fall victims of their attitudes, and their lack of wisdom; Saying: "*There is no soundness in my flesh; My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness*" (3, 5), the psalmist shows that foolishness is the beginning of all sins. A virtuous man who fears God is more understanding than others; according to Solomon the Sage: "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*" (Proverb 1: 7).

(St. John Chrysostom)

"I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly, I go mourning all the day long" (6)

Who is He, who is so troubled, whose soul bowed down greatly within him, and mourned all the day long, but the Lord Christ who knew no sin, became sin for our sake; bore our foul and festering sins, and received our wounds in His body?!... . And behold, He enters into passion,

and is bowed down to the ultimate end, to the reproach of the cross, to bring us forth into His eternal comfort (His Sabbath).

When the tax-collector bowed his head down because of his sins (Luke 18: 16)), he was lifted up by Him who was bowed under the weight of the cross for his sake. He lifted his head, even his whole being, to make him partake of His righteousness and glory.

Every day of our life on earth, we mourn because of our sins; to hear Him, who bore our sorrows, say: "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*" (Matthew 5: 4).

The psalmist probably intends to proclaim that man's haughtiness leads him to sin, that humiliates him in his depths, and bows his soul down to dust. God allows for chastisement to reveal to him the humiliation caused by sin, and to make him return to his Savior and lifts his head in the Lord.

+ He bowed because he has exalted himself; For "*He who humbles himself in the sight of God, He will lift him up*" (James 4: 10) God would easily find a burden to crush you with, which is "*your iniquities that have gone over your head*", that make you bow down to earth. ... By saying: "*All day long*", he means (to the end, or until death).

(St. Augustine)

"For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh" (7)

The wicked may probably enjoy good health, but for a sometime; Whereas the godly believer will enjoy the spiritual body, eternally glorified.

Now, having discovered the fruits of sin, destroying his soul and body, that may even deny him the enjoyment of the eternal glory, his groans turned into cry-outs of true repentance coming out of his heart, and said:

“I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart” (8)

- + You often hear the men of God interrupt their prayers by groans and sighs; and you may wonder why! ... Beside those groans and sighs, heard by those near by, there are inner groans, not heard by human ears!

Someone may mourn his loss of a son or a spouse; And another may mourn his vineyard destroyed by hail; ... they cry out by physical groans; but the men of God, cry out for remembering the Sabbath, *“where the kingdom of God is, that flesh and blood cannot inherit”* (1 Corinthians 15: 50); to say: *“I groan because of the turmoil of my heart” (8)*.

(St. Augustine)

- + Let us pray, not with a loud voice, Let us cry out with our hearts to God

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

3- THE RETURN TO GOD: (9 – 15)

“Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You” (9)

Here the cry-out is to God, the wholly knowledgeable; who hears the hidden sighs; and the only Physician who can hear and see the hidden things. If man’s heart is broken

because of sin, God will approach him as a Physician and a Savior, to heal both his soul and body

+ Put your sighs before God, "*Your Father who sees in secret, will reward you*" (Matthew 6: 6).

Your sighs are your prayer; if your sighs are continuous, so will be your prayer as well. Hence the apostle says: "*Pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5: 17). Can we, unceasingly, bow our knees, worship with our bodies, or raise our hands? No! ... But there is another way of inner praying, namely, the unceasing sighs.

If you long for the Sabbath (the comfort), "*Pray without ceasing*".

"My sighing is not hidden from You"

If sighs are perpetually hidden, so are the groans; which, although would not always reach the ears of men, yet they are not hidden from those of God.

(St. Augustine)

+ I wish no one despise repentance or humility; As it was David, the great king who has so done, namely, (offered repentance with humility), it is befitting of us to cry out loudly as though on someone dead; and to weep with a flood of tears, on the soul, perished by sin.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle).

"My heart pants, my strength fails me; As for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me" (10)

Knowing no hypocrisy, the psalmist accuses himself in strong faithfulness, initially proclaims that he suffers, not from any harm done by others, but rather from himself; ... it is his own sin that destroys his heart, and makes him lose his inner insight.

He suffer in his body; his heart is disturbed and filled with troubles; his strength failed; and the light of his eyes has gone from him; namely he has lost his life, strength, and enlightenment; and came to be in need of God to shine on him, and to grant him the enlightenment anew.

+ The Father *“has seen”*; He *“who dwells on high”* (Psalm 113: 5, 6); He *“who regards the lowly, but the proud He knows from afar”* (Psalm 138: 6); *“His father saw him”* (Luke 15: 20); The features of the father shone upon the face of the son approaching him, in a way that scattered all the darkness brought on him by his iniquity. The darkness of the night is not like that brought forth by sin. Listen to the psalmist say: *“My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up”* (Psalm 40: 12); and: *“My iniquities like a heavy burden are too heavy for me”* (4), then adds, *“The light of my eyes has gone from me”* (10). Like the night that swallows the light of the day that passed, sin destroys the strength of our perception ... It is obvious that unless the heavenly Father shone with His light on the face of His returning son; ... unless He took away the mist of His reproach by the light of His splendor, this son would not be able to behold the splendid face of God.

(Father Botros the Kheriologios)

Now, as the psalmist lost the health of his body, the soundness of his soul, and the light of his inner insight, what is the position of his loved ones, friends, and kinsmen?

“My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague; and my kinsmen stand afar off” (11)

His loved ones and friends (neighbors) turned into enemies, stood aloof from him, with no feelings of friendship nor love; Assuming that God is against him, they sought his soul, and laid snares to catch him. His kinsmen stood afar off, not supporting him against his oppressors who used all possible means to destroy him. ... An extremely painful situation; yet convenient for the divine care to come to his support.

Who are the neighbors who (came close) to the Lord? And who are the kinsmen who stood afar from him? ... The Jews were His neighbors who came close to Him when He was crucified. And the apostles were like His kinsmen, yet they stood afar for fear of partaking of His passion.

This could be interpreted in a different way: By "His friends" he probably means those who pretended to be His friends, when they said to Him: "*Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth*" (Matthew 22: 16), trying to catch Him concerning paying tax to Caesar; He convinced them through the words they themselves uttered.

(St. Augustine)

His own came against Him; and His disciples escaped at the moments of His crucifixion. What David suffered from his own people was a shadow of what the Lord Christ Himself suffered.

The prophet David complains from the malice of his enemies, who, used the chance of his illness and troubles, to seek his soul, namely, to destroy his life completely; using lies and slanders

"Those also who seek my life lay snares for me; those who seek my hurt speak of destruction, and plan

deception all the day long” (12)

Before all their deceptions, the psalmist, in wisdom of the spirit, stood silent, to keep his composure in confronting those tempests.

“But I, like a deaf man, do not hear; and I am, like a mute who does not open his mouth” (13)

What an amazing contradiction between tongues that do not cease to speak slanders, and silence and quiescence. It is a symbolic portrait of what happened during the trial of the Lord Christ, about whom is said: *“He, who has no deceit in His mouth; who, when he was reviled, did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to Him who judges righteously”* (1 Peter 2: 22, 23; Isaiah 53: 7).

- + David was not perpetually silent, but for sometime; he was not utterly mute, but he used to refrain from answering the enemies who stirred him up, and the wicked who offended him.

(St. Ambrose)

- + (from the story of life of Abba Anthony)
After few months, when the demons came singing bible verses, *“I am like a man who does not hear”* (Psalm 38: 14). Another time they came stirred up in a way that shook the whole place; Yet, I prayed to keep my mind from being disturbed; Then they came clapping their hands, whistling, and dancing.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + It is so befitting of you to act, as though you are deaf, mute, and blind.

(St. John Cassian)

4- CONFIDENCE IN CONFRONTING THE ENEMIES: (16 – 22)

His sin gave his enemies the chance to exult; the same way the world perpetually do before the failure of the righteous, when falling into sins. But, by repentance, the psalmist confronted his enemies, not by his own capabilities, but by the possibilities of God.

“For I pray, ‘Only do not let them rejoice over me; those who boast against me when my foot slips; for I am ready

to fall, and my pain is ever with me” (16, 17)

The psalmist was silent before his enemies, like his Lord, about whom is said: *“He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent”* (Isaiah 53: 7). But he was not silent before God, but sang: *“I pray, ‘Only do not let my enemies rejoice over me”*. With his silence, he stood anticipating the work of God with the spirit of wisdom. Now he speaks to God, praying to Him, not to let his enemies rejoice over him, exult over his fall, magnify themselves over him with wounding words, and ridicule when his foot slips. For *“they might have occasion to reproach him”* (Nehemiah 6: 13); he resorts to Him who is capable of lifting him up from his fall.

The psalmist raised his prayer and supplications to God, not to relieve him of his tribulation, but to forgive his sins. As to the tribulation, he declares his readiness to fall under scourges, for his weaknesses are ever before him. About that St. Augustine comments, saying: [He uttered those words in great awe, as though he intends to say: ‘For that, I was born, to be scourged’].

Not waiting for the reproaches of the wicked, the psalmist confesses his sins, saying: *“For I will declare my iniquity, I will be in anguish over my sins”* (18)

- + Here, he reveals that the cause of his pain; is not falling under punishment, but because of the wound, and not of the healing; for punishment is the medication for sin.

You are committed to confess your iniquity (disobeying the law), and to grieve for your sins.

(St. Augustine)

- + Repenting with sorrow, we remember our sins; For the flood of tears that accompany the confession of our iniquities, will certainly quench the fire in our consciences.

(Father Pavnotius)

- + *“For I declare my iniquity”*

Contemplate in what the Holy Book exhorts us, not to keep our sin hidden in us. For once man accuses himself and confesses his sin, he will vomit the cause of his illness.

But, beware of whom you are going to confess your sins. Be careful to chose the one to whom you are going to expose the cause of your illness.

(The scholar Origen)

Having confessed his weaknesses, casting the blame on himself, the psalmist cried out to God to save him from his enemies; namely the devil and his evil works.

“But my enemies are (alive), and they are strong; and those who hate me wrongfully have multiplied” (19)

Saying that they are (alive), he means that the devil and his spiritual hosts have started war since the days of the first man, and are still working.

Beside their vigor and strength; they gained experience of long years of war against mankind, ... To whom shall I resort, except to the living God, the Grantor of life and strength?!... There is no cure for my spiritual illness, and for the afflictions brought on me by my adversaries, except to pray and to resort to the Savior God.

“

Being evil by nature, the devil renders evil for good, on account of that he hates the truth, and cannot endure the good; He has no interest but to oppress those who follow justice and goodness. In another location, the psalmist cries out, saying: *“In return for my love, they are my accusers, but I gave myself to prayer. Thus they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love”* (Psalm 109: 4, 5). That is always the portion for him who follows what is good, to become a subject of hatred and persecution of the devil; like *“Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil, and his brother’s righteous”* (1 John 3:12).

What they do to the righteous are an extension of what they did to the Grantor of goodness, Himself, the Lover of mankind; on whose tongue the psalmist says:

“They have rejected Me, the beloved One, as an abominable dead carcass; they have pierced My body with nails” (20)

He gave love, and they gave back rejection, *“as an abominable dead carcass”*; and instead of His goods, they nailed His body on the cross.

Now, the rejected Savior talks in the name of all His believers, members of His body, and partakers of His passions, saying:

“Do not forsake me, O Lord; O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation” (21, 22)

Whoever gets attached to the Crucified, would never know despair, because he sees that the Lord, the Helper of his salvation, would never forsake him, but will hasten to lift him up.

It is obvious that the psalmist was not in despair, or else, he would not use the last verse in this psalm, which is the highpoint of his whole prayer.

For, while the enemies were seeking his soul, and while he was living in great tribulation, the Lord hastens to receive him, to lift him up anew.

The whole outer circumstances may appear to be controversial; but God is capable of changing what is apparent.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 38

CHASTEN ME, O LORD, BY THE ARROWS OF YOUR LOVE

- + O my Lord, the arrows of sin have wounded me;
My inner wounds are foul and festering;
There is no soundness in my flesh, and my soul collapsed;
I am bowed down to dust;
My insight came to be so dark, to be able to behold Your majesty.

- + Chasten me, O Lord, by the arrows of Your love;

Let Your beloved Son pierce my heart like a fiery arrow;
The wounds of Your love heal the wounds of my sins;
Your arrows destroy the arrows of my iniquities.

+ Listen, O Lord, to the sighs of my heart;
Open my eyes up, O Lord;
Enter into my life; for my loved ones have forsaken me; and my adversaries have
oppressed me.

+ You are my love; and You are my Sanctuary;
You are the light of my eyes;
You are my close Ally, and my intimate Friend;
You are the Savior of my soul and body.

=====.

PSALM 39

EVENTS AND TIME

A personal lamentation, sung by someone suffering at the prime of his life, who, feeling the burden of sin, stands in silence, contemplates in the vanity of temporal life, and longs to jump over the temporal, to be prepared to exit from the land of his sojourn, to live with God, his Savior and Sanctuary.

According to Theodoret and others, this psalm was written at the time of Absalom's rebellion against his own father David, who perceived the vanity of temporal glory, and the vulnerability of man to unexpected calamities.

David committed himself not to grumble, nor to complain before his adversaries; but to pour all his thoughts about the vanity of human life before God alone; For he is a sojourner on earth, like a guest anticipating to abide in the eternal glories.

Now, the main question in this psalm is: Why does God chasten a weak and mortal creature like man?!

The English church uses verses 4 to 13 of this psalm in the service of burying the dead.

The title:

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

I have previously commented on such title, with the exception of the word 'Jeduthun', 'Judithun', or 'Iduthun', who, according to some, there is no credible proof that he is 'Ethan', known for his wisdom (1 kings 4: 31).

The prophet David designated Juduthun, Asaph, and Heman, to lead the ministry of singing praises to the Lord (1 Chronicles 16: 41, 42; 25: 1 – 6; 2 Chronicles 5: 12; 35: 15); a ministry continued by their sons, until as late as the days of Nehemiah. It is a special blessing for a leader to disciple his own children – whether his biological children or otherwise – to practice the same ministry to the account of the kingdom of God.

The prophet David delivered this personal lamentation to Jeduthun, and another lamentation to Asaph, to put them in tunes. (Psalm 77).

According to St. Augustine, the name ‘Jeduthun’ suits this psalm; on account of that his name means (to overlap); while, according to others it means (to cast a stone).

- + Who is that man who overlaps?; And who are those whom he overlaps? ... Those who are attached to the earth; who bow down to the dust; put their hearts in the lowly issues, and place their hope in vain things.

- + I wish ‘Jeduthun’ would come to us; I wish he would jump over those who find their pleasure in the lowly things; I wish to see him exult in the word of the Lord, and be glad in the law of the Most High.

(St. Augustine)

The general frame:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1- Man’s weakness and mortality | 1 -- 6 |
| a- The wise silence | 1 -- 3 |
| b- Mortality of the human life | 4 -- 6 |
| 2- Prayer and bringing the soul into account | 7 -- 13 |
| a- A prayer for the sake of deliverance | 7 -- 11 |

The psalm is divided into two main divisions: Man discovering the vanity of temporal life outside of God; And that there is no refuge for the weak man in his sojourn in this world, except in God Himself.

1- MAN'S WEAKNESS AND MORTALITY: (1 – 6)

a- The wise silence: (1 – 3)

"I said, 'I will guard my way, lest I sin with my tongue. I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me'" (1)

According to St. Ambrose, the psalmist talked to himself, when he was silent with the wicked; The inner silence in the presence of the wicked, has to be accompanied with a secret talk to one's soul, in the presence of God; or a debate with God Himself.

- + The prophet David teaches us that we should often wander in our heart as though in a wide place, and to converse with it as though with a confident friend; the way David himself did, as is clear from his words: *"I said, 'I will guard my way' (1)*. Solomon, his son said, *"Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well"* (Proverb 5: 15); namely, follow your own counsel (coming from an inner thinking); on account of that, *"Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out"* (Proverb 20: 5)

Starting his psalm by saying: *"I said"*, the psalmist remembers a pledge he made to God, and to himself, not to open his mouth up in the presence of the wicked, lest he would probably be stirred up and sin by his tongue. Fearing to talk to the wicked, he prefers to endure his tribulation in silence; on account of that, logic is never accepted by the wicked, whose way is violence and oppression. ... He does not fear the wicked, but he rather fears that he, himself, would probably fall with his tongue, such an unpredictable member of the body, that has to be watched like a wild animal. ... He knows for sure, how difficult it is to avoid this sin, particularly in the presence of the wicked, whose main interest is to stir up the children of God. According to the apostle James: *"If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body; ... but no man can tame the tongue"* (James 3:2, 8).

David pledged not to accuse his enemies before the wicked; not to defend himself, nor even to utter his godly views. He pledged to keep silent before them, and to talk only to God, who is capable of revealing to him the vanity of the temporal life; and His intervention to realize His divine justice in the proper time.

The psalmist often talks about the tongue and its danger; that once it slides, the whole body will slide as well, and the feet will deflect from the royal path. Hence he says: *"I said, 'I will guard my way, lest I sin with my tongue"*. And, according to St. Peter the apostle: *"He would love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile"* (1 Peter 3: 10).

+ It is not without cause that the tongue is put in a secure place (guarded by both the teeth and the lips); on account of that it easily slips

(St. Augustine)

+ By diligently guarding his tongue, the servant of God will surely destroy the counsel of the wicked.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

"I was silent and still; I held my peace to no avail, my distress grew worse. My heart grew hot within me; While I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue" (2, 3)

+ Persisting on being mute and silent, David was not disturbed to be called a "*blood-thirsty man*" (2 Samuel 16: 6, etc.); for he was sure that he is not; and sure of his good deeds.

+ As long as man enjoys a good conscience, he should not be disturbed by the false accusations; nor affected by the slanders of others, but rather by the testimonies of his own heart.

(St. Ambrose)

The prophet David was silent, as though utterly mute; he refrained even to utter holy words, before the wicked standing to oppress him, so as not "*to give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast his pearls before swine*" (Matthew 7: 6); he refrained to utter faith talk, not for fear of the wicked, but for perceiving that words would only increase his violence. However that renewed his pain, and ignited the fire in his heart. As according to

St. Paul, about his own kinsmen who reject faith: *“I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart; for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh”* (Romans 9: 2, 3).

Refraining to talk to the opposing enemy, he mused within himself; and a struggle flared in his heart, between silence, lest he may sin with his tongue, that would increase the evil of the wicked, And an inner longing to testify to the salvation work of God, and His love for the salvation of all men.

+ Suffering for having reached such a level, and longing to surpass it, the *“overlapping”* man would say: *“I was silent and still”*, for fear that I may commit iniquity; *“I held my peace”*; yet I condemn my decision to be silent.

As much as I found comfort in silence, my distress grew worse toward those who oppressed my words, and described them as wrong.... I became more sorrowful for not saying what I should have said.

(St. Augustine)

His silence caused a fire to burn in his heart; on one aspect because he loves his oppressors, seeks their salvation; and struggles between his decision to hold his peace, and his desire to talk to them; And on another aspect, his silence opened up his heart, as well as his tongue to talk to God. The more his sorrows grew, the more he felt the need to pray to God. Through suffering, we would discover the company of Christ, risen from the dead, talking to us after the long horrible silence of the crucifixion, and of the grave, to say together with the two disciple of Emmaus: *“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”* (Luke 24: 32) .

Not every silence would bring us forth into an encounter with the One risen from the dead, and to enjoy His fiery talk; but the wise silence that carries inside love even for the oppressors, and a true longing for their salvation, even at the cost of our whole temporal life. Whoever partakes of the silence, working with love, of the Lord Christ, the silence of the cross, would experience the power of His resurrection.

b- The mortality of the human life: (4 – 6);

As his tongue became silent, not uttering a word to the oppressive wicked enemy, the psalmist's heart talked to His God, and entered into a debate even with himself; which led him to discover, amid his sufferings, the truth of human life, concerning its weakness and short span. ... Although this is a fact well known by all men, yet, there is great difference between the pure mental knowledge, and its acceptance as a divine proclamation, active in man's inner depths. Hence the psalmist cries out:

“Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am” (4)

A great deal of wisdom is set upon our perception that our life on earth is like a shadow; and that the greatest achievement, if it does not prepare us for the better eternal world, would be of much lower value than the longings of the godly man. Hence the Holy Book often draws our attention to the short span of the temporal life. The apostle Paul says: *“The time is short”* (1 Corinthians 7: 29), as an important fact that touches our living faith, and our eternal being. ... Here, the psalmist David does not seek from God to proclaim to him the time of his departure, but to grant him a perpetual remembrance, a practical knowledge, and a good perception of the short span of his sojourn on earth, in order to become of better and more wisdom.

According to St. Ambrose, the psalmist here, hastens the end of his temporal life, seeking from God to realize His divine promise, and to show him his eternal position, *“when all in Christ shall be alive, but each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruit, afterwards those who are Christ’s at His coming”* (1 Corinthians 15: 22, 23).

- + *“Lord, make me know my end”*; not to stay here with all the temptations and tribulations; having to endure those who oppress us for the least of reasons; ... *“make me know my end”*, which I still not perceive (death); not the measure of my temporal life, which is already before my eyes.

- + The end about which he talks, is that on which the apostle Paul has set his eyes in his life, confessing his weakness, and perceiving within himself the changes in things he has already seen (he probably means, that with every new spiritual growth, he gets to perceive the end, in a deeper and more clear way); saying: *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on...”*(Philippians 3: 12, 13).

(St. Augustine)

Getting to know the truth of our life’s end, would prepare us to have a renewable beginning every day; saying. Our perception of the soon coming end of our temporal time on earth; and our recognition of the happy ending when all the promises of God of glories to us are realized, will motivate us to the renewable beginnings, burning with the Spirit, not delivered with despair to sufferings and tribulations.

- + The knowledge for which the psalmist prays, saying: *“Make me know the measures of my days”*, is probably very important; I wish. However, to know as well my beginnings.

(St. Jerome)

“And the measures of my days”.(4). The psalmist did not seek to know the measure of the night of his life, but *“of his days”*. For, there are no nights in the life of the godly believer, but they are all days, enlightened by the Sun of Righteousness shining on him. Despite what he suffers of tribulations and temptations, which make his life seem dark, Yet, fellowship with the Lord Christ, the Light of the world, will not give the darkness a place in his heart. *“You are all sons of light, and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness”* (1 Thessalonians 5: 5).

According to St. Augustine, the believer wishes to know the days of his life, he lives in the Lord; which bring him forth into the eternal day, when we abide in Him, and He in us. For the days without a fellowship with Him, are lost from our life, and are not counted as life. The days in which we get united with God who says about Himself: *“I AM WHO I AM”* (Exodus 3: 14), are the days counted in His eyes, in which we grow and mature; Whereas the days in which we fall into sin, united with the corruption and vanity of sin, are counted as vain, for they pass as though they have not; and they even make us lose the true days.

The psalmist goes on to say: *“that I may know (what I lack)”* (4).

- + For, while I strive here, that is what I lack (the continuous strife to reach the ultimate end). And as long as I lack, I cannot consider my self perfect, and would say: *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; ... I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3: 12, 14). Grant me to gain it as a reward for reaching the end of the race. For there, will be a place for comfort; a city, where there is no sojourn, controversy, nor temptations. ... *“Make me know the measure of my days, that I may know (what I lack)”*; lest I boast in what I already have; until I perpetually come to be in Him (in Christ), and have no self-righteousness...

(St. Augustine)

As long as I am still on earth, make me know the days in which the Sun of Righteousness shine on me, in which I have no darkness or night, which are counted for me,. For by such holy days I would know what I lack, namely, to reach perfection, and to enjoy the perfection of beholding God, and the fellowship of His glories... That is what I truly lack during my strife and my growth in Christ Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, who turns my life into a day with no night.

According to the scholar Origen, there will be many amazing situations in the great day of the Lord: Some elders will appear as little children; on account of that their true days-count are few, having lost a great number of them through their practical deprivation of the living fellowship with Christ; While some children will appear as elders, on account of their enjoyment of the fellowship with the Lord. St. John the Baptist has been as though advanced in days, while being still a fetus, when he testified to the Lord shining on him, by leaping for joy in his mother's womb; While the elders of the Jews, who know the prophecies, have lost their days, when they condemned the Righteous and delivered Him to death.

Crying out to God to make him know what he lacks, the psalmist started complaining to him that his days became as handbreadths, and was attacked by old age and calamities.

“Indeed You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age as nothing before you” (5)

- + For those days are (old days); and I long for (new days) that would never grow old; so as to say: *“Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2 Corinthians 5: 17); he became new in hope, then in actuality.

Know that Adam has become (old) in us; while Christ is renewed; *“Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day”* (2 Corinthians 4: 16). That is why, concentrating our thought on sin, death, and on time that would soon become as handbreadths, on sorrow, labor, and on the consecutive periods of age that gradually pass from infancy to old age; We would see here, (the old man), the day that grows old, the song that became obsolete, and the old covenant; But if we concentrate our attention on the inner man, on things that are renewed, instead of those that change; we shall find (the new man), (the new day), and (the new song), (the new covenant); Let us then love such renewal (in life), and not fear the old age.

Such a man, who seeks the new things, disregarding things that have passed away, would say: *“Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know (what I lack)”* (4). Contemplate in how the psalmist, while still drawing Adam with him, he hastens toward Christ.

(St. Augustine)

Discovering how his days have become as handbreadths, motivated the psalmist to hasten to pass over, or to jump, in order to enjoy the new life in Christ Jesus, perpetually renewed by His Holy Spirit, never get old, until he comes to encounter the ultimate day with no night, nor weakness of old age.

So, the psalmist discovers that his days are as handbreadths, and his essence as nothing before God (5); like a shadow wandering in the world for some time, to exit out of it, not knowing who will gather what he has collected or treasured.

“Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them” (5, 6)

- + Indeed, as what he already said: I have (overlapped) or jumped over all the mortal things, despised the lowly things, treaded by my feet over all the earthly things, soared up high, where the gladness of the Lord’s law is;... I have longed for that end, which, itself, has no end; longed for those days of true being and sound existence(for there are other days without true existence). ...I have become someone who actually strongly jump, longing for the things that endure ... Yet, as long as I am still in this world, as long as I still bear a mortal body; as long as the life of man is labor and anguish; as long as I groan and moan because of the disturbing things of this existence; ... As long as I am as such, while I am up, I fear. Lest I may fall; ... And, as long as my good and evil are not sure, *“every man at his best state is but vapor, and walks about like a shadow”*.

(St. Augustine)

- + Tell me; If we see someone chase the wind, attempting to hold it, Would we not say that he is out of his mind?... If we see someone try hold a shadow, disregarding the actual thing; If we see someone hate his wife, and embrace her shadow; or hate his son, and love his shadow; Would you need further proof for his folly? ... Likewise, are those who greedily seek the existing things, that are actually nothing but shadows; Yes, whether glory, power, good life, wealth, luxury, or similar things in this life; according to the words of the prophet: *“My days are like a shadow that lengthens, and I wither away like grass”* (Psalm 102: 11).

(St. John Chrysostom)

Here, the psalmist talks about the riches and wealth unjustly gathered, and abused.

- + Riches are vain if spent on luxurious life, but are not vain if given to the needy.

(St. John Chrysostom)

2- PRAYER, AND BRINGING THE SOUL INTO ACCOUNT: (7 – 13)

a- A prayer for the sake of deliverance (7 – 11):

The prayer mentioned here is considered among the most amazing and deep prayers. Discovering the vanity of the temporal life, longing to surpass it to reach the day without a night, and the actuality without a shadow; man puts all his hope in the Lord, who, alone, is capable of saving him from the inner enemy, namely, the sin, or his corrupt nature; and from the outer enemies, namely, in his war against the devil and the outer evil, by the spirit of godliness; proclaiming his complete readiness to submit to God, the Creator, the Savior, and the Physician; to treat him with all medications, however bitter they may be.

“And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You” (7)

Now ‘Jeduthun’ – namely, he who (overlaps) the time – puts all his hope in the Lord; not to be destroyed by time and vanity of the earthly life; waiting for the coming of the Lord, in whom he completely trusts and loves; and whom he ministers, not for the sake of getting any temporal goods, but of having the Grantor of the gifts Himself.

- + Now, ‘Jeduthun’ says: “Lord, *what do I wait for?*”, He who provides me with everything; with Himself, He who is above all, “*By whom everything was created*”, including me. He is waiting for me.

Do you see how 'Jeduthun' waits for the Lord?... Therefore, no one here, should call himself perfect, lest he would be deceiving himself; And as long as he will never be perfect here, What will be his benefit, in case he loses his humility?

(St. Augustine)

Putting his hope in the Lord, and trusting in Him as the Forgiver of sins; the psalmist proclaims his acceptance of God's chastisement, even if He allows for him to be the reproach of the foolish; saying:

"Deliver me from all my transgressions; Do not make me the reproach of the foolish" (8)

The psalmist confesses that his sin made him the ridicule and the reproach of the foolish. He wept entreating God, not to restore his honor before the foolish and the wicked, but to purify him from all his transgressions, until he passes through this temporal life to reach the Holy One, in a holy and pure life in the Lord.

Indeed, feeling the bitterness of the divine chastisements, the psalmist in his human weakness, seeks from the Lord to remove those plagues from him; for he felt consumed by the blow of His hand. He was mute and did not open his mouth before the oppressing foolish; to talk to his Creator.

"I was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did it. Remove Your plague from me. I am consumed by the blow of Your hand" (9)

- + To protect myself from the foolish, I was mute, and did not open my mouth; For whom shall I tell what goes on inside me? I listen to the Lord God's words within me, "*For He will speak peace to His people and to His saints*" (Psalm 85: 8)

(St. Augustine)

The psalmist was mute with the foolish; But with the Lord, He entered into supplication seeking mercy. By being mute, he also means that, having nothing to defend himself before His Creator, he stopped justifying himself, but opens his mouth hoping for His compassion.

St. Paul the apostle pleaded three times that the thorn of illness might depart from him; but the Lord's response was: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12: 9). And having experienced the grace of God and the blessing of the tribulations, the apostle said: "*Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Corinthians 12: 9, 10).

"When with rebukes You correct man for iniquity, You make his beauty melt away like a moth; Surely every man is vapor" (11)

- + Let Him who created me renew me; Let Him create me anew ... This is the foremost gift of God's grace; to make us confess our shortcomings; that however good we do, and whatever our capabilities are, , yet this is realized in us: "*He who glories, let him glory in the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 1: 31); and, "*When I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Corinthians 12: 10).

(St. Augustine)

Through God's chastisements because of iniquity, the believer perceives that his life is like the spider's web; and that it is vain to get disturbed because of temporal issues.

- + Yes indeed, it is vain for man to get disturbed; for anxiety because of these issues is extremely disturbing and troublesome; But it is not this way in the heavenly places. Here, on earth, some people labor, and some enjoy; While there, everyone gets the crop of his labor; he gets a double reward.

b- A supplication for a response to his prayer: (12 – 13)

The psalmist ends the psalm with a supplication to God to respond to his prayer, together with tears that would not dry up, and a confession of his sojourn, and his longing to pass through the world, as a land of sojourn, enjoying the forgiveness of his sins.

"Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears" (12)

He began his prayer; and as the tribulation got stronger, his heart got filled with sighs, then with cry-outs; and finally, his tears talked in such a language, unutterable by the tongue.

"For I am a stranger on earth, a sojourners as all my fathers were. Turn away Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength, before I depart and am no more" (12, 13)

- + The saints were strangers and sojourners in this world ... Abraham, in all his issues, lived belonging to the enduring city. He showed hospitality, brotherly love, mercy, and longsuffering, with no longing for wealth, nor temporal glory.

- + Let us be strangers, so that God would not be ashamed to be called our God; ... While being ashamed to be called God of the wicked, He is glorified to be called God of the righteous, the merciful, and those growing in virtue.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Notice how David amazingly looked at his forefathers who were known for virtue: "*For I am a stranger on earth, a sojourner as all my fathers were*".

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + Hastening to depart from this land of sojourn, David says: "*I am (fleeing) before You on earth; a sojourners as all my fathers were*"; As a sojourner he was hastening to the home of all saints. But he seeks forgiveness for the transgressions he has committed here, before his departure from this life; lest he would be denied the eternal life; hence he says: Forgive me to get comfort before I go and be no more.

(St. Ambrose)

- + Set me free from my sins before I depart, so as not to go with my iniquities. He refers to that happy home, where the saints have fellowship in the eternal life, in the unchangeable truth.

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 39

INSTRUCT ME HOW TO SURPASS THE EVENTS

- + Teach me, O Lord how to hold my peace before the foolish;
So as to talk to You in my depths;

- + By Your love you have *“hedged me up with thorns; and walled me in”* (Hosea 2: 6)
Gates are closed shut before me by the wicked who unjustly accuse me;
I shall return to You, and confess my iniquities to You;
I shall forget all about those wicked foolish; by whom, I know, You chasten me;

- + Instruct me how to surpass events and time;
How to the troubles of the wicked and their vain accusations;
How to refrain from debating them; nor to defend myself before them;
How to surpass the corrupt nature, To live the new resurrected life;
How to overcome every lust; and even to surpass my body needs;
How to surpass the time and the temporal things; to be able to behold heaven and
its Lord;
Your Holy Spirit alone can carry me like on the wings of a dove;
Can lift me up to fly, and not to be submerged in the mire of sin;
Your grace is my support.

=====

PSALM 40

“BEHOLD, I COME, TO DO YOUR WILL, O MY GOD”

In psalms 37 and 38, the prophet David talks about waiting for the Lord; having suffered much from king Saul, Absalom, and the betrayal of Ahithophel, etc; Now, having enjoyed salvation after so long suffering, particularly on the hands of his rebellious son Absalom, his lamentations turned into praises of thanksgiving, he presents by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

This praise of thanksgiving is counted as a Messianic psalm, for it concentrates on the Person of the Lord Christ and His salvation work. The epistle to the Hebrews testifies that the Lord Christ is the Talker here, presenting His experiences, and Himself, being the One who came to consummate the will of the Father; and who descended to Hades, to the depth of the mire of the pit, bearing the sins of His people; presenting thanksgiving for His resurrection; and a new praise, to be sung by His people whom He has saved and rescued.

This psalm is counted of the most magnificent of psalms, to be connected to the psalm of the glorious passions (Psalm 22), connected in turn to the praise of the resurrection.

The prophet David wrote this psalm after the rebellion of his son Absalom, hidden under the appearances of religion, and of offering sacrifices (2 Samuel 7-12). Then, it was gradually used in the liturgical service (the general worship).

The general frame:

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1- A praise for the conquest of Christ | 1 -- 5 |
| 2- The obedient Servant and His sacrifice | 9 -- 13 |
| 3- His enemies and His saints | 14 – 17 |

1- A PRAISE FOR THE CONQUEST OF CHRIST: (1 – 5)

This psalm presents to us the experience of the prophet David in offering a new praise to God who saved him “*out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay*”. What is new here is not the words, as much as it is the perception of the heart of an almost captivation by death, if it was not for the intervention of God his Savior. We know nothing about what “*the horrible pit, and the miry clay*” mean, whether the psalmist was suffering from a serious illness that almost brought his life to an end, or from a particular sin that almost destroyed his depths, or from the bitterness caused by the rebellion of his own son Abasalom, and the betrayal of certain of his men? ... The same as we know nothing about “*the thorn in the flesh*” that affected the apostle Paul’s life.(2 Corinthians 12: 9). All we know is that bitter sufferings precede the gladness of salvation, and singing the new praise.

. *“I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined to me, and heard my cry”* (1, 2)

The psalmist probably intends to say that, having fallen under sufferings and tribulations, from which no man could save him, nor he has any desire for man’s intervention thereof, he patiently waited, anticipating with faith the hand of God “*who bruises, but He binds up*” (Job 5: 18), crushes and heals; he knows how to anticipate, however long it will take; for he trusts in the wisdom and might of God his Savior; who knows how, and when to responds to the prayer. ... God will save him, and in His salvation, the one who suffers will enjoy what is greater than being saved, namely, he will enjoy God’s care for him, and His dwelling in his life, which is the greatest gift that

the believer could get; enjoying, not only the salvation, but the Savior; not only the gifts, but the Giver of the gifts Himself.

The Lord Christ presents Himself as an example of waiting for the Father, of delivering His will in His hands; whether in the garden of Gethsemane, or during the trial. He, the worshiped God prays as we do, cries out as we do, and seeks from the Father to consummate His will in Him, although it is one with His own will. ... He waits as though He needs help; He who carries all by His might; All on our behalf, working to our account, in our name, and as a role model for us; according to the words of the apostle Paul: "*Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear*" (Hebrew 5: 7). He teaches us how to conquer amid our sufferings, and in our spiritual struggle, to get the glorious victories.

He waited for the Father; In His trial, He did not bear an attitude of anger, nor uttered words of threat or grumbling; but as a silent Lamb He endured, anticipating the proclamation of His glorious resurrection.

+ I have patiently waited for the promise, presented, not by a mortal who may deceive and be deceived; I anticipated comfort, not from a mortal who may be destroyed by his own sorrows before giving comfort. ... Let us wail and weep together; let us patiently wait together; and let us, as well, pray together.

Let us understand it as such, that He promised us everything, yet He has not yet granted us to possess anything. He is the responsible promise-Giver; the faithful Grantor; Yet, you are committed to show seriousness in what you are promised; and if you are weak, or you were of the little ones, seek the promise of His mercy.

(St. Augustine)

“He also brought me up out of a horrible pit; out of the miry clay” (2)

Amid his sufferings, the psalmist felt as though he is in a horrible pit, covered with miry clay; from which, whenever he tries to lift his foot up, he would go deeper and deeper; and that there is no one to save nor to help. In this he reminds us of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 38), who was cast in the pit because of his testimony to the truth.

The pit, being very deep for anyone to lift us up, the need is for the hand of the incarnate Son of God, who, alone, can descend down to us, to save us from the pit of sin, the dominion of death, and the depths of Hades, by the work of His salvation. The deeper the pit, the greater will be the power of the work of salvation, the magnitude of our joy, and of our praise for conquest.

- + What is this horrible pit?! It is the depth of iniquity, of the desires of the body; for that is the meaning of the expression *“the miry clay”*..... From where shall I bring you up? From the depth about which you cried out in another psalm, saying: *“Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord”* (Psalm 130: 1)..

Once the wicked reaches the depth of evil, he would be despised, and would go down to new depths; for, instead of confessing his sins, he attempts to justify them.

(St. Augustine)

If sin brings us down to bitter depths, the hand of God our Savior will strongly lift us up to bear us in Him *“the Rock of ages”*.

“He set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps” (2)

The “Rock” is our Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 10: 4). He who descended to Hades, not on account of a sin He has committed, but because “*the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53: 6); and carried us from Hades in Him, being “*the Rock*”, and “*the Way*”. On Him we lean, and in Him we hide, so as not to plunge into the miry clay; but to have our feet, so strongly set, and our steps, so securely established; that In the light of the living faith we would walk, and strife with steady steps.

- + “*He set my feet upon a rock; and established my steps*”. Now, this “Rock” is Christ, We are on the Rock, and our steps are according to an ordinance and a system, to be sure of continuing our walk, and grow more and more.
- + He came to have the faith “the Rock” that was not his before, and the hope he had not. Now, he walks in Christ, he who used before to follow the vanity of the devil. Hence he says: “*He set my feet upon a rock; and established my steps*”.

(St. Augustine)

- + The temporal things are like water, like the flood that swiftly runs; he says: “*The water have come up to my neck*” (Psalm 69: 1); Whereas the spiritual things are like a rock; he says: “*He set my feet upon a rock*”, to keep the “miry clay” away from them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + We understand this “Rock” to be our Lord, He who is the “Light”, the “Truth”, the “Non-corruption” and the “Righteousness”, and who paves the spiritual way; Whoever does not divert from this way, will perpetually keep his steps free from the uncleanness of the mire of evil pleasures.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa).

“He has put a new song in my mouth – praise to our God. Many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord” (3)

Trusting in the Lord Christ, the Rock, as a foundation of His faith and his new life, and experiencing the resurrected life that conquers sin and death, the believer’s mouth opens up to sing a new song, the song of conquest, befitting of our new man; he would experience the mercies of God, new every day.

- + Being a new man, let him be conformed,... let him sing the new song, ...let him love the new things by which he himself becomes new.

- + Who could be as old as God, the eternal, the Being before all things, who has no beginning nor end?! Yet He becomes new to you, once you return to Him; Sojourning from him, you became (old; as it is written: *“(My eyes) grow old because of my enemies”* (Psalm 6: 7)... Praising our God, the praise itself will liberate us. (St. Augustine)

Being *“brought up from the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, to set his feet upon a rock (3)*, man’s tongue will exult with praise, to draw many to the life of faith, life of the fear of the Lord, and trust in Him.

“Many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord” (3).

This applies to the Lord Christ who descended to Hades, resurrected, and proclaimed the song of praise of conquest over death, drawing many to faith in Him. Entering into faith with fear; consummating their salvation in fear and trembling, and perceive the secret of the cross with

awe, they trust in the grace of the Lord that grants salvation.

- + Who is He, who is talking in this psalm? It is the Lord Christ, in the name of His members: *“He has put a new song in my mouth; ... Many will see it and fear”*; ... Following Christ Himself, they will see, on one side a narrow way, and on another side a wide-open way.

(St. Augustine)

“Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies” (4)

Receiving the Lord Christ as our Way, we go through the narrow way of the cross, and enjoy the blessed way. We do not put our hope in the vain temporal vanities, and the false deceptions of the world, but in the name of the resurrected crucified Lord.

- + Behold, there is the wide way in which you will find pleasure; which will lead to death; multitudes fill it; of those who desire to get from the hands of God, mortal honors, and everything, but God Himself.

As for you, forget about everything else;... Remember God Himself!

“Forget those things which are behind, and reach forward to those things which are ahead” (Philippians 3: 14).

Let God be your hope, Let Him lead you until the end.

Let Him be your hope, For He who created everything is better than all things; ... He who created every beautiful things, is more beautiful than all beauties; ... He who created every strong thing, is stronger than all; ... He who brought into existence everything great, is Himself the Greatest of all.

For you, He will be everything you love.

Learn how to love the Creator through His creation, through His work!
Do not allow creatures to take hold of your feelings; and make you lose the
Creator, Himself!

*“Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust; does not respect the proud, nor
such as turn aside to lies”.*

(St. Augustine)

- + Having experienced the shining glimpses, serious to man, David said: *“blessed is
the man who makes the Lord his trust”*; for such a man does not care for the vain
and foolish things, as long as he perpetually strive for the sake of Christ,
continuously look forward toward Christ by his inner eyes; Hence David returned to
God, saying: “I do not turn aside to lies”.

The Cirque is “lies”, for it is useless!;

Horse racing is “lies”, for it is contrary to care for salvation;

Theater is “lies”!

And according to Solomon the Sage: *“All is vanity”*, (Ecclesiastes 1: 2); everything
in the world.

It is thus befitting of him who desires salvation, to lift himself above the world, to
seek the world which is with God; to flee from this world, and depart from earth.

Hence, wishing to approach the Father, the Lord Christ said to His disciples:

“Arise; let us go from here” (John 14: 31).

(St. Ambrose)

The psalmist made the Lord his trust! ... Notice that the Holy Book does not separate
between the Lord and His name.

When Manoah' (father of Samson) asked the Lord, *“What is Your name?”*, the Lord
said to him, *“Why do you ask My name, it is too*

wonderful” (Judges 13: 18); And in Isaiah it is said: “*His name will be called wonderful, ... Mighty God*” (Isaiah 9: 6). “God is wonderful, and does wonderful things” (Psalm 72: 18; 77: 11); and so is His name.

The Holy Book talks to us about the following activities of God’s name:

- 1- “*Where two or three are gathered together in God’s name, He will be there in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18: 20).
- 2- We are baptized in His name for the remission of sins (Acts 2: 38); to enjoy sonship to God.
- 3- “*The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and are safe*” (Proverbs 18: 10). David perceived the power of that name when he confronted the mighty Goliath, and said to him: “*You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts*” (1 Samuel 17: 45); And he also says: “*Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth*” (Psalm 124: 8)
- 4- By the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we do wonders and miracles (Acts 4: 29, 30; Acts 3: 12-16; 3: 6).
- 5- “*In the name of the Lord, we cast out demons*” (Mark 16: 17).

Finally, the name of the Lord, being “the Truth”, *He who makes the Lord his trust, does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies*” (4); Namely, he will not put his hope in the rich, the great, or those of authority in this world.

Putting his hope in the name of the Lord, and not in the names of men, man will enjoy the amazing work of God in his life, to say:

*“You are multiplied, O Lord my God, Your wondrous deeds and Your thoughts toward us, none can compare with You
Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted” (5)*

Even if men, truthfully and faithfully, give us help, they present what they have got of vain temporal things; Whereas the Lord presents many amazing things through His exalted wisdom proclaimed in the cross; He presents salvation from sin, liberation from the devil, justification, sanctification, and son-ship to God, and an eternal glory. ... He presents a long list of the wonders of His exalted love, that reveals to us His divine thoughts toward us.

He says: "*Your thoughts toward us, none can compare with You*" (5); for the Lord presented the amazing thoughts of the cross; which is "*to the Jews, a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness*" (1 Corinthians 1: 23)..

- + These are the incomparable wondrous deeds and thoughts of God;.... Let the busybody forsake their busyness, and join us in searching for what could be more exalted and higher; or of more benefit; which, if perceived, they would be exultant for joy.

(St. Augustine)

Talking of God's wondrous deeds in the life of men, the psalmist says: "*Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they could be more than can be counted*" (5). The secrets of God's wondrous deeds are greater than to be perceived by our brain, uttered by our tongue, nor counted in practical actuality.

Commenting on the expression: "*more than can be counted*" (5), St. Augustine says that the amazing work of the cross caused many to join the Higher Jerusalem to enjoy the divine glories ... who are known to God and counted by Him. Yet, the church in the world embraces together with them a multitude of those who have the appearance of faith, namely, the non-practical faith; "*who are more than could be counted*".

- + Notice the wondrous deeds of God: There are those who could be counted, and those who are more than could be counted. There is a definite count of those who belong to the Higher Jerusalem; for “*the Lord knows those who are His*” (2 Timothy 2: 19); He knows the Christians who fear Him, who have faith in Him, who keep His commandments, who walk along His ways, who keep themselves from iniquities, and who, if they fall, would confess their sins; those “*could be counted*”.

(St. Augustine)

- + “*Those who could be counted*” are those designated to reign together with Christ.... Many “*more than could be counted*” can enter the church; but cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.
- + Do not marvel at the great number of (bad) Christians who fill the church, who have communion of the altar; who would loudly commend the bishop or the priest, when they give a sermon concerning good behavior; those who are previously prophesied by the psalm, saying: “*Were I to proclaim or tell of them, they could be more than can be counted*” (5). They can attend with us in the present church; but they will not be able to stay with us in the congregation of the saints after the resurrection.

(St. Augustine)

2- THE OBEDIENT SERVANT AND HIS SACRIFICE: (6 – 13)

Having talked about the multitude of wondrous deeds of God, distinct in the work of redemption, the psalmist set forth to the cross to search for its secrets, to see the unique sacrifice that surpassed all the sacrifices of the old covenant.

“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; but my ears You have opened (You have given me a body); Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, ‘Here I am; In the scroll of the Book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God; and Your law is within my heart’” (6 – 8)

What did the psalmist see in the sacrifice of the crucified Christ?

1- God does not desire sacrifices, offerings or burnt offerings; whose only value is set in one thing, namely, to be a preparation for the cross, being a symbol of it; Beyond this symbol, God does not desire them; Hence he says: *“You have given me a body”*; For by the incarnation, He entered the way of the cross.

+ The true sacrifice was recognized by the believers of the old covenant; revealed to them through symbols. Those have practiced rites that bore a symbol of the truth to come. ... Many of them understood its meaning; but more did not.

They used to slay the lamb, and eat the unleavened bread. ... *“Indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us”* (1 Corinthians 5: 7). In the sacrifice of Christ, I recognize the slain lamb.

(St. Augustine)

+ Knowing that, by disregarding the righteousness, they refrain from loving God, God declared that *“He has no delight in all sacrifices and burnt offerings, as in obeying the voice of the Lord; Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams”* (1 Samuel 15: 22). And David also says: *“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; (You have given me a body); Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require”* (6). Teaching them that God desires obedience, that brings them more

security than the sacrifices and burnt offerings, which benefit them nothing concerning the righteousness; -- he utters a prophecy about the new covenant at the same time.

Talking more clearly about these issues, psalm 50 (51) says: "*You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart – these O God, You will not despise*" (Psalm 51: 17).

Requiring nothing of the sort, God says: "*I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds; for every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all its fullness. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?*" (Psalm 50: 9), etc. ... And to give comfort to man, who may probably think that God rejects all these things in anger, God adds: "*Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me*" (Psalm 50: 14, 15).

- + The ministry of shadows and symbols were no more accepted, on account of that they were offered without fruit, if compared to the sweet fragrance of the spirituals.

(St. Erinaos)

- + While the blood offerings were no more well received, the sweet fragrance of the spiritual worship was well received by God. Those that man would not be able to offer, unless he first has faith in Christ, as is testified by the blessed Paul who says: "*Without faith it is impossible to please God*" (Hebrew 11: 6).

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + He delivered Himself to death -- death of the curse -- to wipe out the curse of the law.

He chose to deliver Himself to God the Father, so that – by the sacrifice of Himself, delivered by His own will – the curse would be taken away, that which was caused by the inability of the animal sacrifice to continue its job, being consumed by their death.

It was referred to those sacrifices in psalm 6 ..., namely, offering them to God the Father, who rejected the sacrifices of the law, accepting instead the sacrifice of the body of His own Son; referred to by the blessed Paul, saying: “*For this He did once for all when He offered up Himself*” (Hebrew 7: 27); redeeming the entire mankind by His salvation, by the sacrifice of that holy and perfect delivered body.

(St. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers)

2- According to the Hebrew text it came as: “*My ears You have opened*” (6). In the Book of Exodus 21: 1 – 6, concerning the Hebrew servant

who, by his own free will, desires to serve his master and his family all the years of his life; that his master would pierce his ear with an awl, as a sign of his acceptance of complete obedience to them with a spirit of love, and not of servitude, and to his longing to serve them forever. ... That was a symbol of the Lord Christ who came to serve, and not to be served, who became a Servant, rendered the Father complete obedience, and delivered Himself for the sake of the church He loves... We, as well, who unite in Him as members of His body, carrying the spirit of deliverance and of obedience, will have the pierced (circumcised) ears instead of the disobedience (See Jeremiah 6: 10).

Showing His perfect obedience, the Lord Christ says: "*Here I am*" (7), proclaiming His optional submission, as He has come to the world to realize what the animal sacrifices have symbolized. He has come to realize the salvation of man, By saying: "*In the scroll of a book it is written of Me; I delight to do Your will, O My God, and Your law is within My heart*" (7, 8), He proclaims that what He did is a realization of the eternal divine plan, that was written in the book of the Old Testament; He came in obedience of God the Father, with gladness and delight.

+ Notice how, by Himself, He does the will of God the Father It is written at the beginning of the book of Psalms: "*His delight is in the law of the Lord*" (Psalm 1: 2).

(St. Augustine)

3- He did it with delight; saying: "*I delight to do Your will, O My God*" (8); as He said to His disciples: "*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me*" (John 4: 34). as He proclaimed in the garden of Gethsemane: "*Not as I will but as You will*" (John 26: 39); And as St. Paul the apostle said: "*For the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame*" (Hebrew 12: 2).

The secret of His delight is that He is the Word of God who proclaims the will of God; for His will and that of the Father are one. Saying: "*Your law is within My heart*" means that He is the incarnate Word of God; and the Word would never separate from the Manhood..

We, as well, receiving the incarnate Word of God in our life, the commandment (the law of God) would come to be in us, to live it, and to do the will of God by our own free will, with true delight.

4- The good news proclaimed by the slain crucified:

"I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness" (9)

By the cross, the Lord Christ preached the exalted love of God to all mankind, not by mere human words, but by His shed blood. The prophets have previously preached the coming of the Savior Messiah; Now He came, by Himself, to speak the word of preaching ; according to the apostle: *"God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son"* (Hebrew 1: 1).

He preached us by His cross, proclaiming the realization of the divine justice; or the fulfillment of the divine justice to our account, and to present His righteousness, as righteousness to us.

By the cross, the slain Lord Christ became the only Preacher who speaks through His church and ministers, to draw by His Holy Spirit every soul to the joyful good news of the gospel.

The Hebrew word (basar) came to mean (joyful news), carrying the same foundation of the word "gospel;" .

5- By His practical preaching, He drew members of His church from the Gentiles, as a great congregation to enjoy the words of His love which He keeps from none; saying:

"In the great congregation, indeed, I do not restrain my lips" (9)

What are the lips of the Lord Christ which He does not restrain, but His justice and mercy. As by the word of the cross, which He has practically uttered, the divine justice encountered mercy in an amazing harmony.

He did not restrain His lips, having spoken publicly through being publicly crucified outside the camp, as testified by the multitude who came to Jerusalem from all over the world to celebrate the feast of Passover; as well as by the Roman soldiers ... No one can give an excuse of his ignorance of the cross.

+ *“He has proclaimed the good news of righteousness to the great congregation”* (10). Now, He addresses His members, exhorting them to do what He Himself has already done: As He preached, we have to preach; ... As He suffered, Let us also suffer together with Him; ... And as He was glorified, We shall be likewise glorified with Him (Romans 7: 18).

He preached among all nations; Why?, ... For He is the seed of Abraham *“in whom all nations are blessed”* (Genesis 22: 8). And why among all nations?;... *“Their line has gone out through all the earth”* (Psalm 19: 4)

“In the great congregation, indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O Lord, You Yourself know (my righteousness)” (9)

I do not restrain my lips to utter; Yes indeed, my words are heard by the ears of all men; but It is You who teach my heart; ... For preaching are not confined to lips alone; lest it would be said about us: *“Whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works”* (Matthew 23: 3); and: *“Inasmuch as these people draw near to Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips , but have removed their hearts far from Me”* (Isaiah 29: 13)..

Do you present a heard confession by your lips; Approach Him likewise by your hearts.

“I have not hidden Your righteousness (truth) within my heart” (10)

By “*righteousness*” he means (faith), for “*The just shall live by faith*” (Romans 1: 17).

(During persecution), the Christian would never say in his heart: [Indeed I believe in Christ; yet I do not declare what I believe to my persecutors who are stirred up against me; ... God knows how I believe in the Truth within the depths of my heart; and He knows that I do not deny Him]

*“I have declared Your faithfulness and
Your salvation” (10)*

I declared Your Christ before all.

How could Christ be your “Truth”?... He says: ‘*I am the Truth*’ (John 14: 9).

How could Christ be your “salvation”? ... When Simon the elder recognized the infant Jesus on His mother’s arms in the temple, he said:

“My eyes have seen Your salvation” (Luke 2: 30).

*“I have not concealed Your loving kindness (mercy) and
Your truth from the great congregation” (10)*

I wish we do not conceal God’s loving kindness and truth.

Do you wish to hear what is God’s mercy? Forsake your sins, so God would forgive them.

Do you wish to hear what is God’s truth? Hold fast to righteousness; then your righteousness would be crowned.

Now, “mercy” will be declared to you; but “truth” will be declared later; For God would not be merciful without being just; Nor He would be just without being merciful.

*“Do not withhold Your tender mercies from
me, O Lord” (11)*

Look on Your wounded members! ... Through the unity of the catholic church, look on
Your suffering members; Look on those burdened with the
sins of negligence; Do not withhold Your tender mercies from them.

Speaking of the incarnate Word of God who came declaring salvation by His cross,
drawing the nations to enjoy the blessings of the amazing
redemption, He intended to make the believers bear His features, in particular His
practical love. It is befitting of us, as members of His
body, to preach by, and with Him, by the lips, as well as by the heart; to testify to Him
by our tongue, as well as by our behavior and inner
intentions. ... It is befitting of us not to fear testifying to the Lord Christ, the Savior,
publicly proclaimed by our lips; and seen in our life.

Our Christ came to declare the divine mercy and truth. By the cross we enjoyed the
perfection of God's love and mercy; and His justice as
realized in His perfection; Here, by repentance, we enjoy His tender mercies in the
worthiness of the blood that fulfilled the truth or justice; And
on the day of His ultimate coming the divine justice will be realized , when everyone will
be rewarded according to his works; to enjoy the
fellowship of His glories, hiding in Him, and in His cross, the grantor of life.

I wish His mercy and truth would never separate from our inner eyes, to ignite the fire of
His love in us, and to nail His fear in us; to love Him like
children with full daring, yet without disregarding His fatherhood; and to fear Him as a
Judge, who search the heart and mind, without
disregarding the work of His grace in us.

The way our Christ testified to the mercy and truth of God the Father; let us partake of
His same two features, by bearing, the spirit of the true

love, with no slothfulness, and the spirit of truth with no violence; I wish our love bears seriousness. and our seriousness bears compassion.

If our Christ delivered Himself a sacrifice of obedience to God the Father, and of love to mankind, bearing our evils and iniquities in His body, to realize the mercy and the justice; On our side, we should confess our innumerable sins, surrounding us on all sides, which deprived us of our insight, and caused our heart to fail us; and we became like dead. In other words, the more we perceive the ugliness and bitterness of our sins, the more we would experience by faith, the sweetness and possibilities of the cross.

“For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me; so that I am not able to look up;

they are more than the hairs on my head; therefore my heart fails me”

(12)

Perceiving that evils surrounded his life, and caused his heart, namely, his insight to fail him, the psalmist could no more enjoy beholding God, the fellowship of the heavenly creatures, and the experience of the heavenly life.

+ *“For innumerable evils have surrounded me”*. Who can count his own sins, and those of the others? They are a heavy burden on him who says: *“Cleanse me from secret faults; keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins”* (psalm 19: 12)

“My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up”. Because of his innumerable sins, his eyes are denied beholding the light; and he is not able to lift his wounded heart up to God; his heart has to heal first, for the eyes to be able to see..

3- HIS ENEMIES AND HIS SAINTS: (14 – 17)

This division includes an analogy between the oppressors of the children of God, and those longing for salvation; namely, between the enemies of God and His saints.

Seeing that his sins and those of the others have surrounded him, and made him lose his insight, and caused his heart to fail him, the psalmist cries out to God his Savior, saying:

“Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me” (13)

Commenting on this cry-out, St. Augustine says: [It is as though the psalmist says, together with the leper: *“If You are willing, You can make me clean”* (Matthew 8: 2); Be pleased, O Lord, to look at the repentant suffering members of Your body, that still anticipate with hope the work of the scalpel of the divine Surgeon].

Asking God for the sake of those who intend to destroy his salvation, to scatter their evil counsel, and wicked intentions. He says: “

“Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who seek to destroy my life” (14)

He moans, not because of those who intend to confiscate his possessions, or even his throne, nor those who distort his reputation, or seek to have him killed; but he moans for the sake of those who intend to destroy his soul, namely, his salvation.

We can also say that these are the words uttered by the suffering Lord Christ, when, in the garden of Gethsemane, He sought from God the Father, if possible, not to be relieved of the passion, but to let it pass from Him. ... As to His crucifiers, used by the devil as his tools,

“Who seek to destroy my life, let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor” (14)

This is actually what happened, when they came to arrest the Lord Christ in the garden; and He said: *“I am He”*, *“they drew back and fell to the ground”* (John 18: 8).

His crucifiers who ridiculed and scoffed Him, did not perceive that by His cross, *“He has disarmed principalities and powers, and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it”* (Colossians 2: 15); by which the prophecy was realized, saying:

“Let them be appalled because of their shame, who say to me, ‘Aha, aha’” (15)

The wicked who ridicule the salvation of the Lord, will be appalled; Whereas those who seek the Lord and His salvation, will rejoice and be glad, and will glorify the Lord who cares for the poor and the needy..

“Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; Let such as love Your salvation say continually,

“The Lord be magnified”. *But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God” (16, 17)*

Seeing how he reached a pitiful condition; and how he came to be poor and needy, the psalmist found in God a Helper of the poor and the needy, And in his tribulation, he experienced the following blessings:

- 1- The inner exultation, and the true joy; which he enjoyed together with all those who seek the Lord, namely, those who joined him in praying to God to save him. If the wicked ridiculed him, saying: ‘Aha, aha’, namely, with a spirit of gloating, they said: [Well, he deserves what came upon him], the godly, on the other hand,

pray with, and for his sake; and rejoice when they see God glorified in him; The former seek to destroy his life (14), while the later seek the salvation of his soul (16).

- 2- The tribulation presented a golden chance for the psalmist and his godly friends, to learn how to resort to God alone, and how to seek Him with the spirit of contrition.
- 3- The ignition of the heart with the love of salvation.
- 4- The opening of his and their tongues with unceasing praise, magnifying the Lord.

+ “Let such as love Your salvation say continually, ‘the Lord be magnified’” (16). Seeing how I am glorified in You, “*He who glorifies, let him glorify in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 1: 31).

+ Even though the sinner becomes righteous, “*Give glory to Him who justifies the ungodly*” (Romans 4: 5). Let the sinner give glory to Him who calls to forgiveness; And let him who walks in the way of righteousness, praise and glorify Him who called him to get the crown. “*Let the Lord be continually glorified by those who love His salvation*”.

- 5- Feeling poverty and need for the Savior; the psalmist says: “*I am poor and needy, and yet the Lord thinks upon me*” (17)

+ All what you have, and what you will have in the future are the possession of Christ; ... So what are you, but poor and needy?

+ What poverty greater and more sanctified than for man to know that he is helpless to fend for himself, that every moment of his life, is set upon the divine care; to continually confess his need for the Lord; and to cry out to

him on a daily basis, saying: *"I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me"*.

There is thus a great difference between the wicked who seek the destruction of souls, and be ashamed; and the godly men who give support to every soul to be saved, and be filled with the divine blessings; And, seeking from God to be transfigured among His people, they cry out, saying: *"Do not delay, O my God"* (17).

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 40

"NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS BE DONE"

- + How sweet are You, O Savior; and how sweet are Your works in me;
You have lifted me up from the pit of sin;
And carried me in You, O the Rock of ages;
You have turned my sorrow into joy; and my lamentations into new praise.

- + You, the eternal, came to me in the fullness of days;
You granted me the new man, according to Your image;
You gave me the new life in You;
You opened up my mouth to sing the new praise;
Your mercies will endure every morning, until I pass over to You.

- + How amazing are Your innumerable works;
By the cross You gave me every satisfaction, riches, and spiritual beauty;
You brought my heart forth to Your heavens;
And You used me to testify to the works of Your love.

+ How amazing are Your works, O divine Word;
In obedience You delivered Your own will in the hands of the Father;
Carry me in You, to be counted obedient, as well;
You delivered Your body a sacrifice of obedience and love;
Receive my body a living sacrifice.

+ Your cross drew many by the language of love and obedience;
Teach me to partake of Your cross to make me enjoy the power of Your
resurrection.



PSALM 41

THE BLESSED MAN

Between psalm 1 and psalm 41:

The first division of the book of psalms, for the Jews, includes psalms 1 to 41. And the two psalms 1 and 41 partake of the following features:

- 1- Both start by the word "*Blessed*" (asher in Hebrew); The first proclaims bless for him who "*meditates in the law of the Lord day and night*", to practice His commandment practically in his daily life; While psalm 41 blesses him who "*considers the poor*". ... The first proclaims the living love of the believer for the commandment of God; and the last one proclaims his living love for the poor, being a brother of Christ, the Object of God's care and love.
- 2- The two psalms are prophetic, talking about the oppression of the wicked of the Lord Christ, His passion, and His victory. The Lord Christ referred to psalm 41, as being a prophecy about the betrayal of Judas (John 13: 18); So did St. Peter (Acts 1: 16).

The title:

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. And according to the Syrian version: A psalm of David, when he designated overseers to care for the poor. And according to the Arabic version: A prophecy about the incarnation, and about the greeting (kiss) of Judas.

This psalm was probably written during the rebellion of Absalom.

The general frame:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------|
| 1- Concerning the poor | 1 -- 3 |
| 2- The rejected poor | 4 -- 9 |
| 3- The conquest of His resurrection | 10 – 13 |

1- CONCERNING THE POOR: (1 – 3)

If the first part of the psalm is greatly didactic, yet it also suits the didactic aspect of the temple's liturgy; particularly that its last verses (11 – 13) represent a thanksgiving to God in the temple; hence this psalm is both didactic and liturgical; as well as a personal lamentation.

*“Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him
and keep him alive, and he will be blessed in the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies” (1, 2)*

Now, who is that poor, whom we are committed to care for?

1- It is obvious that the word 'poor' means (the weak), or (the helpless). God, in His riches, longs to pour His gifts on mankind, not just the material gifts, but His self-giving, to let them, being His children, enjoy His divine bosom. This free gift is a divine grace given by the Holy Spirit of God; yet, on condition of our own desire to give; in order for the mutual love between God and His children to be realized. Our giving is consummated practically in His poor brethren; for He says: *“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me”* (Matthew 25: 40).

- + How great is the rank of the poor, to be considered as brethren of the Lord. The poor may stretch his hand begging; but it is the Lord who receives your gift.
- + You may be informed that I am clothed in light as a garment; Yet, when you clothe a naked poor, I, personally feel clothed and warm.
You may believe that I am sitting at the right hand of My Father in heaven; Yet, if you go to visit someone in prison, you will find me there.

- + When you see a poor man, remember that, although apparently he is not Christ; yet, it is He who seeks your gift, and who takes it in the person of the poor.

- + If the Lord Christ, Your Creator, is not ashamed to stretch His hand and to receive the gift given to the poor, ... We should rather not feel disgusted to serve the poor and to give them comfort; For by serving them, our hands are sanctified; and when we lift them up in prayer, God will see them blessed, have compassion on us, and give us our request.

(St. John Chrysostom)

2- The “poor” here is, as well, the poor in faith, and in the knowledge of God and His love; who is in need of the Word of God. As according to the apostle Paul: *“as poor, yet making many rich”* (2 Corinthians 6: 10); meaning that we may be poor in money, yet we are rich in the Lord Christ, by Whom we make many rich. By the true love, together with work and continuous prayer, we lift many up from the poverty of faith, knowledge, love, and obedience to the divine commandment. ... *“Blessed is he who considers the poor”*.

3- The poor whom we are committed to consider, is the Lord Christ, who, being Rich, He, for our sake, made Himself poor; and, being the Creator of all, He made Himself helpless; He asked the Samaritan woman to give him to drink (John 4: 7) He longs for the hearts of His children, to cover them with the fountains of His love, from which He also drink.

Let us consider our Christ who, for our sake, became a servant and poor. Let us consider Him, who, in His passion and His crucifixion, cries out, *“I thirst!”* (John 19: 28).

When His disciples offered Him food, He said to them: *“I have food to eat, of which you do not know”* (John 4: 32). What is that food, but our union with Him, receiving His passion and His crucifixion, to enjoy the power and glory of His resurrection.

+ *“Consider the poor and the weak”*, namely, consider Christ. Understand in Him the hidden riches; The poor whom you see is Him, *“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Colossians 2: 3).

Consider as well the needy, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner; for if you consider those, you would be able to understand Him who says: *“I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and a prisoner...”*: (Matthew 25: 35, 36)

(St. Augustine)

By caring for the poor, whether for material or for spiritual things, we would be caring for Him who became poor for our sake, and would unite with Him, who came down to earth for our sake. The fruits of such practical care and understanding will be:

1- *“The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble”*.(1)

Lifting our sight up to the Lord Christ, by the work of His Holy Spirit, will lift us up high, to pass safely over trouble.

What is trouble but falling into temptation or being surrounded by sin? No salvation from evil temptations except by considering the Savior, who became poor because of our sins. Seeing Him on the cross, covered with wounds of love for our sake, grace will destroy the work of sin in our members; will save our body together with our soul, and, as believers, we will enjoy the life of glorious fellowship.

Our care for the poor, the needy, the humiliated, and the prisoners, with the spirit of true love, and the wisdom of spirit; would prepare our soul for the work of the free grace inside us. For, loving God in our suffering brethren, He will listen to the hidden sighs of our hearts, and will defend us against every sin. Our love for others, and our compassion on them, is nothing but love for ourselves, and an enjoyment of God's love and compassion in our depths.

* *"Give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you"*

(Luke 11: 41)

* *"Break off your sins by being righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor"* (Daniel 4: 27)

* *"In mercy and truth, atonement is provided for iniquity"* (Proverb 16: 6)

* *"For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy"* (James 2: 13)

* *"As water extinguishes a blazing fire, so almsgiving atones for sin"* (Sirach 3: 30).

* *"Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it will rescue you from every disaster"*
(Sirach 29: 12)

* *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"* (Matthew 5: 7)

+ If you have mercy on the widow, your sins will be forgiven; for it is written:

"Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow; Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1: 17, 18).

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ In baptism, the forgiveness of sins is granted once for everyone; but the unceasing continuous work – following the example of baptism – will again grant God's mercy ... The divine Teacher exhorts us to be merciful (Luke 11: 40, 41). And, searching for the salvation of those upon whom He has given such a great

sacrifice, He referred, as well, to that, those who, after having baptism, commit sin, could be purified anew.

Beloved brethren, the divine counsels, in the Holy Book with its old and new testaments, exhort the people of God perpetually, and everywhere, to do works of mercy ...

- + For he who gives no mercy would not be worthy of God's mercy, nor would get any portion of the divine compassion by his prayers.

(Cyprian the martyr)

We can also understand "*the trouble*" (1), as being periods of tribulations or sufferings, allowed by God to dwell upon His children to chasten or to justify them... For although He allows for them, Yet His eyes will stay looking down on us with compassion, as long as we so look upon the poor.

- + He who loves the poor will be, as though, has an intercessor in the house of the ruler.... He who opens up his door before the needy, will, as though, holds in his hand the key of God' door! ... And he who lends those who ask him, will be rewarded by the Lord of all.

(St. John El-Tabaiisy)

2-
alive" (2)

"The Lord will preserve him and keep him

Promising His people that, "*With the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you*" (Matthew 7: 2): He also promises him who considers the poor in simple temporal issues, to be preserved against any evil, until He is brought forth to the life of the age to come; By

providing the temporal, man would enjoy the heavenlies, and the earthly blessings as well.

- + If we have mercy upon the others, we shall be greatly rewarded; For the Lord Christ promised us *“a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, to be put in our bosom” Luke 6: 38*..

(St. Cyril the Great)

- + If, for the sake of a cup of cool water, given to a guest, we may get the kingdom of heaven, how much more of goods we would get, if we call him to enjoy our riches; and invited him to our table!
- + If we have compassion on a blind man, we would be given sight, and would be led to the kingdom of heaven; For he who trample here in pits, would eventually become your guide, who takes you up to heaven.

(St. John Chrysostom)

3- *“And he will be blessed on the earth” (2)*

For him, the earth will turn into heaven.

He who loves the poor will enjoy the new land, the land of the living, the church life, where his heart would be filled with joy and gladness ... He would enjoy the work of the Lord Christ dwelling in him; who sets His kingdom in him, as a kingdom of praise, exultation, and thanksgiving on the riches of the free grace of God.

Actually, many of those who started, in Jesus Christ, to practice giving by true love, have felt an amazing inner joy, the cause for which they have no obvious knowledge; ... It is the gift of the Spirit to them!

4-

“He will not deliver him to the will of his enemies” (2)

The enemy is the devil; No one should think of any man to be his enemy!

5-

“The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed” (3)

Giving alms would help the living believer to enjoy spiritual and physical healing; not as a pay-back of his own work, but because the

merciful God grants His free grace to him, who proclaim receiving it through offering love and mercy to others (Mathew 5: 7).

According to St. Augustine, *“the bed”* here, refers to the spiritual weakness; for the soul, troubled by sin, finds pleasure in the pleasures of the body, as though on a comfortable bed; yet it is a bed of illness; And the Lord, in His compassion demands

from him to *“arise and take up his bed, and go his way to his house”* (Mark 2: 11). ... In other words, He grants the soul the strength of resurrection, not to be borne by the body to vain pleasures; but, by the spirit, she would bear the body in holiness and purity, to set forth to the heavenly home, and to find her comfort in the bosom of God the Father. ... It is as though, giving alms would give us the chance to enjoy the free work of God; in which we arise from the bed of our body, and set forth with perfect freedom, like with the wings of a dove toward the heavenlies..

The following are the blessings of giving alms, or let us say of the practical love:

God will deliver us in time of trouble; namely, in the day of judgment, turning it into a joyful day of the Lord, a day of everlasting wedding.

The Lord will preserve us from tribulations, and grant us the new life in Him;

The Lord will turn our earth into a joyful heaven;

The Lord will lift us up from the bed of temporal pleasures, to set forth, by His Holy Spirit, to the true comfort in the heavenlies;

By it, we would be liberated from the evil enemy, the devil, and all his works, to enjoy the fatherhood of God working in us; and to have a place in His divine bosoms.

1- **THE REJECTED POOR:** (4 – 9)

“I said, ‘Lord, be merciful to me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against You” (4)

This prayer is extremely eloquent in the Hebrew language. For, what could man do more than to confess his sins, honestly and faithfully?!

How could this prayer be connected to his previous talk about considering the poor?

It so seems that the psalmist has fallen under divine chastisement; for he connects his tribulation to his iniquity; and anticipates that, for the sake of considering the poor, God

will consider him as being, himself, poor; ... yet not without a confession of his sins. Here, showing that what man gets as fruits of giving gifts with love, is not for the sake of his self-righteousness, but out of God's free mercies; when the psalmist confesses his sin, seeking mercy and healing.

It is as though the psalmist says: If I have considered my poor brethren, it would not be a favor on my part; for You consider me, a poor man, wounded with sins, and in need of You as a Physician of the soul and the body.

+ God will heal you, only if you proclaim your wound; if you deliver yourself under the hands of the physician, fervently seek his help; whether he cleanses, burns, or cuts; and endure in submission, to get healed.

You will be healed if you present yourself to the physician; not that he would not recognize your illness, even if you attempt to hide it; but because revealing it would be the beginning of the way to restore your health.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

The psalmist used to start his confession by accusing himself; before complaining against the evil enemy oppressing him. He does not start by justifying himself, nor casting the blame on others; but seeks help from the physician to heal him first, then to protect him from what would dwell upon him from outside; saying:

"My enemies speak evil of me: 'When will he die, and his name perish?' (5)

The evil enemy wishes to wipe the children of God out; thinks that this would actually be realized; forgetting that "a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again" (Proverb 24: 16).

According to some, this is the voice of the Lord Christ, falsely accused by His enemies, who plotted to kill Him, and bring His name to perdition. ... Yet, He will continue to utter his voice in His church that suffers for His sake, whose name, the world intends to wipe out, together with the name of her Christ. The book of Acts tells us about St. Peter and St. John: *“They called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus”* (Acts 4: 18).

+ That is about the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ; Yet, would it not be understood concerning His members?! As our Lord walked with this body on earth; and they saw the people follow him, they said:: “When will He die, and His name be no more?” Namely, If we kill Him, His name will be completely wiped out from earth; He will deceive people no more. Getting people to understand that He was only human, and no salvation would come through Him, men would forget all about Him, and His name would be mentioned no more. But it so happened that, although He died, yet His name did not perish, but became like a seed of wheat, that through its death, it produced more wheat.

Christ died, and His name did not perish; the martyrs died, and the church grew, and the name of Christ grew among the nations.

Vain was their view against Him; It was better for them to believe in Him, *“to consider the poor and needy”*; He who though rich, became poor for their sake, to become rich by His poverty.

'Ahitophel', who plotted to have David killed, and to bring his name to perdition; became a symbol of the devil who stirred up many against the Son of David, to get rid of Him by the cross. Then, the words of David came to be uttered in a more perfect way in the Person of the Lord Christ; saying:

“And if he comes to see me, he speaks vain words; his heart gathers iniquity to itself; When he goes out, he tells it.

All who hate me whisper together against me; Against me they devise my hurt. ‘An evil disease’, they say, ‘clings to him; and now that he lies down, he will rise up no more’” (6 – 8)

This prophecy was realized in the Person of the Lord Christ, when the high priests, the priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, Pilate, and Herod, gathered together against Him, whispered among themselves, namely, had counsel in secret, and condemned Him against the law; with the assumption that when he dies and buried, He will rise no more.

All those who attended His trial, His scourging, and His crucifixion, spoke vain words against Him; and, bearing iniquity in their hearts, they assumed that what He goes through is a sign of God's displeasure with Him. Hence, when they go out, they uttered blasphemies against Him.

He who enters by his 'self' into the events of salvation, enters and goes out to utter blasphemies of iniquity; Whereas he who enters into it by grace, "*will go out and find pasture*" (John 10: 9); will find in it a flood of love, satisfying to the soul. As, according to the apostle Paul: "*To the one, the aroma of death to death; and to the other the aroma of life to life*" (2 Corinthians 2: 16).

After talking about the enemies who crucified Christ, he talks particularly about 'Judas', the betraying disciple who delivered Him; saying:

"Even My own (bosom) friend in whom I trusted, who ate My bread, has lifted up his head against Me" (9)

+ Who is His (bosom) friend? It was Judas ... who betrayed Him by a false kiss (John 6: 70).

(St. Augustine)

2- THE CONQUEST OF THE LORD'S RESURRECTION: (10 -- 13)

"But You, O Lord, be merciful to me, and raise me up, that I may repay them. By this I know that You are well pleased with me" (10, 11)

They assumed that He died, was buried, to rise no more. But, having died for our sake and in our name, He is risen as well in our name, to cry out, saying: "*Be merciful to me, and raise Me up*". Although "*He has the power to lay his life down, and the power to take it again*" (John 10: 18); as He Himself proclaimed; Yet, being our representative; in obedience, He died, and in obedience, He rose, for us to become in Him children of obedience, and the object of pleasure to God the Father ... His resurrection proclaimed our justification in Him, to say: "*By this we know that You are well pleased with us*" (11). ... We became the object of pleasure to the Father, after having been the object of

pleasure of the enemy, who reigned over our hearts and our life, and who used us to the account of the kingdom of darkness

He says: *“Raise me up, that I may repay them”* (10). By His own will He delivered Himself to death; then He is risen proclaiming the conquest of life, to condemn sin and death ... and He will come again to judge the sinners.

According to St. Athanasius: [Death, being mere lying down, ... I shall rise again].

By the power of resurrection we learned the spirit of victory and conquest, not by violence nor by boasting, but by meekness, granted to us by Christ Jesus, by whom we come to be the object of His pleasure and acceptance, to be abide before Him forever.:

“As for me, You uphold me in my integrity; and set me before Your face forever” (12)

The psalm ends by a collective liturgical doxology; As what He gets of blessings will bring joy to the whole church.

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting, Amen, Amen” (13)

According to some, this doxology is the end of the first division of the book of psalms (Psalm 1 to 41), where the believer praises God of the catholic church (the new Israel), as a deposit of the life of heavenly praise, in the higher Jerusalem.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 41

GLORY BE TO YOU, O CRUCIFIED LOVER OF MANKIND

- + Grant me, O Lord, to behold You in every poor;
O who became poor for my sake, to flood me with Your riches.

- + How amazing You are in Your love!
You long to grant me fellowship of Your heaven, the practical love in particular;
I show compassion on the poor, to experience Your compassion on me, the poor.

- + The enemy intended to bring Your name to perdition by the cross;
You engraved my name on Your wounded palm;
And granted me the power of Your resurrection

- + The wicked oppressed You and Killed You by the cross;
And You made me the object of the Father's pleasure;

=====

THE SECOND DIVISION

THE CHURCH AND SALVATION

(Psalms 42 to 72)

THE CHURCH AND SALVATION

(Psalms 42 to 72)

The first division of the book of psalms (Psalms 1 to 41) constitutes a group of psalms that deal with the condition of man: his blessed life, his fall, then his renewal by the work of God, his Savior, who restores to him his lost exultant paradisiacal life. In all that, it is analogous to the book of Genesis. The second division, on the other hand (Psalms 42 to 50), likens the book of Exodus, with the appearance of the people of God, entering into a covenant with the Lord, through the blood of the Lamb (Exodus 12); Hence, the psalms of this division came to talk about "The church and salvation..

In the first chapter of the book of exodus we see the people enslaved in a foreign land, away from the promised land; a suffering people, moaning and groaning with every scourge coming over them by their persecutors . Their tribulation grew harder and

harder with time; the doors of hope seemed to be completely closed shut, and there was no way of salvation. But in the proper time, God heard their moaning and screams, and arose to defend them with His strong hand; to save them from the house of bondage, and to bring their enemies to perdition in the Red Sea.

This division starts by a bitter cry-out emerging from the depths of pressure (Psalm 42 – 49), to come to end up by the proclamation of the kingdom of God over His people who worship Him; when it is said: *“He shall have dominion also from sea to sea; and from the River to the end of the earth; All kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him”* (Psalm 72). The King of kings will reign over His people who came to be kings of the earth, namely, have dominion over their bodies, sanctified to be counted the land of the Lord; while repentance will be the royal path of glory. Hence this section presents to us many psalms that talk about repentance and confession, the most prominent of which is psalm 51 (50 LXX), sung by the church at the beginning of every prayer or vesper of the (Agpeya); as well as in most of the collective liturgical prayers.

This division reveals the beauty of the church enjoying salvation, as a bride adorned for her Groom, *“fairer than the sons of men”* (Psalm 45).

The psalms of this division are collected from various sources:

- 1- The sons of ‘Korah’ (Psalm 42; 44 – 49); a family of official gatekeepers and musicians (1 Chronicles 9: 17 – 19; 26: 19); who probably were disciples of Korah, and not necessarily of his family. According to some, the word ‘Korah’ (Core), probably means (bald); and according to St. Jerome, and St. Augustine, it is analogous to the word ‘calvaria’, namely, (the skull), the location where the Lord Christ was crucified. The children of Korah are the children of the crucified Groom, who are able to crush the head of the ancient serpent by the cross, destroy death, and enjoy the joy of resurrection. In other words, the Christians, counted as the children of the true Korah, practice the resurrected life, that knows nothing but thanksgiving and praise to God, their Savior.

- 2- 'Asaph' (Psalm 50), who established another musical band for the temple; or probably a title of the Chief Musicians or heads of the choir in the days of David and Solomon (1 Chronicles 16: 4, 5; 2 Chronicles 5: 21). The word 'Asaph' means (Jehovah collects); and according to St. Augustine, it means the (Senhedrin). If the Jewish Senhedrin was responsible for the crucifixion of the Lord Christ; Yet they are credited for keeping the prophesies that testify to the Lord Christ, our praise and our joy.
- 3- David, the prophet and king (Psalms 51 to 65; 68 to 70); the man of prayer and praise; representing the church queen who finds her whole pleasure in her Groom King; attaches to Him, and unceasingly praises Him.
- 4- Solomon (Psalm 72); referring to the church, bearing the exalted peace of God.
- 5- There are three anonymous psalms (Psalms 66, 67, 71); representing a call addressed to every soul to enjoy membership in the exultant church, even though not known by name among men.

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PSALM 42

THIRSTY FOR CHRIST

PSALMS 42 and 43:

Some scholars believe that the two psalms 42 and 43 represent one unit. According to 'Ridner', even though each of them could be sung alone, yet they are both like two parts

of one well-connected poem, of the most magnificent sorrowful poems of the book of psalms. Both psalms have one convenient title, and include the same meditation of the soul: “*Why have You forgotten me?*”; and “*Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?*” (42: 9 and 43: 2), and repeated again in 43: 5: “*Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?*”; which give one unity to the two psalms.

We can say that the two psalms constitute a lamentation that reveals the bitterness of the soul because of past, present, and future sufferings; Yet, swallowed by the sweetness of hope in God, and the enjoyment of His presence. It is as though sufferings do not destroy the psyche of the psalmist, as much as they increase his longing toward God his Savior.

42: 1 – 5 Past sufferings – in the wilderness – longing toward Go

42: 6 – 11 Present sufferings – on the mountains – A feeling of being forsaken by God

43: 1 – 5 Future sufferings – in His holy sanctuary – a joyful hope.

Circumstances of the psalm:

- 1- According to some, this psalm is a lamentation by one of the singers of the temple, who was exiled to the north, close to the origin of the River Jordan; and longs to return to the house of God to enjoy the divine presence through the holy collective worship.
- 2- According to Onesimus of Jerusalem, the prophet David wrote this psalm, then delivered it to one of the Chief Musicians – of the children of Korah – to be sung accompanied by musical instruments.
- 3- It was written as a prophecy about those who were captivated and denied the enjoyment of the ministry of the temple, and the experience of the divine presence; proclaiming their longing to return home, crossing over the water channels (the River Jordan). By that, they represent humanity fallen into the captivity of sin, and delivered herself to bondage; who would not enjoy the new

life in the Lord, unless it passes through the water of baptism, to cross over to the Higher Jerusalem, the heavenly home.

- 4- According to some early fathers, this psalm is the voice of men of the old covenant who had strong thirst to encounter the Savior. In their spiritual strife, they were like deer, running toward the water brooks, namely the fountains of prophecies, saying: "*Why are you cast down, O my soul?*;" Hoping for the coming of the Lord, for He will surely come, to realize their salvation, and to fill them with joy and peace].
- + With thirst, the souls of the prophets panted to that fountain, according to the words of David: "*My soul thirsts for God*" (2); For by that they could quench their thirst by the riches of the knowledge of God; and could cleanse their soul of the blood of foolishness, by the water of the spiritual brooks.

(St. Ambrose)

The title:

To the Chief Musician. A contemplation (a Maschil) of the sons of Korah

- 1- We have already commented on the word (Maschil) in the title of psalm 32.
- 2- According to some scholars, it was David who wrote this psalm, on account of that it is written in the singular tense "*My soul*"; For if it was written by the children of Korah, they would say 'Our souls' ... David was its author, and they put it into a melody. This psalm suited David's state of mind in his long exile out of Jerusalem in the days of king Saul; particularly that the location where David was, conforms geographically to what came in verse 6 about the land of Jordan and Harmon.

According to some, few of the children of Korah were also exiled (Numbers 26: 11); or they were all sent away from having a main role in the collective liturgical

worship in the temple. For the psalms referred to them, reflect their longing for their home, and their feeling of loss; And, at the same time, they suffered in the name of the whole congregation, captivated in a foreign land.

Interpreting the meaning of the word 'Korah', St. Augustine and St. Ambrose say that the word 'Korah' is analogous to the word 'Calvaria'; Hence, the children of the Groom, of His passion, redeemed by His blood, the children of His cross, those who have on their forehead what His enemies have put on his cross at Calvary, ... those are called 'the children of Korah'.

The general frame:

- 1- A cry out and longing for God 1 -- 5
- 2- Tribulation and confusion 6 – 11

1- A CRY- OUT AND LONGING FOR GOD: (1 – 5)

A true and deep cry-out comes out of the psalmist through his feeling of deprivation of the Higher Jerusalem, and the heavenly sanctuary; counting himself as denied God, who alone could water his soul; saying:

*“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

When shall I come and appear before God?” (1, 2)

In Palestine, where there is no rain for nearly nine months of the year, fountains of water, wells, and water brooks are covered up to keep them from drying because of the high temperature. The deer, out of deadly thirst, pant toward the sources of water, and there, they stand screaming for being denied the hidden treasure of water. So it is with the believer who pants in the dry wilderness of this world, searching for the fountains of the water of life, namely, for the evangelic church life; he comes to the Word of God, the

sealed Holy Book, to have its secrets revealed to him by the Holy Spirit; and to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the church worship, the holy Sacraments; proclaiming in all these his strong longing for God, coming from the depths of his soul.

The believer is like deer, never cease panting to search for water brooks; and not like camels that bear self-satisfaction of it during their slow advance in the desert.

The psalmist expresses his longing for God as thirst, that causes suffering, more intense than those of hunger. As our representative, the Lord Christ, on the cross, cried out saying: "*I thirst*" (John 19: 28), to express the thirst of believers to the Word of God.

In the following commentaries, the fathers present to us their interpretations of the deer thirst for the water brooks, of which we quote:

+ Going elaborately through the whole book of psalms, I found nowhere the children of Korah sing a sorrowful tune; but all the time, tunes of joy and happiness prevailed on their songs; I found despise of the mortal and temporal things, and hot longing for the heavenlies and eternities; For the Lord was crucified and buried at a location called "Calvaria"; Hence those who believe in His cross and resurrection, are all children of Korah, the children of Calvaria, namely, the skull. ...

It is the nature of the deer not to fear serpents; but by the hot breath emerging from their nostrils, they draw them out of their holes, to kill them and tear them to pieces. A burning feeling of thirst, then would cause them to pant in search of water brooks to quench their thirst.

We, as well, like the deer, long for the running water. Our deer came out of Egypt and of the world, destroyed Pharaoh (the devil) in the water of the Red Sea, and crushed his entire hosts by the cross in the water of baptism; by which the hearts of His believer, full of zeal, flare with longing toward the running water of the church; to the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In the book of Jeremiah, a testimony to the Father as a Fountain, came to say:
“(My people) have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2: 13).

And in another location, we read about the Son, that they have forsaken the Fountain of wisdom; And about the Holy Spirit, the Lord says: *“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; ... it will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4: 14).

(St. Jerome)

- + Run to the brooks; long to the brooks of water; to God the Fountain of life, the Fountain that will never dry up; the Fountain from which whoever drinks will have his inner thirst quenched.

Run to the Brook; long for Him; ... Yet, do not do that haphazardly; Do not just run like any other animal, but *“pant”* like a deer.... Namely, do not be slothful, but, like the deer, run and long with your whole might.

Listen to what else the deer are known; They kill the serpents, and in the process, burning with thirst, they pant to the water brooks. The serpents are your iniquities; So destroy the serpents of evil in yourself, to have more longing for the Fountain of truth.

Another thing worthy of noticing concerning the deer ... While wandering as a flock, or wading in a brook of water to reach another location, getting exhausted, they lean their heads; each on the one preceding it, down to the last one in the flock. And when the foremost one gets tired of carrying the burden of all the flock, it retreats to the rear to lean its head on the last one... In this, the deer liken those about whom the apostle says: *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Galatians 6: 2).

(St. Augustine)

- + God is truly the Fountain; I wish that whoever longs for Him would pour his soul on Him; and would never leave anything in it to the possession of the body; but that his soul would flood with love all around him.

(St. Ambrose)

- + Let our souls thirst for Him, saying: "*When will He come?*" ... Well, you long for his coming; ... Will He find you ready?!

(St. Augustine)

- + Many people are thirsty: the righteous and the sinners. The former thirst for the truth; and the latter for the pleasures of this world. The righteous thirst for God; while the sinners thirst for gold.

(Caesarius, bishop of Arles)

- + Whoever drinks with his depths from such (good) wine, then deprived of it because of his slothfulness, he alone perceives the extent of his loss.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

If we suffer from the inner serpents, I wish we never surrender to their venoms, but strive more against them by the Spirit of God dwelling in us; and have our hearts pant with love toward our savior, longing to come before Him. The work of sin is to isolate us from encountering the living God, and enjoying His face, to quench the thirst of our soul with His love; to say:

“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?” (2)

Speaking about longing and love between God and man, the psalmist calls God, “*the living God*”. For we do not worship “*as is the habit of some*” (Hebrew 10: 25); or out of fear of His anger, but in response of Him, being the living God, who enters with us into relationships of love and covenants; intending to appear inside us, to proclaim His kingdom in us; and that we would, as well, appear before His face, to enjoy the splendor of His glory, and the beauty of His heavenly Sanctuary.

If this psalm was written about the captives who were denied the presence in the temple of God, whom the Babylonians – their Captors – used to reproach, saying: “*Where is Your God?*”; to which the believer responds by saying: [I am not preoccupied with your reproaches, But my heart burns with longing for my Living God, who alone can quench my inner thirst ... I long to encounter Him face to face].

By saying: “*When shall I come and appear before God?*”, he probably means to say, that no circumstances would ever deny me encountering Him, or His dwelling in me; but my inner longing is to encounter Him face to face.

Those were the cry-outs of the people in captivity, who longed for the city of God, Jerusalem, and for His holy temple, where they would encounter Him in His house and temple.

They probably are the cry-outs of the prophet David, or of one of the singers who were also denied the presence in the temple of God.

Or they probably are the cry-outs of men of the old covenant, whose souls thirst for the coming of the Savior ... to come to them, or they go to

Him.

Or they probably are the cry-outs of the church, proclaiming her longing for His ultimate coming; saying: "*Amen; Come, Lord Jesus* (Revelations 22: 21).

- + "*When shall I come and appear before God?*"... See, Their supplications were answered; ... they came and appeared in the presence of God, before the altar, and saw the secrets of the Savior. ... Yet, no one is qualified to look at this scene except him who, from the depth of his heart and conscience, cries out wailing in remorse: "*My tears have been food day and night*" (3).

(St. Jerome)

- + That divine beauty is hidden from the physical eyes, and are only perceived by the mind and soul. When it sheds its light upon a saint, it leaves him burning with unbearable feeling of longing; ... Perceiving the meaning of the worldly life, he says: "*Woe is me, ... my soul has dwelt too long*" (Psalm 120: 5, 6); "*When shall I come and appear before God?*" (2); "*I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*" (Philippians 1: 23); and, "*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God*" (2) ... Yes indeed; because of their fervent desire to enjoy beholding the divine beauty, they pray for their meditation to continue enjoying the Lord all the eternal life.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + "*My soul thirst for the living God*".
I thirst in my sojourn, in my running; and my thirst will be quenched once I arrive there!

(St. Augustine)

+ *“When shall I come and appear before God?”.*

In this psalm, the psalmist demonstrates clearly the troubles caused by the human weakness, and the comforts given by God.

(St. Ambrose)

“My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, ‘Where is your God?’” (3)

According to St. Augustine, the psalmist did not say: “My tears have been my drink”, but “*my food*”; on account of that if the thirsty eats food, his thirst would increase.... The tears of longing for our encounter with God, would not quench our thirst, but would make it more intense. ... He also says: [My tears have been “*my food*”, not bitterness to me, but sweet, because of my thirst to the Fountain. And the more I am unable to drink from it, “*my tears have been my food*”].

His tears did not dry up day and night; for the daily preoccupations, however important they are, could not distract him from seeking his God with tears; nor the comfort during the night could appease that longing..

He does not feel ashamed to be seen crying with tears by day, proclaiming his attachment to his God like that of a suckling to his mother, from whom he could not be separated. He finds pleasure in crying in secret during the night, to proclaim the depths of his love for God.

As the day refers to a condition of relief and joy; whereas the night refers to a condition of tribulation and suffering, It is as though the psalmist proclaims that his tears would not dry up in his joy, or in his sorrow; for, under all circumstances, nothing would preoccupy him except his

longing for God.

With pride, haughtiness, and ridicule, his enemies say to him: *“Where is your God?”*.

Assuming that God’s longsuffering is weakness, they intended to destroy his trust in God, as though He has forsaken him; not perceiving that God, being the Master and Controller of history, He suffers long in anticipation of their repentance and return to Him; or waiting for their cup of evil to become full.

“When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me” (4)

Instead of being preoccupied with the reproaches of his enemies, or with responding to them, his soul pours out within and upon himself, and not upon anyone else, for it does not trust in any human arm, but enters into its own depths, in anticipation of the transfiguration of the Lord Christ in it, and of His hidden comforts.

And lest anyone would probably think that “pouring out his soul within himself” is a kind of despair or of a broken heart, he consummates his talk, proclaiming his full fellowship with his brethren in the life of worship, and in the joy of his heart; saying:

“For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise” (4)

The psalmist’s flood of tears, pour over his soul in his secret place, increasing his longing to set forth together with the multitude to the house of God, as though to celebrate a joyful unceasing feast. He sees himself in the house of the Lord, as though in an amazing tabernacle, under the shadow of God’s two wings, and His divine protection.

According to some, saying: "*When I remember these things*", means that by remembering the joyful days that have passed, our souls moan within us, longing to remain in a perpetual condition of joy and an unceasing praise.

And according to St. John Chrysostom, the remembrance of God's past dealing with us, is a support for us in the present; saying: [Not remembering God as we should, and not bearing Him in our minds continually, cause things to appear more difficult; ... for He will surely say to us: 'As you have forgotten Me, I shall likewise forget you'.... How great is God's remembrance of us, and our remembrance of Him].

According to some, the psalmist remembers the early days when he used to join the multitudes in the joyful and exultant processions of worship, which have been to him like a divine tabernacle in which he used to take refuge ...

Through this remembrance, he pours out his soul within himself.

Anyway, let our souls pour out within ourselves; not to be preoccupied with the 'ego', that would deny us beholding God; but to set forth beyond the 'ego', to behold God who cares for us, to enter into His amazing tabernacle, and to have our place in His holy house. In other words, what keep us from beholding God, are not the enemies who reproach us, saying: "*Where is your God?*"; but it is rather not encountering our souls, and not going beyond the 'ego', that corrupts beholding God, and our fellowship with His people, with the joyful spirit of worship, and our entrance into the divine tabernacle.

Commenting on this verse, St. Augustine says:

[Feeling comfortable within herself, the soul will see nothing beyond herself; and will consequently not behold God.

By letting God dwell above my soul, He can see me, guide me, and care for me; From up there, He would listen to me, call me, direct me along the way to my ultimate goal.

He says, I will go to the amazing tabernacle, to the house of God, where I find amazing things, which I admire.

God's tabernacle on earth are the believers; in whom I admire their control of their carnal members; and in whom it is said: "*Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts; and do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present ... your members as instruments of righteousness to God*" (Romans 6: 12, 13).

There, in the sanctuary of God, in the house of God, we find the fountain of understanding.

In the house of God there is an endless feast; for there, we find an occasion to be celebrated, not just once and for all; but there, an angelic choir holds a holy feast in the presence of the face of God; there will be the joy that will never fail].

According to the scholar Origen, the psalmist's soul here is the bride who sings the psalms of ascent (Psalms 120 to 134), and the song of songs, on entering the house of God, the secret place of the Groom.

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, for the help of His countenance" (5)

Perceiving that the secret of the bitterness of his soul, and its being cast down, is not the reproaches of the enemies, nor their oppression, but his own inner weakness; the

psalmist knows that her joy is in God her Savior, who lifts up her failing face, as though from the dust, from the bondage of the temporal things, and the confusion by the earthlies, to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit of God, and to enjoy fellowship with the heavenlies. If the sin is what destroys the soul, it is only God the Savior, who can restore her splendor and salvation.

+ Behold, We now enjoy certain inner gladness; We enjoy the eye of the mind, capable of seeing, even for a passing glimpse, an unchangeable thing.

“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?... Do you doubt your God?!; ... Hope in Him; ... And it is as though his soul answers him, in secret, saying: [Why should I not be; except that I have not yet ran to where that joy is, in which I plunged even for a moment?!].

(St. Augustine)

2- TRIBULATION AND CONFUSION: (6 – 11)

“O my God, My soul is cast down within me; Therefore I will remember You from the land of Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon”, from the (little) Hill Mizar” (6)

According to St. Jerome, the psalmist remembers God, while he is in the low land of the Jordan, or in the little Hill of Hermon; ... For any saint, however holy he is, would see himself in humiliation, as though in the low land of the Jordan; longing to ascend up to the tops of the mighty mountains; and even reaching up to the heavenly life.

If the worries of the world that crawl into the heart, bring it down to the low land of the Jordan; There, as well, we would hope for God’s mercies, For there, we encounter the Lord Christ, who emptied Himself, and descended to the water of the Jordan, to grant us the open heavens, to make us hear the joyful voice of the Father, and to grant us the

gift of His Holy Spirit. These are the blessings of baptism, where we remember God; namely remember the grace of the Holy Trinity in us.

+ From where shall I remember You?... From the little Hill and from the land of Jordan. ... Probably from the font of baptism, where I am granted the forgiveness of my sins; For no one runs toward the forgiveness of sins except him who is not satisfied with himself;... No one will be granted the forgiveness of sins except him who confesses that he is a sinner;... And no one will confess that he is a sinner unless he humiliate himself before God. ... That is why I remembered You from the land of the Jordan and from the little hill. ... Notice that he remembered God from the little hill and not from the high and mighty mountain.

If you ask about the meanings of the words, the word “Jordan” implies (descent or going down); Go down to be lifted up!; Do not be haughty, lest you may be expelled ... And the word “*Hermon*” means (honored). Get discontented with yourselves, otherwise, God will be discontented with you.

(St. Augustine)

It is befitting of us to remember God from the land of the Jordan, namely, from a spirit of humility, through the blessings of baptism; and from the little hill in Hermon, where we feel that our whole life, with all its possibilities, sanctified to the account of the Lord, in His possession, and the world has no place in it.... I am small, yet I am sanctified by, and in the Lord, through the work of His Holy Spirit in me.

By the land of the Jordan, and by Hermon, he probably means those returning from captivity; see them as they come close to the border of their land, stand to contemplate in God’s work with them; After seventy years, when there was no more hope of return, here He brings them back to rebuild the temple!... It is the portrait of every believer, returning to God after his fall, feeling set free from the bondage of captivity, and set forth toward his heavenly home; joyfully standing at the border, to contemplate in God’s

dealings with him, not forsaking his soul to bow underneath the yoke of bondage, but granting her the glorious liberty of the children of God. There, at the River Jordan, remembering how many troubles he has suffered; yet remembering as well, the mercies of God he has tasted; man would say together with the psalmist:

“Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All of Your waves and billows have gone over me. The

Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime; and in the night His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life” (7, 8)

That was the condition of the people of the old, when God brought over them the Assyrians, then the Chaldeans, to chasten them. ... And that was the condition of the prophet Jonah fleeing from the face of God; when he, while in the belly of the whale, prayed saying: *“For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me”* (Jonah 2: 3). He praises God who allowed for him to go through tribulation after another, to bring him forth, as though to the depth of the sea; Yet He turned the salty sea into a river of sweet water around him; and turned his barren wilderness into a fruitful paradise. That was how the billows of God’s chastisement dwelt unto him, which actually showed His fatherhood and mercies.

According to St. Augustine, *“the deep calling unto deep”* are the “wisdom” or the “understanding”. For, with every tribulation dwelling unto the believer, in his relationship with God, he enters into a new experience, and enjoys an understanding of the secrets of God, in His dealings with those He loves.

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, *“the deep calling unto deep”* refers to the Holy Book with its two testaments. Whoever enjoys the secrets and depths of the Old Testament, will have his heart go forth to the New Testament, to know its secrets. And

according to St. Cyril, the prophecies of the Old Testament call what correspond to them of realization in the New Testament.

According to St. Cyril, as quoted by father Onesimus of Jerusalem, what came in verse 8 refers to what happened in the days of king Hezekiah, when he was put in siege by the Assyrians; when, in the day time, God commanded His mercy, and in the night He sent His angel and killed 185, 000 of their men (2 kings 19: 32 – 35).

Commenting on saying: “*The Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night, His song shall be with me*”, the scholar Origen says: [The daytime refers to the eternal life, with no night, when we get the mercies of God in their amazing depths; As to our daily life here, it is like night, yet joyful, when we praise God, show His glory, for He promised us sure eternal mercies.

Anyway, God's mercies are unceasing; commanded by Him in the daytime, and revealed by bight, when tribulation, suffering, and temptation prevail. We glorify Him in the daytime, as we hear His promise, and praise Him in the night, as He transfigure in the midst of our troubles. Our praise amid the sufferings will be as follows:

“I will say to God my Rock: ‘Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a breaking of my bones, my enemies reproach me, while they say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” (9, 10)

Entering under chastisement, man assumes as though God has forgotten him or forsaken him, although He is actually a Support to His children even among His chastisement.

According to St. Augustine, these words are the cry-out of the Lord Christ on the cross, saying: "*O God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?*" [So our Head cried out as though speaking in our names (Matthew 27: 46; Psalm 22: 1).

The psalmist ends the psalm proclaiming that, although his bones were broken or crushed because of his intense tribulation and bitterness; and although his soul bowed in mourning, yet for joy, he trusts in God his Savior.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 42

MY TEARS HAVE BEEN MY FOOD

- + To You, O the living Fountain, my soul longs;
I am like deer that pant to the water brooks;
And on their way, struggling against the serpents, their thirst increase;
Grant me such true longing, to pant toward You;
In my sojourn, by Your cross I destroy the ancient serpent;
And I will come and appear before You, to find comfort in Your bosom.

- + My longing burns more; Who can quench it?
My tears becoming my food, my thirst for You grows more;
My tears will never cease by day, nor stop by night;
I shed them during my joy, as well as in my tribulations;
I feel no shame of them before those around me;
And I am not deprived of them in my secret retreat with You;
I love these sweet tears.

- + By my unceasing flood of tears, I proclaim Your perpetual remembrance in me;

I remember You, and You remember me, You who inscribed my name on Your palm;

Grant me never to forget You, lest I hear Your admonishment, saying::
"Why have you forgotten Me; yet even then, I shall never forget you".

+ Remembering You, and Your amazing works with me;
I would enjoy seeing You, and partake of the life of praise of Your people;
Remembering You within me;
I see You dwelling unto my soul, as though Your fiery chariot;
I enjoy You, seeing me, guiding me, and carrying me forth to You;
I enter into Your holy tabernacle, into Your house;
Setting my soul a holy tabernacle for You;
There I rejoice; and no one can take my joy away from me.

+ My tears will never dry up, for the sake of Your Word You grant me;
As I see deep calling unto deep;
As I see the secrets of the prophecies of the Old Testament, revealed;
As I see them realized in the New Testament.

+ With every morning, I listen to Your promises;
And with the dwelling of the night, when I enter into tribulation, I discover Your mercies;
You remain my victory and my Savior;
You strengthen my bones, broken by the enemy;
And lift my soul up, which bowed in bitter mourning.

+ Glory be to You, O my Savior;
For You alone, can wipe out my hidden tears.

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PSALM 43

VINDICATE ME, O MY LORD

As we said, psalms 42 and 43 represent one cry-out by the prophet David, which he gave to the children of Korah to put in tunes. In psalm 42, he talks about the past and the presence; whereas in psalm 43, he talks about the future.

It is a two-faced lamentation: a bitter face, and a joyful one. Seeing the sufferings waiting for him, yet not without glories, this psalm expresses the fellowship of passion together with the Lord Christ, and the experience of the glory and gladness of His resurrection.

The fathers present to us three interpretations of this psalm:

- 1- This psalm represents a proclamation by those returning from the Babylonian captivity. peaking in the singular tense; either on account of that those returning represent one people; or that they were few in number ... Either way, their souls exulted with God's light and truth, once they joyfully set forth toward the mountain of God, longing to enjoy the holy altar, and singing with the harp of the Spirit.
- 2- According to the scholar Origen, and to St. Athanasius, it is a psalm of the Lord Christ, suffering from the oppression of the Jews, the non-righteous nation; and from the betrayal of Judas, the deceitful and unjust disciple... Having borne our sins, He came to be as though forsaken by God the Father; suffering in the garden from intense sorrow; having received our bitter cup! ... By the cross, He brought us forth into the unique divine altar; and granted us the joy and praise instead of moaning and sorrow.
- 3- According to St. Augustine, this psalm is a talk coming out of the human soul, complaining of two things: the sin as an inner enemy, and the wicked as outer ones. Yet, having found God, her Savior, who lifts her up to His church, His holy mountain, and His house; to find in His atoning sacrifice, and in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, what would restore her youth, she rejoices and exults, to present by her whole being a symphony of love, instead of the intense sorrow and bitterness.

The title:

In the Hebrew version, there is no title for this psalm, probably on account of that it is considered as a consummation of the last one. According to the Septuagint version its title came as “*A psalm of David*”; While in the Syrian version, it came as: “*A palm of David when Jonathan told him that King Saul intends to have him killed*”.

The general frame:

- | | | |
|----|---|--------|
| 1- | Vindicate me, O my Lord | 1 -- 2 |
| 2- | The enjoyment of the house of salvation | 3 -- 4 |
| 3- | God, the Savior of my face | 5 |

1- VINDICATE ME, O MY LORD: (1)

“Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation. Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man” (1)

It is an inexpressible exalted comfort, to be capable of asking God to vindicate us; for His judgment is true, impartial, not according to appearances, but to the heart. Whoever delivers his way to God with a good conscience, would have nothing to fear. For, as the righteous cannot use deceit and injustice, the weapons used by the wicked against them, their only resort is, therefore, God, who, if on their side, no real harm will dwell upon them.

+ I do not fear Your judgment; for I know Your mercy.

He cries out: “*Vindicate me, O God*”.

Now, being a sojourner, You do not separate my place from that of the wicked;... I have to live together with the “tares” until the time of the harvest; ... You do not separate between the rain which come over me from that which come over them; But, in Your judgment, You discern between the believer and the non-believer.... We may be equally weak, but our consciences are not the same; We may equally suffer, but our longings are not similar. The longing of the wicked is perishable; but that of the righteous could be doubtful if it was not God, Himself who gives the promise.

(St. Augustine)

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, the talk here probably represents a cry-out by a righteous man like Daniel in the bitterness of captivity; when no one could save him or his people except God alone; when he found himself surrounded by the wicked, in a heathen nation that has no knowledge of the righteousness of God; where everyone is “*deceitful and unjust*”.

According to the scholar Origen, on the other hand, this talk is by our Lord Jesus Christ, asking for judgment between Him and the Jews, whom He calls “*an ungodly nation*”, on the one hand, and a “*deceitful and unjust man*”, namely, Judas who delivered Him, on the other.

Anyway, this talk also apply to the church, the body of the suffering Christ. For, the way He was attacked by His own, and betrayed by His disciple who ate , every member of His body is similarly treated; and in them the saying is realized: “*Man’s foes will be those of his own household*” (Matthew 10: 36)

Let us, therefore cry-out to God, when our enemies are stirred up against us, being sure that we are His children for whom He cares; We are referred to Him, and He refers Himself to us, being our God.

“For You are the God of my strength; Why do You cast me off? Why do I go mourning because the oppression of the enemy?” (2)

The psalmist cries out to the Lord, being his personal God and his strength. If all have forsaken him, or have become his oppressors, God alone remains attached to him; Hence, he dares to cries out: “*Why have You cast me off? Why have You forsaken me?*”; I have the right to resort to You, and to admonish You Do not leave me in my sorrow!

- + I go sorrowful; the enemy disturbs me by daily temptations; whether by an unclean love, or by unwarranted fear; hence my soul, in sorrow, asks God: “*Why?*”
- + Why do you say: “*Why do You cast me off? Why do I go mourning?*” ... Knowing that iniquity is the cause of sorrow; let righteousness be the cause of your gladness.

- + You complain that the enemy afflicts you; This may be true; But it is you who gave him the chance to do so!
- + Now, there is an open race before you; Choose the race of wisdom; Join your King; and close the door before the tyrant's face.

(St. Augustine)

It is to be noticed that the psalmist, even in his complaint to God against the enemy, says: "*Why do I go mourning?*", and not, [Why am I surrounded in sorrow?] For the children of God never stand still, even when surrounded by tribulations on all sides, but they "go" steadily along the royal path. Tribulation motivates the true believer to work diligently, and even to run, in order to reach the higher reward.

When the whole world stood against St. Athanasius the apostolic, he did not slow down in his strife, but, trusting in God his Savior he said: [And I am against the whole world]. And St. Monica did not stop praying, in spite of the resistance of her husband, her mother-in-law, and her children, even her servants... and, by her persistent spiritual strife, she presented to us St. Augustine, the fruit of her tears.

2- THE ENJOYMENT OF THE HOUSE OF SALVATION: (3 – 4)

Having cried out to the Lord, His God, Savior, and strength, proclaiming that he will keep walking along the royal path, in spite of the sorrows surrounding him, and the continuous troubles brought on him by his enemies, the psalmist, now, seeks from the Lord to send him His Light, to lead him to His church, being His holy house, the house of salvation.

"Oh, send Your light and Your truth; Let them lead me; Let them bring me to Your holy hill, and to Your tabernacle.

Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy" (3, 4)

- a- Who is the Light and the Truth who lead me, and bring me up to reach the top of God's holy hill, but the Lord Christ, who is "*the Light of the World*", and "*the Truth*"? ... According to many fathers, the Light is love, and the darkness is hatred; The Lord Christ, the Light and the Truth, grants us the true spirit of love, to save us from the darkness of this world, and to carry us up to the light of His heavens.

We cannot enter into the membership of the church, as members of the body of Christ, unless we accept the union with Christ, the Head; to have Him as the Light, the Truth, and the Love.

- + This Light and that Truth, are actually two faces of the same coin. For, what is the Light of God but His Truth? And what is the Truth of God but His Light?... The Person of the One Christ is both; For according to Him: "*I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness*" (John 12: 46); and, "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*" (John 14: 6). He, Himself, is the "*Light*", and "*the Truth*".

Let Him come, vindicate us against an ungodly nation; and save us from someone deceitful and unjust. Let Him come to separate the wheat from the tares; and at the time of the harvest, send His angels to gather from His kingdom every evildoer, and cast him in the fire of Hades; while gathering the wheat together in His storehouse.

(St. Augustine)

According to father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem:

[By saying "*The Light*", the prophet means (the Joy); For the tribulation and sorrow are darkness to the heart. He means to say to the Lord: 'Send Your true joy, and Your help, to bring me up to Mount Zion and to Your house, namely to Your holy sanctuary. This is the supplication of the captives in Babylon, seeking freedom from captivity.

Whereas St. Athanasius the apostolic, says that this is the supplication of the prophets to God the Father, to send His only begotten

Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who says: "*I am the Light of the World*", He who leads us high to heaven, and up to the heavenly places.

And according to the scholar Origen, The "*holy hill of God*" is His kingdom; whereas His "*tabernacles*" are the houses of the saints, as, according to our Lord, glory be to Him: "*In My Father's house are many mansions*" (John 14: 2)

b- If in his sorrow, the psalmist says: "*Why do I go mourning?*"; he does not only continue to walk along the royal path, but he seeks the divine help and intervention to "*go up*"... That is the work of the Lord Christ (the Instructor), who grants us His Holy Spirit, to bring us up to His holy hill, and to His tabernacle; Namely, to the divine presence (the holy hill), and into the fellowship of the saints, being the dwelling of God among His people.

According to some, mentioning "*God's holy hill*", and, "*His tabernacles*", indicate that the author could not be before David, or after Solomon. For before the prophet David, there was no knowledge of "God's holy hill"; and after Solomon, there was no tabernacle, for the temple was already built... As to the "*tabernacles*" in plural, in the time of the prophet David there were two tabernacles for the divine worship: one in Zion, as frequently mentioned in the Holy Book; and another at Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16: 37 – 39).

Anyway, the fathers did not separate our love for God from our appreciation of His house. Even in the West, some scholars warn against disregarding the bond with the house of the Lord... One of them says: [Whoever has no love for the house of God is ungodly], and another says: [Those led by the Lord, are led to His holy hill, and to His tabernacles; Whereas those who pretend to be led by the Holy Spirit, while disregarding the church, the house of God, will go backward, for they disobey the written commandments, deceiving themselves].

+ His holy hill is His holy church, that mountain, according to the prophet Daniel, which was a very small rock that grew to cover the face of the earth, and destroyed all the kingdom of the earth.

Whoever is out of this mountain, would not hope for the eternal life; For many diligently strive in their prayers for diverse reasons, Yet they are committed not to rejoice in this endeavor, for even the demons were diligent, as well, in seeking to go and enter into the swines (Luke 8).

Let us strive to reach the eternal life, and by such longing, we can say: “*Send Your Light and Your Truth*” (3).

- + The “tabernacle” is for the nomads, and for those in a situation of war; Hence, hearing of “a tabernacle”, we should perceive a situation of war, and be alert against the enemy.

(St. Augustine)

c- The house of God is called (the house of salvation), on account of that it is set upon the sacrifice of the cross, being the secret of the reconciliation with God, and the enjoyment of union with Him. Hence, the sight of the psalmist was directed toward the altar, when he says: “*I will go to the altar of God; to God, my exceeding joy*” (4).

Talking about the altar that appears in the temple, we also refer to another altar set in our souls; yet (not another), for it is one with it.

- + The soul of every good man is nothing but an altar, up from which the sweet fragrance of incense ascends by Truth and spirit; namely, by prayers with a pure conscience.

In short we may say that all Christians strive to set altars and statutes (like the Cherubim); which are not without life or feelings, but capable of receiving the Spirit of God.

(The scholar Origen)

- + Spiritually, we understand that “faith” is the inner altar of the temple of God; which the seen temple symbolizes. Every gift we present to God, whether prophecy, teaching, prayer, praise, songs of praise, or any other spiritual gift of the mind, will not be received by God, unless they are presented with true faith; to be securely bound to that altar; for then, our words would come out pure without blemish.

(St. Augustine)

- + The heavenly altar, set among us here, is the gathering together of those who have dedicated their life to prayer; to have one voice and one mind.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

According to St. Agnatus of Antioch, the church is the place of the sacrifice (Thysiasterion); as he wrote in his epistles, on his way to martyrdom. He identified the church as being life together with the slain Lord Christ, enjoying the “Eucharist” -- the body and blood of the Lord; the gift of the altar to the believers. And there, he is setting forth to deliver his life a sacrifice of love on the altar of God through martyrdom. The church is actually the “Golgotha”, proclaiming the mutual love between God and man; in which the unique atonement sacrifice of Christ is proclaimed on the holy altar; and in which the believer longs to die all day long for the sake of His slain beloved One. That is what St. Augustine expressed, saying:

[It is the catholic sacrifice, offered by the Lord, the Higher Priest, He who delivered Himself with passion for our sake, to make out of us a body for such a great Head.

That is the sacrifice of the Christians, by which all come to be one unique body in Christ Jesus.

That is what the church sanctifies through the sacrament of the altar.

For, while lifting the offerings up to God, she presents herself an offering to Him ...]

He says as well: [In heaven there is a certain unseen altar, to which no wicked can approach ... What kind of sacrifice is offered there? Whoever enters there, is himself, presented as a burnt offering]

d- Entering into the house of salvation, the psalmist sings, saying: "... *to God, an exceeding joy (to my youth)* – (according to the Arabic version)" (4). He turned into a young man, exultant in spirit, whom time cannot bring forth to helpless old age; nor the bitter events can make him lose the joy of youth.

According to St. Augustine, we, in this world, are as though in a sorrowful condition of old age; But God works in us to bring us forth into joyful everlasting renewal, where we hear the words of the Lord, saying: "*Behold, I make everything new*" (Revelation 21: 5).

We experience the joy of youth through the renewal of nature which we gained in the water of baptism by the Holy Spirit who renews our youth like an eagle's; and stays working in us, granting us a continuous renewal through the perpetual repentance, and the fellowship of life with God; where we take off the works of the old man, and put on the works of the new man, according to the words of the apostle, saying: "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*" (2 Corinthians 5: 17).

3- GOD, THE SAVIOR OF MY FACE: (5)

Having enjoyed salvation through the church of Christ, the place of the sacrifice, and the house of salvation, the psalmist sings for joy, saying:

"And on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God" (5, 6)

- a- Entering into the church, the psalmist finds what is public, belongs personally to Him -- The Lord, God of the whole church, is His personal God ... Hence he repeats the expression “*God, my God*”. And, according to St. John Chrysostom: [Out of his strong love, he considers what is public, as his own; the way the prophets used to do every now and then].
- b- The captive Jews refused to play their praises to the Lord on musical instruments, as a sign of their sorrow, anticipating their return to Jerusalem, the joyful city of God; as according to the psalm:
“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there, those who carried us away captive required of us a song, and those who plundered us required of us mirth, saying: ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion’. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalm 136 (137): 1 – 4).

Playing for the Lord on the harp, therefore means the return to Jerusalem, where the believers sing their praises with the joy of the heart.

The harp, as we already said, refers to the body of the believer, when he delivers it into the hands of the Holy Spirit to play on its strings a praise of love and holiness, to have all his members, senses, feelings, and all his energies, testify to God’s work and righteousness.

According to St. Augustine, it is befitting of us to play on the harp, by our obedience to the commandments, and our endurance of sufferings; For by that we praise God.

Finally, enjoying the gifts of God, his Savior, the psalmist demands from his soul, not to stay cast down, nor mourning, but to lift her face up to behold the face of God; ... to encounter her Savior Groom, to dwell together with Him in His heavens, as though in His everlasting sanctuary.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 43

IN THE HOUSE OF SALVATION

- + When everyone stand against me;
I see You, O my Savior, open Your stabbed side for me;
And bring me forth into the secrets of Your love;
And count me worthy of dwelling together with You in Your sanctuary;

- + Let the devil do whatever he can;
For I, though filled with sorrow,
Yet in You, I become exultant;
When You lift me up to Your house;
And bring me forth to Your altar;
While I count myself unworthy to suffer for Your sake.

- + Having offered Yourself a sacrifice of love as an atonement for my sins;
Receive my life a burnt offering for Your sake;

- + In Your house, I enjoy Your divine altar
I have communion of Your body and blood shed for my sake;
Set Your altar in my depths;
And smell my worship a fragrant incense rising up to Your heavens;

- + Why would my soul moan within me;
When You long to see me;
And to carry me by Your Holy Spirit up to Your heavens?

- + Glory be to You, O my beloved;
For I anticipate the day I encounter You;
When I see You face to face; and enjoy the fellowship of Your glories.

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PSALM 44

“WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER”

Its occasion:

It probably has been a time of tribulation that dwelt upon the whole congregation (9 – 14); not because of an apostasy or falling into heathen worship (17 – 21); but as a test of faith. The psalm represents a cry-out of a suffering people for the sake of righteousness; ... a cry-out that endures along the eras since the days of Adam, when Cain killed Abel for no reason, ... and its echo remains even in paradise where the martyrs who were killed for the sake of testifying to the Word of God, say: *“How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth; ... And it was said to them, that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed”* (Revelation 6: 9 – 11). It is the procession of all the generations.

This psalm is considered an example of entering into sufferings on the level of the people, not for chastisement, but to partake of the divine love; for us to say: *“For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter”* (22)

It is also considered as a living example of the collective life of fellowship, together with a practice of a personal relationship with God ... For the psalmist often speaks in the name of the congregation, without disregarding his personal talk to the Lord, his king and God; ... saying: *“You are my king, O God, Command victories for Jacob”* (4); crying out to his God for the sake of the whole church (Jacob).

The general frame:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 1- God's dealings in the past | 1 -- 3 |
| 2- A perpetual horn of salvation | 4 -- 8 |
| 3- A test of the present faith | 9 -- 16 |
| 4- A word of admonishment | 17 -- 22 |
| 5- A cry-out for the sake of salvation | 23 – 26 |

1- GOD'S DEALINGS IN THE PAST: (1 – 3)

This psalm starts by a collective praise, sung by the congregation in the time of tribulation, when all remember God's dealings in the past; saying:

"We have heard with our ears, O God, Our fathers have told us what deeds You did in their days, in days of old" (1)

The whole people bring back to their memory God's dealings with their fathers in the days of Moses and Joshua the son of Nun, when God set them free of the bondage of Pharaoh, drove nations out before them, and presented to them the promised land; not by their swords, nor by their might, but according to the riches of the promises of God; It was the work of God's rich grace at the beginning, as well as at the end.

The past for us, as children of God, is not just history that passes along, but it is an experience which extends along the time, by which man lives with God, his Savior and Care-Taker. God, for us is the same, yesterday, today, and forever; worked in the past; and still works at present, confirming the truth of His promises with us, until He brings us forth to the fellowship of His glories to come.

He says: *"We have heard with our ears"*; meaning that, what their fathers have told them about God's dealings with them, is something sure without any doubt.

It is the duty of fathers to present to their children the experience of their life with God, being the deposit of the living faith working along the generations. The tradition once delivered to the saints, is lived by the church along the generations, to experience the active evangelic life. It is befitting of the children, as well, to receive such a lived experience, and the practical gospel, to live, as it was by the early generations; according to the words of the prophet Moses: *"Ask your father, and he will show you"* (Deuteronomy 32: 7).

Father Papias, bishop of Herapolis, disciple of St. John the Evangelist, presenting to us his experience, says;

[With no hesitation I add what I have learned and received of interpretations from the elders, which I am sure of their soundness ... For I do not believe that what I learn from the books would benefit me as much as what I get from the live voice].

The experience that the psalmist and the people tasted are:

“You have drove out the nations with Your hand, but them You planted. Now You afflicted the peoples and cast them out. For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword, nor did their own arm save them. But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance, because You favored them” (2, 3)

1- The foremost of this experience is that the hand of God drove out heathen nations to plant His own people. That is God's plan in the life of man; He intends to uproot every corrupt (nation) in the heart, to set His (kingdom) inside it (Luke 17: 21).

What is the “hand of God” that uproots, to plant, but the divine Word, *“Through whom everything were made, and without whom nothing was made that was made”* (John 1: 3); the Word, the Creator, and the Worker, incarnated for our sake, to drive the corrupt nature away from us, and to plant us in Him, members of His holy body. That was known by the demons who recognized the mission of Christ, the incarnate Word, and cried out during His ministry: *“Have You come here to torment us?”* (8: 29) Yes indeed, He came to destroy their kingdom, and to drive them away from the heart of man, as they were driven away from heaven, to proclaim His heavenly glory in us; hence He said: *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven”* (Luke 10: 18).

2- *“For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword, nor did their own arm save them”.*

This is the experience of the children of God along the eras; For his people were not liberated from the bondage of Pharaoh by a human arm, nor a material sword, but by the blood of the Lamb, the Grantor of salvation. Moses said to the people: *“Do not be afraid; stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; ... The*

Lord will fight for you, and you hold your peace” (Exodus 14: 13, 14); Then all of them sang, saying: “The horse and its rider, He has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; The Lord is a man of war” (Exodus 15: 1 – 3).

Moses did not overcome Amalik by the sword, but by stretching his hands like the cross.

And, entering into the promised land, Joshua did not destroy the wall of Jericho by the sword, but by blowing the trumpets of ram’s horns, shouting, and carrying the ark of the covenant (Joshua 6: 4).

And the young man David said to the mighty Goliath: *You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts” (1 Samuel 17: 45)*

We do not inherit the promised land, the Higher Jerusalem, by our sword, but by the sword of the Lord, coming out of His mouth (Revelation 1: 16; 19: 15); capable of separating the truth from vanity, and of cutting off everything unclean in us.

3- The secret of conquest is *“the right hand of God, His arm, and the light of His countenance”*
(3)

+ Your *“right hand”* is the secret of Your power.
Your *“arm”* is “Your Son” Himself, and “the Light of Your countenance”

What does this mean, but that You were present with them by Your miracles. ... For when the presence of God appears by any miracle, we do not see Him by our eyes, but through the activity of the miracle.

(St. Augustine)

The secret of our conquest is the incarnate Word of God, being:

- a- **“The right hand of the Father”**; namely, His power, being the Rational Word of God, or the uttering mind of God. For, according to the scholar Origen: [He was so called, on account of that He made all creation, showing the power of God].
- b- **“The arm of the Lord”**; for every divine gift is *“from the Father, by the Son, in the Holy Spirit”*; one gift presented by the ordinance of the Father, realized by the Son, the rational Word; hence called, “The hand or arm of God”. When the Holy Book says that God stretched His hand, or bared His arm, it means by this the divine incarnation; when the Son came down to tell us about the plan of the Father, His love, and His work.
- c- **“The light of the countenance of the Father”**; or as the apostle call Him: *“the brightness of His glory”* (Hebrew 1: 3); He is the splendor of His Light, and one with Him; For the Light could not be Light without splendor; and there is no splendor without Light... Hence, it is also said: *“Light from Light”*; for He is the splendor that comes eternally from Him, not separate from Him, and of the same essence.

4- Of the most prominent experiences gained by the children of God through His dealings with His believers along history, is that they are the object of God’s pleasure; expressed by the psalmist, saying: *“because You favored them”* (3).

God is in no need of us; For He is the Giving Love, who intends to give us the fellowship of life together with Him; for no other cause than that we are the object of His pleasure. Having sinned to Him, the incarnate Son of God came down to deliver Himself a sacrifice of love and obedience, to be smelt by the Father a fragrance of pleasure and favor. ... Being members of His body, we are to be counted as the object of His pleasure and favor, taking the curse of the sin away from us.

2- A PERPETUAL HORN OF SALVATION: (4 – 8)

Cherishing the past dealings of God with His people, the psalmist turns this experience into a living present actuality.

- a- A collective and personal salvation: In God, working in the whole history, he sees his own King and God; And at the same time, through

his personal life of fellowship, the psalmist seeks, in the name of the congregation (Jacob); saying:

“You are my King, O God, command victories for Jacob” (4)

Through the personal relationship binding the psalmist to God of all mankind, counting Him as His own King and God, he had full daring to seek from God to fulfill His promises; having promised the salvation of His people.

How beautiful it is for the believer to use his daring with God, not for his own benefit, but for the edification of the whole congregation, and for the salvation of others; For when we forget about ourselves, and seek for the sake of the others, we shall gain to our account, more than we have ever sought or asked for.

b- Daring to hold fast to God's promises to His people, we bear Him as 'our strength'; and by Him we gain conquest over the devil who never ceases to complain against us.

“Through You we shall push down our enemies. Through Your name we will trample those who rise against us” (5)

The psalmist does not discern between “God” and “the name of God”. By God we shall push down our enemies, and by His name we shall trample those who rise against us. For the name of God means the divine presence.

Who are our enemies whom we shall push down, but the works of the old man?! And who are those whom we shall trample, but the sins and the evil works?! The true believer who accepts God as his King, will deliver his inner life, body, behavior, and possessions, to the account of the King, to dwell in the kingdom of God, who knows no failure or defeat.

c- We boast in God our Savior, confess His name, and glorify Him for the sake of His works with us

“For I will not trust in my bow, nor shall my sword save me. But You have saved us from our enemies; and have put to shame those who hated us. In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever” (6 – 8)

Being our King, You save Your people, not by their strength nor by their weapons, but by You, to become the subject of their boast and unceasing praise.

- + That was the past, ... How about the future? By You, there will come the time when our enemies will be (winnowed) like chaff, and like dust they will be driven out from the earth (the new, namely the eternal).

“I will not trust in my bow, nor shall my sword save me” (6).

- + What does he mean by “we shall **boast**”? and “we shall **confess**”? (8)
Saving us from our enemies, and giving us an eternal kingdom, In us the words will be realized: *“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You”* (Psalm 84: 4).

(St. Augustine)

- + Intending to catch us in his nets, and finding in us nothing that belongs to him, the devil would depart confused; As for us, we can praise God together with the prophet, saying to Him: *“You have saved us from our enemies; and have put to shame those who hated us”*.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

3- A TEST OF THE PRESENT FAITH: (6 – 16)

The psalmist describes the present tribulation in a bitter collective lamentation, in which it came:

- 1- The psalmist feels that, because God has taken Himself off from the midst of the armies of His people; He cast them off, and put them to shame.

“But You have cast us off and put us to shame; and You do not go out with our armies” (9)

What came upon the people was not because of the strength of their enemies, as much as because God has cast them off for some time. This time, however, it was not to chasten them for a certain sin they have committed, but for the sake of testing their faith.

+ “*You have put us to shame*”, not before our consciences, but in the people’s sight. ,, Everywhere, Christians were driven out, on account of being ‘Christians’, as though it was some kind of ridicule and reproach.

Where then is our God and King?! He who commanded victories for Jacob?!
Where is He, who has done all those things that our fathers told us?!
Where is He, who has done all those things that He proclaimed to us by His Spirit?!
Has He changed?! ... Yes, ... Those things were done as, “a contemplation of the sons of Korah”.... It is befitting of us to understand the reasons behind all that. Why did He intend for us to suffer all those things at this specific certain time?!

We came out to encounter our enemies; And You did not go out with our armies. ... We saw them very strong, and we were without strength. ... Where is Your might?! ...
Where is Your right hand?! ... Where is that sea that dried up; and in its waves the chasing Egyptians drowned?!... Where is the collapse of the opposition of Amalek by the sign of the cross?!

(St. Augustine)

God often drew His hands away from us, yet for sometime, not to forsake us, but to train and teach us, that without Him we would never overcome; and to give us the chance to proclaim our love for Him by continuing to strive, even when there are no heavenly comforts. That is what St. (Abba) Anthony made clear in his epistles; saying that God, at

the beginning of the way, gives many comforts that fill the heart with joy, and exhort us with the spirit of strife; But chooses to withdraw His comforts for a certain time, without forsaking us. Then, when we feel an intense draught, we would proclaim our love for Him, for His sake, even if we do not get comforts, through our persistence on strife, and on seeking His free grace.

St. John Chrysostom likens God to a mother who takes her hand away from her infant while training him on walking. Even if he falls once and several times; even cries, he will see his mother looking down on him with compassion with her eyes and heart. Seeking his continual maturation, she would never forsake him.

It may so seem that God has cast us off from His face, has forsaken us to reproach; does not go out with us during our spiritual strife. Yet, we should have faith that He dwells in us, will never forsake us; and, being members of the body of Christ, He works in us by His Holy Spirit, for our glory, yet in the proper time.

- 2- Feeling bitter defeat; that would expose the extent of our weakness, helplessness, and dryness.

“You make us turn back from the enemy; and those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. You have given us up like sheep intended for food, and have scattered us among the nations”
(10, 11)

When the believer gains a series of victories, it so happens that he may fall into pride; Hence God, intends to take off His hand from him for some time, to make him discover his weaknesses.

When the Lord did take off His hand, and did not go with the armies of His people, they turned back from the enemy, were taken captives and slaves, and were scattered among the nations. Here the people perceived the extent of their weakness; like helpless sheep before wolves; or even sheep, not fit for production, but only intended for slaughter.

How miserable is he, who thinks of himself as something, and falls into pride, when God grants him consecutive victories, or valuable gifts; For then the divine grace would forsake him, to realize, how his weakness, shame, and the dryness of his nature, make him only fit for slaughter! ... Hence the apostle says to the Corinthians, warning against pride: *“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us, not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?”* (1 Corinthians 4: 6, 7). ... If all what is in our hands are a gift from God, that we have got for free, so why do you boast on others?

3- God did not allow for the tribulation for His own benefit.

“You sell Your people for naught, and are not enriched by their price” (12)

Here, the psalmist seems as though he admonishes God for selling His people for naught; that His people became in shame, ... God was not glorified, neither in His people, nor in His enemies, who humiliate His people, and insult His name. According to St. Augustine: [During their escape before their heathen enemies, did the Christians hold meetings to celebrate the glory of God?!... Did they praise God in collective harmony in the churches of God, as they used to do in the time of peace?!].

It is an amiable admonishment to God, seeking from Him to lift the tribulation up, and to support His believers, to make them sing His praise together in an atmosphere of peace and security.

That could be considered as an admonishment addressed to the people as well; on account of that God seeks no benefit for Himself out of their tribulation; for He did not sell them to their enemies, anticipating price or profit; but seeks their edification, their eternal salvation, and their glory.

- 4- In our tribulation we endure the passion of Christ; to be counted as partaking of His crucifixion, as well as in the strength and gladness of His resurrection. Hence the description of the passion came to apply to the Lord Christ in His trial, passion, and crucifixion; and to apply, as well, to His church who partake of His passions.

“You make us a byword among the nations, a shaking of the head among the peoples. My dishonor is continually before me, and the shame of my face has covered me, because the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, because of the enemy and the avenger” (14 – 16)

According to St. Augustine: [They spoke with their lips and shook their head; That is what they did with the Lord Jesus and with all his saints, whom they took hold, ridiculed, and slain].

According to some the talk here applies to the people of the old, particularly at the time of the captivity of Jerusalem or Judah, when the surrounding nations ridiculed them, and shook their head, specially the Edomites who shut the ways before the escapees of Judah, to catch and deliver them into the hands of the Chaldeans; and turned the desolate cities of Judah into pastures for sheep..

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, shaking the head as a way of ridicule, refers to the work of the heretics, enemies of the church, who intend to shake our faith in the Head -- Jesus Christ, to become in shame and reproach.

5- A WORD OF ADMONISHMENT: (17 – 22)

Describing the tribulation through which the people was going through, the psalmist enters with God into a word of admonishment – something that God wishes us to do in such circumstances; to get attached to Him, and to converse with Him. For it often happens in the time of joy, that we tend to get so preoccupied with ourselves, overwhelmed by haughtiness and pride, that God has no place in our hearts.

Being His children, let us admonish Him, for He listens, longing to give us in abundance, not just His goods and blessings, but His love, and even Himself..

In an admonishment of love, the psalmist asks God: Why did he allow for His people to go through such tribulation?!

“All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten You, nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from Your way” (17, 18)

God longs to hear such words, which bear no self-righteousness nor self-defense before Him, but faith in Him, abidance to His way, and a proclamation of our true love for Him. Those were the words of the apostle Peter after his fall: *“Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You”* (John 21: 16); and were also the words of the apostle Paul: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter’”* (Romans 8: 35, 36)... Here the psalmist proclaims; that the people did not do like Lot’s wife who looked backward, and turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19: 26), nor like the Israelites who grumbled in the wilderness, longing for the pots of meat and for eating the bread of bondage (Exodus 16: 3); nor did they put their hands to the plow and looked backward (Luke 9: 62); but, like the apostle Paul they *“forgot all things which are behind, and reached forward to those things which are ahead”* (Philippians 3: 13).

What is *“the Way”* from which our steps did not depart, but the Lord Christ who says: *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”* (John 14: 6)? to whom men of the old covenant have put their sight in hope, being *“the desire of all nations”* (Haggai 2: 7); and in whom they longed to enjoy the new resurrected life... Behold, we, every day wait for His coming on the cloud, and say: *“Amen, Come, Lord Christ”* (Revelation 22: 20)

According to St. Augustine, the psalmist proclaims here that their steps have not departed from the narrow way designated by the Lord for us to reach eternity; the way which, although bitter, yet it does not bring us forth to death, but to the “shadow of death”, saying: *“You covered us with the shadow of death”* (19). If the temptations with all their strength bring us forth to the death of the body, they bring us forth to the shadow of death [for our death is the shadow of death; whereas the true death is the condemnation of the devil].

Then the psalmist consummates his admonishment by saying:

*“If we had forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a foreign god,
Would not God search this out?*

For He knows the secrets of the heart” (20, 21)

In such admonishment, the psalmist proclaims the following:

a- I should not talk; for You, O God, know the secrets of the heart; You know that we have not bound ourselves to a foreign god, but to Your

Holy Name, not only apparently, but deep in the heart.

b- We know You, and will never forget You; and You know us the way the lover knows his beloved, not the knowledge of mind-perception, but

that of strong relationship, the knowledge of love (see Mathew &: 23). In His knowledge, the Holy God receives no one but the saints.

c- If the tribulation has become too intense, if the enemies have got so stirred up against us, and we were almost on the verge of death, Yet, in

all this we have not forgotten You. As according to Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic: [The more the enemies provoke us, the more liberated

we shall be; ... The more they oppress us, the closer we shall get together; ,, And the more they intend for us to deflect from goodness, the

more we shall get to preach, saying: *“All this have come upon us, but we have not forgotten You”*].

Finally the psalmist ends his admonishment by saying:

*“Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep
for the slaughter” (22)*

That is the voice of the catholic church since Adam till the end of time, testifying to God until death, accepting the fellowship of the passion of Christ with joy; and longing to be accounted for Him as sheep for the slaughter; the way He Himself has been (See Isaiah 53: 7); ... Going

through optional death all day long, if not by shedding blood, it will be by spiritual strife, by giving and delivering to everyone, even to non-believers, for the sake of God, the Lover of all mankind.

- + In my capacity as a priest to My Lord Jesus Christ, to whom I present a sacrifice every day; I wish I can offer my life to Him a sacrifice; the way He gave His life a sacrifice of love for my sake.
- + Let all that come over me: Fire, cross, confrontation of vicious beasts; tear and break, ... Let all the tortures of the devil come upon me; for the sake of reaching to my Lord Jesus Christ.
- + Why would I deliver myself to death?! ... to fire, to the sword, to the vicious beasts?1 ... Whoever is near to the sword, is near to God; and whoever is with the beasts, is with God; on condition that all this happen in the name of Jesus Christ; ... I would endure everything to partake of His passion.

(St. Agnatus of Antioch)

- + We could be killed several time a day; For whoever is perpetually ready to die, his reward will be kept to receive it all at once.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + The saints who offer themselves (a sacrifice) to God, offer themselves alive every day. Let us offer ourselves (sacrifices); Let us bring ourselves to death for the sake of Christ our God.
How did they put themselves to death? By not loving the world or the things of the world (1 John 2: 15); About which the apostle says: "*Those who are Christ's have circumcised the flesh with its passions and desires*" (Galatians 5: 24). That was how the saints put themselves to death.

(Father Dorotheos of Gazza)

6- A CRY-OUT FOR THE SAKE OF SALVATION: (23 – 26)

If our love for God motivates us to put ourselves to death for his sake all day long, through continuous strife against sin, and delivering the will to let the free grace of God work in our life; and through testifying to the evangelic life up to the end, ... That will be realized, not through a feeling of despair nor of defeat, but through the sure enjoyment of the strength and gladness of the resurrection of the Lord; hence the psalmist says:

“Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise, do not cast us off forever. Why do You hide Your face, and forget our affliction and our oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust. Our body clings to the ground. Arise for our help, and redeem us for Your mercies’ sake” (23 – 26)

That is the faith of the whole church in the resurrection with the Lord Christ; and that was the cry out of the martyrs during their torture, and of those who strive during their labor. In humility they bow their heads and bellies down to the dust, seeking the strength of His resurrection, saying together with the apostle: *“If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him”* (Romans 6: 8); and, *“He raised us together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 2: 6)

What does the psalmist mean by the terms: *“Awake”, “sleep”, and, “Arise”?*

+ By the word *“sleep”* the psalm refers to God’s perseverance and longsuffering on us.

(St. John Chrysostom)

St. Jerome demands from us to awake the Lord Christ, sleeping in us, namely, to awake our faith in Him by repentance, saying: [In case He sleeps because of our sins; let us say to Him: *“Awake, Why do You sleep, O Lord?”*. And in case the waves strike our boat, let us awake Him, saying: *“Lord, save us, we are perishing”* (Matthew 8: 25; Luke 8: 24)].

And according to St. Cyril the Great, awaking the Lord Christ means crying out to Him during the tribulations and the sufferings, together with trusting in Him; saying: [Christ dwells in the midst of His chosen ones, and allows for them, by His holy wisdom, to go through persecutions,

He may seem asleep; but, when the storm reaches its climax, and the people in the belly of their boat cannot anymore endure, they are committed to cry out: "*Awake, Why do You sleep, O Lord?*" Then, He will wake up and take away all fear without delay].

And according to the scholar Origen: [He is asleep in holy tranquility, watching your perseverance and endurance, anticipating the repentance of sinners and their return to Him].

AN INSPIRATION FRPM PSALM 44

"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG" (Romans 8: 36)

- + You shone on our life, O Sun of Righteousness;
There is no more night in it;
It has become all day;
You shone on us with Your cross, O Priest and slain One;
Qualify us to rise up together with You on Your cross;
Partake of Your passion;
And rejoice in Your company, O true love.

- + You are the Lord of history;
You have done wonders with our fathers;
And Your hand still works in our life;
Take the kingdoms of evil away from our hearts;
And plant Your kingdom in us.

- + You work in us;
For we are the object of Your pleasure and love;
Reign in our hearts by the sword of Your word;
By the wounds of Your love.

- + We counted You as though You have forsaken us;

That You have sold us without price;
The enemy is ridiculing and reproaching us;
And we, in contrition, worship You;
Our bellies attach to the dust;
Bring us forth as though from the grave;
And grant us Your resurrection working in us.

+ Glory be to You, O Risen from the dead;
Raise us, and make us sit together with You in Your heavens.

=====

PSALM 45

THE WEDDING PRAISE

FOR THE MESSIAH, THE WARRIOR KING

A royal Messianic psalm::

It is one of the royal psalms, which include several stages in the royal life; and describe a celebration of a royal wedding, that could not be applied to any human wedding; but only to the spiritual wedding between the Lord Christ, the King, and His church.

The three previous psalms – the psalms of sufferings of individuals and the congregation, are followed by this royal psalm of glory; whose prophetic goal is to reveal Christ the King, and the church, His bride.

It came after the psalms of suffering, for the Holy Spirit to proclaim that the suffering is the way to the eternal wedding.

In the last psalm, we hear a collective lamentation, in which the whole congregation feel as though they have been rejected by God, brought to reproach, did not go with them to war, and delivered them to their enemies. In the present royal Messianic psalm, we see the congregation united with the Messiah, the warrior King, and enter into an inner glory, as a heavenly adorned bride, whose spiritual beauty, the king desired; we see her enter into His palace and enjoy Him.

In the last psalm, the people were a byword among the peoples, an object of ridicule, and shaking of the head. Here, the people are presented as a queen, coming to the King, followed by fellow virgins, her companions.

In the last psalm, the people feel as though God has sold them for no price. Here they feel as though God has sold everything, and fought mighty men to acquire this people, to grant them his riches, and to flood His blessings on them.

In the last psalm, the people present themselves sacrifices of love, as sheep to the slaughter. Here, the people enjoy the gladness of the resurrection, its strength, and eternal glories.

In the last psalm, we find a call to God, saying: “*Awake*”. Here, we find the call addressed to the people, saying: “*Forget your own people and your father’s house; So the King will greatly desire your beauty*” (10, 11).

The Messiah King:

In the ‘Tergom’ – the old Jewish interpretation – the word “*Messiah*” has been added to the word “*king*”; saying: “*O King Messiah, You are fairer than the sons of men*”.

The early Christian writings and liturgies, came to interpret this psalm, as being a praise of the wedding between the Lord Christ and His church.

It is a mutual song of love between the Savior Messiah and His queen bride; in which the church meditates in her Groom, fairer than the sons of men, who, alone, can enter into the battle to her account to overcome the devil, liberate His bride from his captivity; pour His splendor on her, grant her His righteousness, and fellowship in His glories. And in it, the Groom meditates in her, proclaims His desire for her, and grants her His joy, gladness, strength, and authority; to let her live as a queen, exultant by the Spirit.

Some may assume that this psalm describes the wedding of king Solomon; but as we said, it bears certain expressions that could not be applied to a human.

While some others believe that, even if it describes Solomon's wedding, yet as a symbol of the Lord Christ, the King of peace; And as the Lord Christ said about Himself: "*A greater than Solomon is here*" (Matthew 12: 42)..

- + It is the song of the holy wedding, for the Groom and the bride, the King and His people, for the Savior and those who are saved.
- + The spiritual union is a union between "the Word" and the body; that takes place in the womb of the Virgin; where the body itself united with the "Word", "*and the two have become one flesh*" (Matthew 9: 5).

(St. Augustine)

Psalm 45 in the Orthodox rite:

This psalm is recited or sung in the prayer of the third hour (of the Agpeya), by which we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit who granted the prophet to prophesy about this King Messiah, the Warrior, to the account of humanity, and who prepared St. Mary to receive the incarnation in her, ... is the same Spirit who dwelt upon the church on the day of Pentecost, to give the disciple the power to preach and testify to Him, as a Groom Lover of mankind. The Holy Spirit conforms and sanctifies the soul to become according to the image of her Groom, to be qualified for the eternal wedding. It is the Spirit of the Groom who takes from what is His to give the bride.

All along the (Coptic) month of Hiahk, the church prepares herself to receive the feast of Nativity with songs of praise. The vesper includes many verses of this psalm; on account of that the goal of this (Kiahkian praise) is to receive the infant of the manger as a Groom of the soul, who

alone can bring her forth to the battle to grant her His conquest, to give her his crown, and to count her a bride and a precious and victorious queen.

In the feasts of St. Mary, during which we celebrate the foremost member of the church, and the living role model of every soul that wishes to enjoy the membership of the church; The church quotes certain verses of this psalm to praise her; to exhort in her children the true longing for the eternal wedding.

And certain of its verses, as well, are used in the liturgy of matrimony, on account of that the sacrament of matrimony is a shadow of the eternal wedding between God the Word and the church; and that the bride and the groom draw their love and union from the mutual love between Christ and the church.

The general frame:

1- <i>"My heart is overflowing"</i>	1
2- <i>"My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe"</i>	1
3- The King's glory	2
4- A Warrior King	3 -- 5
5- Declaration of His Kingdom	6 -- 8
6- The bride queen	9 -- 12
7- The bride's glory	13 – 17

The title:

To the Chief Musician. Set to the 'lilies' (Shoshannim eduth). A contemplation of the sons of Korah. A song of love.

And according to the Septuagint version: To completion (consummation) about those who change; a contemplation by the sons of korah. A song for the sake of the beloved.

- a- **“On the lilies”** (Shoshannim eduth): The article ‘on’ here refers to that it is played on a particular musical instrument by this name; or that it is played according to a melody that starts by the word “lilies” (Shoshannim eduth).

The word “lilies” was used in the singular tense in the title of psalm 60; and in the plural tense in psalm 80; but never used in any other psalm.

In the old, the word (Shoshannim) was understood as being a musical instrument with six strings; but now it is unanimously understood to mean certain kind of “lilies”. As to the word (eduth), it is understood to mean (testimony); namely, (The lilies of testimony); which refers to the fact that this praise glorifies the salvation work of God, who sets out of mankind beautiful lilies bearing the sweet fragrance of Christ, and testifies to the rich grace of God. It is the psalm of the wedding of the church, described as: *“Like the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters”* (Song 2: 2); and her groom is described as: *“He feeds his flock among the lilies”* (Song 2: 16).

- b- **“About those who change”**. It is the praise of the bride who came from the Gentiles; whose nature has changed, as well as her mind and heart; has forsaken the house of her father, the devil, to come to dwell in the wedding house, united with her heavenly Groom.

- + The heathens have actually changed. Seeing how the churches were full, while their temples became deserted; a crowd here, and loneliness there, and marveling about the reason behind that change, they came to read what they were told, to hear, by their

ears, what was promised, to come to believe in Him who consummates His promise; and to be changed from “the old man” to “the new man”; from someone lost, to a believer; from a robber to a giver of alms; from an adulterer to a chaste; and from an evildoer to a goodness doer.

(St. Augustine)

The change happened both on the level of individuals and that of congregations. And it continues through persistent change; to dissolve the old man in us with all his works, and to renew our inner man day after day.

The song of the wedding of the church is the song of the persistent change and renewal, “*till we all come to unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*” (Ephesians 4: 13).

c-- A song of love, or A song for the sake of the beloved.

- + “The beloved” is (the Hand) who changed; about whom the divine voice say: “*This is My beloved Son*” (). The change here probably refers to the emptying, or the divine incarnation.
- + Who is this “beloved” other than the only begotten Son!

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

d- By the sons of Korah. We already spoke of them as symbols of the (sons of Golgotha), or (the sons of the Crucified), who

alone, could sing the praise of the wedding of the Lamb ... Whoever cannot enjoy the cross as the power of God, how could he sing the praise of the heavenly wedding?!

1- ***“My HEART IS OVERFLOWING WITH A GOOD THEME”*** (1)

According to some scholars, the Septuagint version expression *“My heart is overflowing with (exalted word)”* is a testimony about the birth of the Son from the Father, being born from the heart; from, and equal to His same Essence. The following are some quotes of the words of the fathers concerning this issue:

+ He is the “Word”, by whom the Father’s heart is overflowing.

(St. Ambrose)

+ *“The only begotten Son”* is born from the Father in a way unique to Him; from the (womb) of His heart.; To whom the Father Himself testifies, saying: *“My heart is overflowing with (exalted Word)”*.

+ The Holy Book reveals that the Father and the Son are **One**; the same way we, on our part, know that the Father and the Son are **distinct**; I say **distinct** and not separate; for, on my part I utter the words of God Himself, saying: *“My heart is overflowing with (exalted Word)”*.

(The scholar Tertullian)

+ According to some, by saying: *“My heart is overflowing with (exalted Word)”*, the Father refers to a specific unutterable birth.

+ By “I utter”, he mean, “I say a word”?! ... “From His heart”; “From His depths”, He utters “His Word”!.

You, yourselves, would not utter except what comes out of your heart. Yet, what you utter is uttered once and then disappear; But what God utters is “everlasting”.

(St. Augustine)

- + As we have seen before, according to the true faith, “The Word” is from “The Father”; the only begotten Son, befitting of Him. For how would man understand “the Son”, who is “the Wisdom”, and “the Word”, by whom everything was made, as we are told by the Holy Book? For the Father says on the tongue of David: *“My heart is overflowing with (exalted Word)”*, and, *“From the womb, before the morning star, I have begotten you”* (See psalm 110).

2- “MY TONGUE IS LIKE THE PEN OF A READY SCRIBE” (1)

“My heart is overflowing with (exalted Word); I recite my composition concerning the king; My tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe” (1)

Having seen by the eyes of prophecy, the wedding of the crucified Lord Christ, overflowing in his heart, the psalmist feels as though a fire of love burns in his depths; that his tongue and his whole being express such a unique wedding.

St. Paul, intending to talk about a certain sin, could not, and said that mentioning it is ugly and reproachful. Whereas, intending to talk about the King, the heavenly Groom, his tongue overflowed with exalted words, that express what he has in his heart.

Before Christ the Groom, the psalmist stood, by his behavior and life, he told about that wedding; and his tongue became like the pen of a ready scribe.

When our tongue speaks, it most probably expresses what goes on in our depths. If we have a portion in the spiritual wedding by our practical life, or by our love for God and for people, the Spirit pours on our tongue words of grace, working to the account of His kingdom. Whereas if we have no fellowship therein, our tongue becomes, like all our other body members “*instruments of unrighteousness to sin*” (Romans 6: 13), that wound and kill, instead of soothing and healing the souls.

- + The tongue is the pen by which we write down our covenants with God
We confess His kingdom on us, and reject the dominion of the devil.
This is our signature on the covenant.

(St. John Chrysostom)

The tongue of the psalmist is like the pen of a ready scribe, moving by the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God, expressing (the mind) of the Spirit with depth and perfection. His heart burns, and his mind goes, so preoccupied with the heavenly wedding, that his tongue utters goodness, namely, got sanctified to utter divine words. As, according to St. John Chrysostom, the tongue, like any other body member, could become a tool for righteousness or for evil.

- + Let us prepare all the members of our body to be weapons of righteousness, and not of iniquity.

Let us first train our tongue to be a servant of the grace of the Holy Spirit, through uprooting all the venomous evils from our mouth, and refraining from uttering words of vanity and foolishness.

We can make every member in our body an instrument of righteousness or of evil; of justice or of iniquity; “*(our) tongue a sharp sword*” (Psalm 57: 4); or “*like a pen of a ready scribe*” (1); the former causes death, while the

other writes down the divine law; although both of the same nature, yet the use is different.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Man can deliver his tongue as a tool in the hands of the Lord Christ to utter His words, and to testify to His divine love and compassion; or in the hands of the devil, by the sword of words, as a tool of deception, hypocrisy; Hence, according to St. John Chrysostom: [Let us talk in a way that would tell, that what we utter are the words of the Lord Christ].

Let us liken the psalmist whose heart so burns with the love of the Groom to utter poems about Him, and to meditate with the heart and tongue in His Person, features, and works. ... He saw new things that his life and tongue pored praise. And according to St Gregory, bishop of Nyssa: [In reference to the perpetual flood of thoughts, whoever concentrates his sight upon the limitless beauty of God, will always discover something new, and with God continuously proclaiming Himself in him, man would remain continuously in a condition of astonishment].

In the heavenly Groom, the psalmist saw that::

- * He is the Word of the Father, eternally born from Him
- * He is fairer than the sons of men.
- * His lips pour grace, mercy, and compassion.
- * He is a warrior King; who enters into the battle to the account of His beloved bride.
- * His sword, bound to His beauty; cuts off everything ugly in us.
- * He is amazing in His justice and His love.
- * His throne is eternal.
- * His anointment is joyful.
- * His garment is sweetly fragrant.

- * His heavenly bride is honored and very beloved to Him.
- * He is worshipped by nations.
- * He brings His people forth into His temple.
- * He sets kings and rulers,
- * He is the subject of the peoples' praise.

3- THE KING'S GLORY: (2)

Looking at the wedding, and seeing no point of comparison between the unique Groom and the sons of men, the psalmist says:

"You are fairer than the sons of men" (2)

Singing praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, being fairer than the sons of men, St.

Augustine wrote:

:

[He is fair, being The Word with God (the Father);

He is fair on earth, clothed in human nature;

He is fair in the womb, and fair in His parents' arms;

He is fair in the miracles He performed; and fair while scourged;

He is fair in granting life; and fair in not refusing to die;

He is fair in delivering Himself; and fair in taking it back;

He is fair on the cross; fair in his tomb; and fair in ascending to heaven;

So we see Him fairer in His nature, being the Word of God, One with His Father; equal to Him in essence; fairer in His salvation work, and shedding the last drop of His blood for the sake of salvation of man, His beloved creation ... Fairer in His salvation works that will remain an object of praise by the earthlies and heavenlies.

+ What fairness?! ... That of the resurrection; being fairer than the sons of men!

+ He surpasses all men in fairness; the Son of St. Mary; the Groom of the holy church; He who made the church likens His mother; made her our mother, and kept her virgin for Himself.

(St. Augustine)

+ I wonder: Why did he not say: “fairer than the angels” as well?... Did He say: “*fairer than the sons of men*” because He, Himself, became man?

(St. Augustine)

“Fairness” or beauty, should not be understood in its material or physical, but in its spiritual meaning. According to St. John Chrysostom: [Lest you may assume that he means the physical beauty, the psalmist says that it is set upon obedience, which concerns the soul more than it concerns the body].

Some fathers, like Justin the martyr, Tertullian, and St. Clement of Alexandria, see in the divine incarnation, an emptying by the Lord, and condescendence even of the physical beauty. Yet the majority of fathers see in it physical, as well as spiritual beauty, as a reflection of the work of the divinity in Him. For, according to St. Jerome: [The splendor and greatness of His divinity, became hidden under the veil of the body, and sent its radiation upon His physical features, to captivate all those who have the honor of looking at Him].

What preoccupy our hearts is the beauty of His amazing salvation work, and the splendor of His Person; on account of that, as He, alone, is

blameless, it is befitting of His bride to bear the feature of His beauty, through the reflection of His splendor on her.

- + Yes indeed, it is befitting that in us, our Groom, who is fairer than the sons of men, would not find any of the sins previously mentioned.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

The secret of the Lord's fairness, according to the psalmist, is the words of grace pouring out of His lips:

"Grace is poured upon Your lips; Therefore God has blessed You forever" (2)

According to St. Basil the Great, the prophet, looking intently at the splendor of the glory of the divinity of the Son, he uttered those words longing to the beauty of His divinity that made the grace pour on the Son's lips. It came in the gospel, that the multitudes *"marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth"* (Luke 4: 22). He drew His listeners, and led them to become His disciples; that within a short time, His words spread by preaching the gospel in the whole world.

Perceiving the strength and activity of His words, St. Peter the apostle said to Him: *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"* (John 6: 68). And the church, in the book of the Song of songs, speaking about the appeal of the words of the Savior, says: *"Draw me after You, let us make haste"* (Song 1: 4).

- + The smoothness (sweetness) of His words, indicates the extent of grace of His teaching.

- + The “grace” here, refers to what dwelt upon the (temple) of the body ... For the Holy Spirit did not give grace to that (temple) in a certain measure; for “*Of His fullness we have all received*” (John 1: 16). That (temple) received the grace in all its fullness; ... whereas men received just a drop of this grace.

According to St. John Chrysostom, what we get of grace is like a drop we receive from the Lord Christ who, by the union of His Divinity with His Manhood, presented the fullness of grace to Manhood, who is not separate from Him, to become a Source of grace for us. Hence St. Cyril the Great often repeats that the divine Word has taken our manhood to renew our corrupt nature, to find in Him the source of every renewal and heavenly grace.

In the following are revealed certain angles of the graces that pour out of His lips:

- a- Our enjoyment of the incarnate Word Himself; we have communion of His delivered body and blood, the secret of the grace of our union with Him, and abidance in Him; saying: "*Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day*" (John 6: 54).
- b- By His lips He presented words that enlighten the inner insight, and draw souls to His salvation; It is said: "*When He was seated, His disciples came*

to Him; then He opened His mouth and taught them saying: ... And so it was, when Jesus has ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 5: 1, 2; &: 28, 29).

- c- By His words, He grants forgiveness from Himself: “*Your sins are forgiven*” (Luke 7: 48).
- d- By the words of His grace granting life, He healed the infirmities, comforted the sorrowful, muted the oppressors, drove demons out, and raised from the dead.
- e- By His words, He opened before us the gates of paradise; saying: “*Today, you will be with Me in paradise*” (Luke 23: 43).

The words of the Lord Christ, pouring grace, He remained uttering even after His ascension, through His apostles, His disciples, and preachers of His gospel ... those who represent His lips pouring His grace.

What does the psalmist mean by saying: “*Therefore God has blessed You forever*” (2)?

According to father Onesimus, depending upon the words of the fathers, the Lord Christ here, speaks concerning His Manhood. Although being the incarnate Word of God, the One, and Equal to the Father in the same essence, Yet, concerning Manhood, and as a representative of mankind, He calls His heavenly Father: “*God*”; And according to Manhood, “*He increased in wisdom and stature*” (Luke 2: 52), not gradually in them, but gradually proclaiming them.... For wisdom was not something foreign to Him, being “*The Wisdom of God*”; but He gradually revealed it, and practiced it being a true Man.

He also says: By saying “*Therefore God has blessed You*”, the psalmist proclaims what the church gets of divine blessings through, and in the name of Her Head.... Partaking of the blessing, being the body of Christ, it is said about Christ, the Head, that He is blessed, though He is the Grantor of blessings.

4- A WARRIOR KING: (3 – 5)

“Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One; With Your glory (beauty), and in Your majesty, ride on prosperously and reign for the cause of truth” (3)

Here we notice:

- a- This talk could not be concerning king Solomon, who was a king of peace and not a warrior king.

- b- The psalmist binds between the (beauty) of the warrior king, and girding his sword to prosper and to reign; something that could not apply to a human warrior; for what has beauty to do with the ability to fight a war?!... It is obvious that the talk here concerns the battle of the cross; For our Lord Jesus Christ, the Leader of our spiritual war against our enemy the devil, He, who alone is blameless, wholly beautiful, girds His sword as a heavenly beautiful Groom to kill in us everything ugly, namely, our corruption; to set His kingdom in our hearts, proclaiming Himself, the Truth, the meekness, and the righteousness. ... That is what provoked St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, and others, to talk about the beauty here, as being the beauty of the resurrection; The later says: [The beauty of Christ is indeed holy; as about Him is written: *“He is fairer than the sons of men”* (Psalm 45: 2); *“He is the firstborn of those who have departed”*, and that *“His horns are like that of a unicorn”*. If His sword is His cross by which He has crushed the devil, broke the thorn of death, and overcome death, hence those saved see it as *“the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 1: 18); and about which is said: *“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them with it (with the cross)”* (Colossian 2: 15). For by His resurrection He justified us, namely granted

us His righteousness, for us to have the beauty of His resurrection. In other words, we can interpret the words of the psalmist, saying: "*With Your (beauty) rid prosperously and reign*" as such: [O Firstborn of those who departed, gird the sword of the cross, and with it strike our old and corrupt man, to make us enjoy the strength and gladness of Your resurrection, namely, to bear its beauty in us; by which You reign in us, and Your preaching word would succeed].

- c- The sword of Christ is His cross, the Grantor of the resurrected life; And it is His Word, as well; being said: "*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (Hebrew 4: 12); The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Ephesians 6: 17); That is why the Lord Christ used the words of the Holy Book in His battle against the devil in the temptation (See Mathew 4: 4; 7: 10); And about Him is said: "*Out of His mouth went out a sharp two-edged sword*" (Revelation 1: 16).

If the words of the Lord pour grace and sweetness, sooth and heal our wounds; They are, as well, as sharp as a two-edged sword, that separate between the light and the darkness, and between the truth and vanity, or between the righteousness of God and our corruption. His wounds do not lead to perdition, but ignite the fire of healing fire in the heart; so that the soul would sing, saying: "*I am lovesick*" (Song 2: 5; 5: 8).

- d- The Lord Christ girds His sword on "*His thigh*", a reference to His Manhood. If we say that the sword is the cross, By the flesh, the Lord bore His cross to humiliate the devil.

By the incarnation of the Lord, we enjoy the sword of the Word, we see the Love incarnated, and we get in touch with the rich promises of God, all

of which were realized by the cross. ... By the incarnation of the Lord, we see the Word of God, engraved, not in letters on paper, but proclaimed by blood on the cross.

- e- It was said: "*Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One*". If the thigh refers to the incarnation, by which the Word emptied Himself, and become weak in the flesh; Yet, as we sing in the Great Friday: "O who with weakness, You have revealed what is greater than power"; Hence the psalmist addresses Him as "the Mighty One". For what is greater power than to destroy the power of the devil, and his kingdom by the cross of the Lord?!

Perceiving that the Crucified is a Mighty One, who, by His cross grants us the conquest over the desires of the flesh and the love of the world,, the apostle Paul says: "*Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*" (Galatians 5: 24); "*God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*" (Galatians 6: 14).

- f- If the Lord Christ has come to reign upon the heart, and to grant it an exalted peace; yet by setting His kingdom in it, the hosts of darkness are stirred up against Him, using even those closest to Him; Hence the Lord says: "*A man's foes will be those of his own household*" (Matthew 10: 36); And according to St. Augustine:

In the gospel we read: "*I came not to give peace on earth, (but a sword); For from now on five in one house will be divided three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law*" (Luke 12: 52, 53). ... What is this sword given on earth by Christ? Division

actually happens; when a rational young man presents himself to minister to God, and finds opposition from his own father, there will be division between them; for one of them seeks the earthly inheritance, while the other seeks the heavenly one.

g- Girding the sword of His cross to strike the devil hard; the Lord prosperously reigns, to set “*the kingdom of truth, humility, and righteousness*”:

“... *because of truth, humility, and righteousness; and Your right hand shall teach you awesome things*” (4)

If the kingdom of the devil is set upon vanity (lies), pride, and oppression; the Word of God is incarnated to destroy by truth, humility, and righteousness, the kingdom of darkness, and to set the kingdom of the divine righteousness in us.

The Lord resisted vanity by truth, lies by truth. Being “the Truth”, we receive Him, so that vanity would find no place in us; we receive the light, so that the darkness would flee away.

+ The truth is restored to us: “**Truth** shall spring out of the earth; and **righteousness** shall look down from heaven” (Psalm 85: 11). Christ came as expected by mankind; “*By your offspring shall all nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves*” (Genesis 22: 18)..

He not only taught us the truth, but presented Himself to us to acquire. Likewise, concerning **humility**, By His incarnation, He humbled Himself for us to acquire, to carry humility, by which we would destroy the pride of the devil; or in other words, The Lord Christ is our Weapon against the proud enemy.

Testifying to His amazing humility, the prophet Isaiah said: *“He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as sheep before its shearer is silent”* (Isaiah 53: 7); and the Lord said about Himself: *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart”* (Matthew 11: 29).

Finally, by His faithfulness, He grants us the kingdom of righteousness, that knows no oppression.

The truth, humility, and righteousness are interconnected, being different faces of one kingdom: Receiving Christ, the Truth, the believer, in rejecting vanity, is committed to the spirit of humility; or in other words, he would not fall into anger, with the pretension of defending the truth. And in his humility, he is committed to the divine righteousness ; They are all divine gifts; or let us say, gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; who takes what is Christ's, and grants the church, to bear the fellowship of His features, to be prepared for the eternal wedding.

These are the weapons of the heavenly Groom” Truth, humility, and righteousness” ... the weapons, for the sake of which He received the cross to

destroy the vanity, humiliate the pride, and uproot the authority of the oppressive devil. By this, God's right hand "*shall teach you awesome things*"; or, according to St. Augustine: [By this, we are led by His right hand, namely, by His might, and does amazing things in us. They are active weapons that have drawn many from idol worship, with its vanity, haughtiness, and violence, to the fellowship with God by the Holy Spirit, in Christ Jesus, to practice the exalted new life; Hence the psalmist sings, saying:

"Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; The peoples fall under You" (5)

What are the sharp arrows of the Lord Christ but preaching the cross, that pierced the hearts, wounded them with love, burned them with the spirit of strength, that knows no failure nor despair; and struck the hearts that were against the Groom King, to submit to Him with faith, and to worship Him in an amazing obedience, to enjoy the new life.

According to some, the sharp arrows of the king are the pure apostles, sharpened by the Holy Spirit to pierce the hearts of peoples and nations, to testify to the teachings of the Lord, and to the works of His amazing grace. For, on the day of the Pentecost, the multitudes who gathered there enjoyed those sharpened arrows; as it was said: "*When they hear this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles: 'Men, and brethren, what shall we do?'*"; And speaking about the work of the Holy Spirit through the prophecy in the church, Paul the apostle said: "*And so, falling down on His face, he (an unbeliever) will worship God, and report that God is truly among you*" (1 Corinthians 14: 25).

- + He says: "*Your arrows are sharp*". God's commandments (arrows), flying everywhere, would reveal the hidden secrets of every heart, stinging and changing the conscience of everyone.

The scholar Tertullian)

5- DECLARATION OF HIS KINGDOM: (6 – 8)

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, Your God has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia, Out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad” (6 – 8)

Looking at the Messiah, the victorious King with His cross, who presents His precious blood as an atonement for the sins of the world, and a dowry to His bride the heavenly queen; the psalmist sings, saying: *“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever”*. The Coptic church made this verse a famous melody sung for about 20 minutes, by which the soul meditates in the throne of the crucified King, on Tuesday of the passion week, as well as before the burial of the Lord on the Great Friday... In the believer's eyes, the events of the crucifixion and the burial are all proclamations of the throne of the eternal King.

What are the features of this kingdom, proclaimed by the cross?

1- A divine kingdom: This verse and the one following it were quoted by St. Paul in Hebrew 1: 8, 9, to confirm the Divinity of our Lord Jesus

Christ; For it would not be possible to address someone like king Solomon nor any other king, saying: *“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever”*. For it is a verse particularly addresses the incarnate Word of God, who proclaims His kingdom in us, and brings us forth to His kingdom forever.

- + It is obvious that, even before He becomes Man, He was King and Lord from eternity; He is the Icon and Word of the Father... About His Lordship and Kingdom on us, realized as He became Man (as He reigned over us), saving all by the cross; St. Peter says to the Jews: *“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2: 36).

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

2- An eternal kingdom: Every earthly kingdom has a beginning and an end.

Whereas the Messiah King came to proclaim His kingdom in us,

to abide with Him forever; which death cannot destroy! While still in the body, He carries us up beyond the time and place, to live with our hearts together with Him in His kingdom, singing with the apostle: *“He made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2: 6), to consummate the commandment, saying: *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek these things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on things on the earth; ... When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory”* (Colossians 3: 1 – 4).

3- “A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom”: With

wisdom, He sometime uses compassion, and other times He

chastises. And in both cases, he seeks our uprightness and righteousness; being a Lover of mankind; Holy, and Hater of wickedness; For it is not possible for the darkness to conform to the light.

4- “God has anointed You with the oil of gladness”: The prophets, the priests, and the kings, in the old covenant, were anointed by the holy

oil as a sign of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit on them, to dedicate their life and energies to the account of the people of God; by which they are counted as separated for the holy task, in the possession, and to the account of God; and

not allowed to deflect from their mission. It was not possible in the old covenant, to anoint someone both a priest and a king at the same time; for the priests were from the tribe of Levi, whereas the kings were from the tribe of Judah. It was the Word of God, alone, who chose to empty Himself by His own free will through incarnation and crucifixion, to work to the account of humanity, and to its sanctification in Him, being the Unique Priest, who, alone, has been the Priest, the prophet (The Lord of the prophets), the King, and the Sacrifice... That is the concept of His unique anointment; for, being the Lord of priests, prophets, kings; and the Creator of sacrifices, has chosen, by His own free will and pleasure, to become the Priest, the Prophet, the King, and the Sacrifice.

He was anointed by the oil of gladness; for He received that anointment with joy; according to the words of the apostle: "*who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross despising the shame*" (Hebrew 12: 2); and received it as the pleasure of His Father who testified to Him, saying: "*You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Mark 1: 11; Luke 3: 22).

By His unique anointment, He grants us, members of His body, the anointment of gladness in the Sacrament of 'Meron', to be counted as kings and priests (Revelation 1: 6), a sacrifice, and an offering to the Lord! ... He was called "**Christ**", being the Anointed for our eternal salvation; And we are called "**Christians**", being, by Him, anointed for God, and our hearts dedicated to the account of His kingdom.

The Lord Christ was anointed, as "*the Stone which the builders rejected, that has become the chief cornerstone*" (Psalm 118: 22); and, according to the apostle Peter: "*Coming to Him as a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious. You also as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*" (1 Peter 2: 4, 5).

It was referred to the Lord Christ as a stone rejected by men, chosen by God, to the stone put by Jacob underneath his head as he went to sleep (Genesis 28: 11 – 18); to behold heaven open, and “*there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of which reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it; So Jacob rose early in the morning, poured oil on the top of the stone, ... and went on his way...*”. It was a symbol of the Lord Christ who was anointed to reconcile heaven with earth; though He was the stone forsaken or rejected by men.

The following are some commentaries by the fathers on the incarnate and anointed Christ, in whom we were also anointed:

- + This seal (anointment) is on our hearts rather than on our bodies.

(St. Ambrose)

- + In truth, all the kings and the anointed persons, have got their portion among the anointed, the way He, Himself, received from God the Father, His titles of: the King, the Christ, the Priest, the Angel, and all the rest of the titles He bore.

Aaron’s rod that budded, proclaims Him as the High priest; and Isaiah prophesied that “*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots*” (Isaiah 11: 1); Who is Christ..

(Justin the martyr)

- + It is impossible to believe in Christ without confessing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; For Christ is the Son of the living God, anointed by the

Father, by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 16: 16); Acts 10: 38); As said by David through a divine proclamation: "*Therefore, God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions*" (7); And, as proclaimed in the name of the Lord by Isaiah saying: "*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because God has anointed Me*" (Isaiah 61: 1).

- + When He became man, He took the name "Christ"; because passion and death were the fruits of that name.

(Father John of Damascus)

- + By this word He revealed His name; as I already said, He was called "Christ", having been "anointed".

(Father Lactanius)

- + See now, Arians, and recognize the truth ... Praising Him, being the eternal God, the psalmist says: "*Your throne, O God is forever and ever*" ... He was anointed here, not to become God, for He already is; nor to become a King, for His kingdom is eternal, and being the image of God, He shows the holy divine proclamation. But it is for our sake, that those things were written ahead. ... The kings of Israel became kings when anointed, for they were not as such beforehand, like David, Hezekiah, and the rest. ... As for the Savior, on the contrary, He is God, the eternal God; about whom it was said that He was anointed by the Spirit, to grant us, humans, not only the exaltation and the resurrection, but the dwelling and the company of the Holy Spirit as well; as confirmed by the Lord Himself in the gospel of St. John, saying: "*I also have sent them into the world, and for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth*" (John 17: 18, 19). By so saying, He made it clear that He is, not the sanctified, but the "Sanctifier"; not sanctified by another, but sanctifies

Himself; sanctified in the truth; He who sanctifies Himself is the Lord of sanctification. ... How could this then be? How could this mean, except to say: [Being the Word of the Father, I deliver Myself; I become Man, In him I am sanctified; that all become sanctified in Me, the Truth.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- + That is "*the oil of gladness*", about which the prophet says: "*God has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions*" (7). And as proclaimed by St. Peter, saying: "*The word you know which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power*" (Acts 10: 37, 38). The Holy Spirit is therefore "*the oil of gladness*"; And lest you may count Him as a creation; the way this kind of oil, does not mix with water, the same way the gladness does not anoint the body, but enlightens the inner heart; as according to the prophet: "*You have put gladness in my heart*" (Psalm 4: 7).

(St. Ambrose)

According to St. Ambrose, being "*the oil of gladness*", this anointment concerns the inner depths rather than the body; to take away from the heart the spirit of sorrow and grumbling, and to grant it the spirit of joy and gladness; the way oil easily separates from water, floats on it, and does not mix with it.

Speaking about the anointment by which we discover the secret of the cross, the psalmist says:

“All your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes, and cassia” (8)

While princes of the East used to be *“gorgeously appareled”* (Luke 7: 25); the garment of the Lord Christ is His church, sweetly scented by the work of the Holy Spirit; *“a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5: 27); bearing the fragrance of His righteousness and holiness, *“the sweet fragrance of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 1: 15).

According to some saints, the garment of Christ were woven from the threads of His passion on the cross and His burial; on account of that the myrrh, the Aloes, and the cassia refer to the spices used in anointing the body of the Lord Christ.

Myrrh is a kind of costly perfume extracted as a resin from a tree called *“Balsamodendron Myrrah”*; in the form of white or yellow pebbles with sweet fragrance. Myrrh was used in making the holy anointment (Exodus 30: 23), in embalmment (John 19: 39), in feminine perfumes (Proverbs 7: 17); and was one of the gifts presented by the Magi to the newborn infant Jesus at Bethlehem.

Aloes is a perfume oil extracted from a tree of Indian origin common all over the holy land, similar to that of Myrrh, a kind of *“Balsamodendron”* also used in feminine perfumes, garments, bed covers, and embalmment (Proverbs 7: 17; Songs 4: 14; John 19: 39).

Cassia (Exodus 30: 23; Ezekiel 27: 19) is extracted from the cortex of a kind of Cinnamon tree called *“Cinnamomum Cassia”*, common in China and Malaysia. Cassia buds are underdeveloped flowers which have the taste and smell of Cinnamon.

- + By those spices the prophet refers to the passions and death of our Lord; for after bringing His holy body down from the cross, Joseph and Necedemus covered it with myrrh, aloes, and cassia. ... According to St. Basil the Great, Myrrh, being a hard substance, is a sign of laying the body in the grave; Aloe, being a fluid sap, refers to His descent to Hades to set its captives free; Cassia being a cortex, refers to the wooden cross; Whereas saying "*Your garments*" refers to the incarnation of our Lord, and taking a body for the Divinity to dwell in.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

According to St. John Chrysostom, the psalmist sees in the garment some kind of diversity, which refers to that our salvation would not be realized by grace alone, but is also in need of faith, and a practice of related virtues. Myrrh, Aloes, and Cassia refer to the sweet fragrance of Christ, which we enjoy by the grace of God; yet without slothfulness on our part.

And according to the scholar Origen, the garments of the Word of God refer to the sweet fragrance of the teaching of the divine wisdom: Myrrh refers to the death received by the Lord Christ for the sake of mankind; Aloes refers to his condescendence and emptying Himself to bear the image of a servant; and the Cassia, extracted from a plant that grows in places with a plenty of rain, refers to the redemption of humanity through the water of baptism. ... The goal of the teaching of Christ is as though to die together with Him (the Myrrh); with the spirit of humility (the Aloes), enjoying the son-ship to God (the Cassia)..

And according to St. Ambrose, and St. Athanasius the apostolic, those perfumes refer to the burial, as by them, the body of the Lord Christ was

anointed. In other words, if the church is the garment of Christ attached to His body; she would not bear His sweet fragrance unless she is buried together with Him, to be also risen together with Him.

After speaking of the garments of Christ with their sweet fragrance, he moves on to His splendid shining white temple, set by the believers by the Holy Spirit, as a sanctuary for Him, and a place of gladness.

“Out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad. Kings’ daughters are among Your ladies of honor” (8, 9)

- + By *“the palaces”*, he means the temples of God built after the sweet fragrance of the passions of Christ have covered the world. Saying *“of ivory”* is on account of the high value, great splendor, and long endurance of ivory. So became God’s holy temples, by the grace of God. The *“the Kings’ daughters”*, refer to Queens Helana, Ephdoksia, and others, who built honorable and splendid temples in Jerusalem and elsewhere. So it is said of the souls of believers, to be the *“kings’ daughters”*, namely, those of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

6- THE BRIDE QUEEN: (9 – 12)

The praise of the wedding started by revealing the Person of the Groom, His possibilities, works, activities, and the features of His kingdom; Now it presents to us the bride queen, her position in the sight of her Groom, her features, and her positive role.

“At Your right hand stands the queen” (9)

He does not say: ‘... stands the bride”, but says: “*At Your right hand stands the queen*”, as a confirmation of the following facts:

- 1- Although she is in a state of perpetual wedding, and an unceasing joy, yet she is committed to perceive her positive role, being a “queen”. Entering into the wedding is an entrance into a state of joy, not to live (spoiled), waiting to be served, but to bear the responsibility to work to the account of others. Like Christ the King, who came to serve and to deliver Himself for the sake of others, it is befitting of the church – priests and congregation – to partake of this feature, the feature of giving ministry, and of unceasing practical love.

- 2- Sitting on the right hand of the King is a great honor, of which no one is worthy. Yet, as “the right hand” means power; sitting at His right hand means she bears His power; Namely, she should not refer any success she may have to herself, but to her Groom working in her life... All what is in her life is a debt from Him who set her a queen. ... Hence, commenting on how the prophet David saw the church a queen, St. John Chrysostom says: [He cast Himself on us as a garment: “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Galatians 3: 27). Seeing that garment from afar by his prophetic eyes, David cried out with a loud voice: “*At Your right hand stands the queen*” (9). All of a sudden, the poor and despised, became a queen standing at the right hand of the King; the prophet shows Christ and the church as Groom and bride, standing in a wedding].

- 3- It is a unique wedding, in which the bride is clothed by her Groom as a garment in whom she hides (Galatians 3: 27); to bear the fellowship of His features; namely, the heavenly life, symbolized by gold; as it is written:

“in gold from Ophir; ... her clothing is woven with gold, ... in robes of many colors” 9, 13, 14)

“The clothing” of the church is woven with gold; in other words, in all her thoughts and acts, she practices the heavenly life, and the heavenly thoughts. As to her *“robes of many colors”*, this refers to the diverse gifts of her members, all of them have their hearts drawn to heaven; yet each has his own gift for the edification of all; as according to the apostle: *“There are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all”* (1 Corinthians 12: 6); and *“Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel”* (1 Corinthians 14: 12).

- 4- The heavenly Groom seeks from His bride to occupy her place in the heavenly royal family, being a bride and a queen. The way He loves her, offers the last drop of His blood to acquire her, and nothing in His sight is more precious than her; He seeks from her to partake of His love, and to consider anything else, however dear to her, of no value. He seeks from her to come with her heart out of the world and its deceptions; and to forsake her nearest kin to attach herself to Him, the same way He emptied Himself to attach Himself to her. The way *“He sanctified Himself for her sake”* (John 17: 19), He seeks from her to sanctify all her heart and all her life to His ministry; counting this as her spiritual beauty which He desires; saying:

“Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear; Forget your own people also, and your father’s house; So the King will greatly desire your beauty; Because He is your Lord” (10, 11)

According to St. John Chrysostom, the church became Christ's bride after being His sister, having renewed her by baptism before choosing her as His bride. And lest these titles: "bride" and "sister", may be taken in a material sense, as carnal, or blood relationship, we see Him call her "His daughter". ... How could the sister and the bride be a daughter of the Groom?!... Intending to show the extent of His longing to get attached to us, and to exhort us to receive Him as everything for us. In this psalm He presents Himself as:

- "God" (6); The eternal God who reigns upon the heart, and bears us to His heavenly throne.
- "Christ" (7), anointed with the oil of gladness, dedicating all His possibilities to grant us His everlasting joy.
- "The King" (6).who sets us a queen to enjoy the fellowship of His royal glory.
- "A Groom" (11). With whom we unite as a bride, carrying His splendor in us.
- "A Lord" (11). Whom we worship with joy.
- "A spiritual Father" (10). To whom we are all His beloved "daughter".

In His call for her to forget her own people and her father's house to attach to Him, we notice the following:

a- He seeks from her to sanctify her senses, the sight and hearing in particular; If He is God who listen to the prayers, and looks down on the poor, it is befitting of us to incline our ears to Him in obedience, and to look up at Him with love.... The first commandment is to "Listen" ... For to Him, obedience is better than the sacrifices of the fools; and the obedience from the heart is a reaction of the inner love that draws our hearts – the inner eye – to meditate in our beloved Lord.

b- He seeks from her to follow the lead of Abraham, the father of fathers, who by faith, inclined his ear to the call of God, forsook his land, his family, and his father's house, and set forth from the land of the Chaldeans to where he was called by God, to get the divine consecutive promises. He had to depart from among the idol-worshippers, and to forget all their experiences, in order to enjoy new spiritual experiences, through attaching to God, and entering into a covenant with Him.

+ In this psalm, in order to follow the lead of Abraham, the human soul is committed by God, to forsake her land, and her family; to forsake the Chaldeans, namely, the demons (the idol-worship), and to come to dwell in the land of the living, about which the prophet says: "(I believe) *that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*" (Psalm 27: 13);

Yet, it is not enough for you to forsake your land, unless you forget your people and your father's house; namely, unless you despise the carnal desires, and attach yourselves to the Groom in a firm and close embrace.

(St. Jerome)

+ According to St. Basil, the father of sinners is the devil; being written that "*He who sins is of the devil*" (1 John 3: 8) Saying that they have to depart from their father's house, means that they have to quit committing sin, and to be born to God by baptism, to become His children.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

Calling her to forget her father's house, ... Through forsaking the devil and his works, she would receive the work of God in her as the secret of her beauty which He desires..

- + Forgetfulness does not normally grant beauty; ... So what kind of forgetfulness that would pour beauty upon the soul; but that of the sin?

We get that forgetfulness of evil, when we remember the good things; when we remember God. ... For, perpetually remembering God, we would never remember those other things as well..

- + In case we have anything old; let us cast it away from us.... We should cleanse in us any spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, to become pure (Ephesians 5: 27). ... Even if we are utterly distorted, we can restore the beauty, about which David says: "*The King desires your beauty*".

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + We are called by God the Father, through a blessed initiation, to forsake the devil – our father – whom we can truly forsake by seeking help from God, and striving perpetually to avoid his evil deception.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- + If you forsake the horrible deeds of your people, and your father's house, you will have your early splendor back, and will become desirable to behold. ... The splendor and beauty of the soul, is the good worship, chastity, humility, and the rest of virtues that would bring pleasure to God.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- + He who says: "*Listen, O daughter*", would be a "father" to her. ... He who exhorts the soul to forget her people and her father's house, is her father; That would be realized through dying together with Christ to the worries of this world; according to the words of the apostle, saying: "*while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal*" (2 Corinthians 4: 18).

Setting forth from this temporally seen house, and concentrating our eyes and hearts on that house where we shall dwell forever; we would be able to realize if, while we talk in flesh, we would not be in war against the Lord according to the flesh; proclaiming by words, as well as by deeds, the truth of the words said by the apostle: "*Our citizenship is in heaven*" (Philippians 3: 20).

(Father Pavnotius)

- + The apostles, in one moment, have forsaken "*their fathers' house*" (Matthew 9: 19| Mark 11: 15 – 19); their kinsmen, all their possessions, and the whole world with its limitless values.

God does not consider the size of the possessions, as much as the ordinance of the soul that has forsaken them.

(St. Jerome)

- + According to some, When the Lord Christ came to Judea, the church came out to receive Him, came out of her "*land*", namely, (from idol-worship), according to what is written: "*Forget your people and your father's house*", And as Christ has, as well, has come out of His home land (Matthew 15: 21, 22); It became possible for the two parties to fall in love with each others.

- + Even Ruth the Moabite, if she has not forsaken her home land, her people, and her kinsmen, she would not have gained what she had. ... So it is with the church, having forsaken the customs she has got from her early father's house; then, and not before that, she became beautiful in the sight of her Groom.

(St. John Chrysostom)

The Lord Christ says: "*I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world*" (John 16: 28); and that by (emptying Himself), and descending to us without separating from God the Father; with whom He is One and equal in Essence.... As He came out to encounter us; we, as well, come out to Him from the 'ego' to encounter Him (within the circle of emptying), as a bride with her Groom. ... And as said by St. John Chrysostom: [Having seen how humanity has forsaken God and become a harlot, the divine Word came down to her, not with the perfection of His splendor, but as the Son of Man, lest she would be intimidated and flee away, but to receive Him, unite with Him, enjoy His work in her, and become in truth His beautiful bride and queen].

By Him, we would forsake our corruption, and bear the new beautiful nature, whose beauty will never get old nor deteriorate with time.

- + Getting to know that you have bound to Christ, You have to forsake those foolishnesses and deflections, that bring Him no pleasure, for He seeks another kind of beauty, by which His love for us would increase more and more; Namely, the beauty of our soul; which the prophet means by saying: “*So the King will greatly desire your beauty*” (11).

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + How could the one, poor and trampled under feet, become a queen?! ... How could she be raised to stand at the right hand of the King?! ... Except because the King Himself, contrary to His divine nature, chose to become a Servant.

I exhort you to understand what concern the Divinity; to understand what concern (the emptying); to perceive Whom He was, and whom He came to be for your sake!; Do not mix between the distinct issues; ... And do not turn your discussion of His great condescension, into a cause for blasphemy!

(St. John Chrysostom)

So the King became a Servant, in order to set a queen out of the maidservant; He (emptied Himself), to pour His beauty on her forever.

- + While the physical beauty would be corrupted by illness, destroyed by old age, and death would ultimately come to put an end to it; The beauty of the soul, on the other hand, would never be shaken by any of those factors, but would perpetually endure.

How often has the physical beauty caused those who appreciate it to fall into evil deeds?! While the beauty of the soul would draw even God Himself to love it; according to the words addressed by the prophet to the church: *“Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear; ... So the King will greatly desire your beauty”* (10, 11).

(St. John Chrysostom)

5- A church worshipping her Groom:

*“Because He is your Lord,
worship Him”* (11)

Because the Groom has reflected His beauty upon her, she came to be so exceedingly beautiful to succeed to royalty (Ezekiel 16: 13); And as she, in her union with Him, come to discover His glory more and more, she is inclined to worship Him in exalted sweetness; And the more she worship Him, the more she gets to know Him, to love Him, to submit to Him, and to perpetually worship Him with her whole being, in an amazing exultation.

As a bride exultant by her Groom, not knowing how to pay back His uncountable goodness on her, she submits to Him, and worship Him, as a sign of her perpetual thanksgiving. And the more she gives Him thanks, the more graces God would pours upon her, and the more her longing to thank Him would be.... Such is the feature of exalted heavenly life.

According to St. Gregory, When we, in eternity, submit to God, uttering the three ‘glories’, we so come to enjoy His glory anew in our life; to get up to worship Him; and continue to do that in an exalted sweetness.

There is a great difference between the submission of the devil and his hosts to God on the great day of the Lord, when they seek to have the mountains fall down to cover them from the face of Him who sits on the throne; and the submission of the exultant bride, enjoying the fellowship of His glories.

The catholic bride:

This bride is featured by catholicity, as the door of faith opened before all nations and peoples of the world; after the Jews have, for so long, assumed that faith in God was confined to them alone; And as all categories of men came to enjoy the new faith, that even emperors, kings, and princes came to have a portion in the church of the new covenant; the psalmist says in astonishment:

“The daughter of Tyre will be there with a gift; The rich among the people will seek His favor” (12)

‘Tyre’, on account of that it has been an open land to foreigners; was known for extensive riches through her international trade, together with corruption and deterioration, which we have already dealt with it in our commentary on the books of Ezekiel and Isaiah. According to St. Jerome, the word ‘Tyre’ in Hebrew means (tribulation); hence he sees its inhabitants refer to those falling under the tribulation caused by the devil.

By worshipping the Groom, and offering gifts, Tyre refers to the nations drawn to the worship of God.; As, according to father Onesimus of Jerusalem: [All the nations will submit to Him; Before Christ every knee shall bow. By mentioning ‘Tyre’ in particular, a city geographically close to the land of the Jews, where idol-worship has been well-established, he meant to include all nations; a way of referring to all by referring to a part; Namely, that all the nations like ‘Tyre’ will submit to Him, and will offer Him gifts of upright faith and good deeds].

And by saying: “*The rich among the people will seek His favor*” (12), the psalmist believes that believers in the Lord Christ are those rich in faith, who, by Him, have become kings and priests (Revelation 2: 1); rich in the sight of God who receives them as His children by His Holy Spirit in the water of baptism. In other words, as nations of the whole world approach Him, they will get riches, satiety, and inner glory, to need nothing more. That was the same feeling of the apostle Paul who, finding in His Christ, treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2: 3), says: “*That you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge*” (1 Corinthians 1: 5).

6- THE BRIDE’S GLORY: (17 – 19)

The heavenly Groom came down to our land to stretch His arms on the cross, to embrace all believers from all nations to His bosom as a heavenly bride, who, bearing His splendor inside herself, seeks the hidden glory, and not the outer appearances. She would be like the tabernacle of meeting, covered on the outside by goatskin of no beauty; while in the inside, it has the most valuable of tissues, blue, purple, and scarlet; beside the ark of the covenant covered with gold, the golden minaret with all its beauty, the golden altar of incense, etc.... Appearing on the outside as poor, and reproachable, she may be despised by the enemy, whereas on the inside, it was enjoyable to behold by her Groom. The apostle Paul also see her as “*our outward man, who is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*” (2 Corinthians 4: 16); On the outside he sees the reproach of the cross outside the camp; while in the inside he sees the power and gladness of the resurrection.

Concerning the glory of the bride, the psalmist describes as::

a- An inner glory:

“The royal daughter is glorious in her chamber” (13)

Entering into the secret place of her Groom King, she comes to be everything to Him: a bride, a daughter, a servant, a friend, etc.... She glorifies Him by her life, and even by her hidden thoughts; to be glorified by Him as well.

- + We should notice that, as the king has his own secret place, to which His bride and queen is brought forth; So the bride, as well, has her own chamber, whose door is closed once the Word of God (the Logos) comes to join her. With all the riches she has on the inside, once she has Him in her chamber, she closes her door to pray to God the Father who sees in secret what she has gathered of riches, and grants her what she seeks in her prayers.

(The scholar Origen)

Meditating in His bride glorified in her chamber, the heavenly Groom says: “*A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up; a fountain sealed*” (Song 4: 12); As though He says to her: Remember My possibilities in you; ... Being the secret of your glory, I made you a garden, a spring, and a fountain; ... By My Holy Spirit, I planted in you diverse trees, and opened in you a fountain of living water; I became to you a wall surrounding you on all sides, lest a robber or a vicious beast would crawl to you.

Talking about the glorious inner possibilities, Solomon the Sage says: “*Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own Well; Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets?*” (Proverb 5: 15) And St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa says:

[When our inner thoughts deflect toward the foreign sin, we would be dispersing our fountains, and presenting them to strangers.

When we concentrate our sight on the inner glory, God would set Himself a Guard on the doors of our heart, namely, on our inner man; as He confirms: *“For I, says the Lord, will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst”* (Zechariah 2: 5).

According to St. Ambrose: [The sealed inner glory is the virginity of the soul that bears many good fruits. By the words in Song 4: 12, the Lord addresses the church he intends to see a virgin without blemish or uncleanness.

The fertile garden is the virginity bearing many fruits with sweet fragrance ... It is *“a garden enclosed”*, on account of being surrounded by a wall of purity on all sides; It is *“a fountain sealed”*, for virginity is the fountain and origin of chastity, with the seal of purity kept safe against any corruption; In it the image of God would reflect; when the pure simplicity conforms to the purity of the flesh].

b- A heavenly glory:

“Her clothing is woven with gold”

(13)

In the old covenant, according to the command of God, they made on the hem of the priestly robe, pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet fine linen thread. And they put bells of pure gold on the hem of the robe all around between the pomegranates (Exodus 39: 24). According to the scholar Origen, those bells were designed to ring continuously, as a sign of the unceasing utterance by the priest concerning the last days of the world. By such arrangement, the church, in her worship, behavior, and doctrines, is committed to bear an eschatological and heavenly nature (the gold).

c- Her glory is in the diversity of her gifts:

“in robes of many colors” (14)

d- Her glory is in her preaching and in her testimony to her Groom.

*“The virgins, her companions who follow her,
shall be brought to You” (14)*

As the soul is drawn to her Groom, she draws together with her many hearts through her testimony to Him; brought along as virgins.

e- An Exultant church:

*“With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought;
they shall enter the king’s palace” (15)*

Every soul shall rejoice for her Groom, and exult in the riches of His works, and His exalted love. The secret of her joy is her entrance into the heavenly temple of the Lord.

According to St. Basil the Great, the talk here concerns the one church that draws many away from their corrupt beliefs, to provide them with the true spirit of joy, and bring them forth to the heavenly kingdom.

f- An honored church:

*“Instead of Your fathers shall be Your sons, whom
You shall make princes in all the earth” (16)*

After the departure of the father Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, out of the church's sons, God set (the apostles) as spiritual kings and rulers all over the world, with the spiritual authority to bind and loose according to the gospel of Christ (See Matthew 18: 18)..

+ Here the blessed David speaks about the choice of the saintly apostles.

(St. Cyril the Great)

g- A praising church that glorifies God:

"I will make Your name to be remembered in all generations. Therefore the people shall praise You forever and ever" (17)

She will draw believers from all the peoples to praise God, and to confess His amazing salvation work.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 45

MY SOUL WILL PRAISE YOU, O ETERNAL GROOM

+ O Lord, let my tongue join my heart in praising You;
For the flow of Your love inside me enflames my depths;
And my tongue cannot express what is in my depths.

+ Reveal the splendor of Your beauty in my depths;
For You are fairer than the sons of men;
Pour Your splendor on me, to make me bear the fellowship of Your features.

- + How beautiful You are, O Lord, in Your love!
By coming down to me, You have lifted me up to Your Father's bosom;
And by Your entrance into the battle of temptations, You granted me Your conquest;
And by Your weakness, You granted me what is greater than strength;
How beautiful You are on the cross;
Where You opened up for me Your heart enflamed with fire;
To enter and abide;
How beautiful You are in Your resurrection;
By which You have destroyed the gates of Hades, and opened up for me the gates of paradise;
How beautiful You are in Your ascension;
I anticipate Your coming to enter together with You into Your heavens
- + Your lips drop oil;
Your words grant the grace of life and resurrection;
Say a word, to draw me to You, and remain forever with You;
- + How magnificent You are, O Warrior King;
Strike with Your sword, to cut off all evil in me;
Enter into the battle of my heart, to set the banner of the kingdom of Your love in me;
Set in me the kingdom of truth; humility, and faithfulness.
- + O Christ, my God;
Anoint me with the oil of Your Holy Spirit, Grantor of gladness;
Consecrate me to the account of Your kingdom.
- + Grant me a place on Your right hand, O heavenly King;
To count me as a heavenly queen;

Clothe me with the garment of Your righteousness;
And adorn me with the gifts of Your Holy Spirits.

+ Call me by Your voice, to make me forget the world with everything in it;
To be drawn to You with my whole heart;
And to be joined by all who desire the spiritual sweetness.

+ Pour Your glory inside me;
For my soul is disgusted with the vain glory;
To make my heart flow with a flood of praise to You forever and ever;

+ Glory be to You, O Heavenly Groom;
Reveal to me the secrets of Your wedding.

=====

PSALM 46

THE LORD OF HOSTS IS WITH US

According to some, this is the first of the psalms of Zion, or of the church; close in spirit to psalms 48 and 76; and is bound to the two following psalms: 47 and 48, to form together a trinity of praise.

This psalm was written on a certain occasion of salvation work, presented by God to His people in an exalted way; like for example the salvation of Jerusalem from the siege of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19: 8-9); or the salvation of Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah from Aram and the Ammonites; when the singers started praising God (1 Kings 20: 1 – 30); when it was said: “*The battle is not yours, but God’s*” (2 Chronicles 2: 15).

The psalm proclaims the divine presence, namely, God’s dwelling among His people, being “*The Lord of hosts*” (7, 11); granting His people the strength over nature, “*though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea*” (1 – 3); and over the enemies, being in the midst of His people (4 – 7); and even over the whole world (8 – 11). ... God the Savior is awesome in the midst of His church, the new Zion, like an army with banners (Song 6: 4), granting her conquest.

Some churches use this psalm during the celebration of the feast of Epiphany (the divine revelation); when God the Savior transfigures in the midst of His people, proclaiming His work in them; during the celebration of the feast of the wedding of Cana of Galilee when the Lord Christ turned water into wine to make glad the heart of His church; and in the celebration of the dedication of a church.

The general frame:

- 1- The Lord of hosts, Grantor of strength 1 -- 3
- 2- The Lord of hosts, Grantor of gladness 4 -- 7

3- The Lord of hosts, Grantor of conquest 8 – 11

The antiphon:

“The Lord of hosts (of Sabaoth) is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge” (7, 11).

The title “The Lord of hosts”, or “The Lord of Sabaoth”, refers to God dwelling over the Ark of covenant, proclaiming His presence in the heavenly royal palace. His church is seen as a spiritual army enjoying the covenant with God, and spiritually striving to set His kingdom in her (Exodus 7: 14; 21: 41; Numbers 10: 36; 1 Samuel 17: 45).

The title “*The Lord of hosts*” touches our life on two aspects:

- a- The appearance of God as a King, a Warrior, and a Leader; who not only motivates us, by His commands and commandments, to enter into a battle against the devil and his hosts, but He enters into the battle together with us, precedes us, and grants us His unchallenged strength. As, according to the prophet Isaiah, having seen, by the eye of prophecy, the (winepress) of the cross: *“Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, This One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength; ... So You head Your people, to make Yourself a glorious name”* (Isaiah 63: 1, 14); And according to the apostle Paul: *“God always lead us in triumph”* (2 Corinthians 2: 14).

He provides us with all possibilities for victory, and remains the true Leader who holds the (steering wheel) of the church by Himself. According to the liturgy of St. Gregory: [Neither an angel nor an archangel, or a cherub, You entrusted with our salvation, but You came by Yourself down to us; ... And according to the apostle Paul: *“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”* (Romans 8: 32)

He entrusted no one else with our salvation; He presented His heavenly hosts to minister to us; whom the apostle Paul describe as “*ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation*” (Hebrew 1: 14)

Our conquest is a sure thing as long as we are in a fellowship with the Lord of hosts, who dwells in us by His Holy Spirit; who gives His command to the stars to join the battle; and sends legions of angels wherever He chooses; One angel, in one evening, destroyed 185, 000 soldiers of the enemy (2 Kings 20: 35).

He is the Lord of hosts to whom the whole nature submit; and obey His commands.

+ “*The God of Jacob is our refuge*”. Make yourself like a little infant lifted up by his father; For an infant not lifted up is a forsaken one; while the one lifted up is cared for.

(St. Augustine)

b- Referring Himself to His hosts, striving on the way of His righteousness; He calls Himself: “*The Lord of hosts*”; ... He calls Himself: “*God of Jacob*”; For Jacob wrestled with God and men, and prevailed; ... He is God of those who strive, and not of the lazy and slothful.

The title:

To the Chief Musician. To completion. A psalm of the sons of Korah. A song for Alamo.

1- The word “alam” means (a secret) or (a hidden thing). Hence it came in the Septuagint version as: “For the sake of secrets”, (For the sake of hidden things).

For this psalm proclaims the secret of God concerning His dwelling in the midst of His church, being her refuge, salvation, and peace.

According to some, “A song for Alamothe” means (praise by the church, the virgin); for the word ‘alamothe’ is derived from ‘alama’, a title given to St. Mary, the mother of God, in Isaiah 7: 4, being a betrothed virgin.

This psalm, then, is the song of the divine battle, led by the Lord of hosts, to sanctify His church, and to present her as a virgin bride. ... By such a Spirit, His minister work, saying together with the apostle Paul: *“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11: 2)

According to others, the word ‘alamothe’ refers to a musical tune of a song that starts by the word “virgins”

2- We already spoke about “To completion”, as being an expression of the consummation of an issue in the fullness of time; As the Word of God incarnated and consummated our salvation, and became, Himself, “the ultimate goal of our longings”; as well as the ultimate goal or
The ultimate end of the law.

+ We should understand the expression “To completion” as concerning Christ; *“For Christ is the end of the law, for righteousness to everyone who believes”* (Romans 10: 4); And He is called “the End”, not that He brings it to an end, but He completes or consummates it.

(St. Augustine)

3- “The sons of Korah”, namely, (the sons of Golgotha or of the cross) as we already said. No one can enjoy praising the Lord of hosts, as

the victorious Lord of the church, unless he is bound to the cross, "*The power of God for salvation*" (1 Corinthians 1: 24). Every time the sons of the Crucified sing the praise of Zion, victorious by the cross of her Savior, they discover divine hidden secrets with new depths, longing to reach its completion ... and that will bring to them more thirst toward the spiritual knowledge, and the enjoyment of the divine secrets.

- + The secret, therefore, is Christ Himself; Who, through being crucified at the Golgotha (Calvary), He, as you know, has split open the veil, to reveal the secrets of the temple.

(St. Augustine)

1- THE LORD OF HOSTS, GRANTOR OF STRENGTH:

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (1)

When troubles and sorrows get more intense, whether because of the seen enemies, as when the army of Sennacherib the Assyrian king put Jerusalem under siege in the days of the prophet Ezekiel; Or because of hidden enemies like the sins; We find in God a refuge, strength, and help. If we are sanctified to Him, and enjoy fellowship with Him.

This is the praise of the church, united to Christ her Head; In whom she hides, and by whom she resist evil.

According to St. Basil the Great, many utter these words by their mouths, and not by their hearts; as proved by the fact that when they fall into a tribulation, they hasten to seek human help, and not the divine help.

What does the church find in her Warrior King?

- a- **“A Refuge”**: Being targeted by persistently by the devil; we are in need of a perpetual Refuge, a capable Stronghold.
- b- **“A Strength”**: Lest it would be thought that she stands negatively by fleeing to God her Refuge, He present Himself to the church as “Strength” to work through Him, and to say together with the apostle: *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4: 13).
- c- **“A Help”**: He stands beside her, even in her as a Helper. He may allow for her to go through temptations, but He helps her in the midst of her sorrows, to stay growing, and progressing in maturity.

+ Many are the sorrows, and in every sorrow; whether it touches our processions, our health, or one of the necessities of life, or of those of our loved ones: we are committed to flee to God For it is not befitting of a Christian to resort to anyone but to His Christ, His God; by whom he would be strengthened.

+ But, beloved brethren, among all the sorrows that may dwell upon the human soul, nothing is more serious than the feeling of sin.

(St. Augustine)

“Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountain be carried into the midst of the sea; though its water roar and be troubled; though the mountains shake with its swelling” (2, 3)

Man sees the earth as his carrier; if it is removed, he would lose his life and being; and sees the mountains as being so well-established and unshakable. But in case it so happens that the believer feels that the earth shakes under his feet; and that what he

considers as well-established and unshakable, like the mountains, are carried into the midst of the sea; he should not fear, for his God is the Creator of the whole nature.

By “the earth”, he probably meant the armies that put Jerusalem under siege; and by the “mountains”, the mighty leaders of Assyria. But God is capable of shaking the first, and carrying the second into the midst of the sea.

If the “earth” refers to the body, and the “mountains” to the strong personality and the great gifts; When it so happen that your body collapses, and you assume that you have lost many of your gifts, even your personality, you will not fear, for God, your Savior can sanctify your body, souls, and capabilities, and, by His might, can restore to you the perfection of your personality.

+ Let us then, seek another kind of mountain in which would put our hopes. The Lord said to His disciples: *“If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain: ‘Move from here to there’, and it will move”* (Matthew 17: 20), *“or cast into the sea, and it will be done”* (21: 21).. By saying “this mountain”, He referred to Himself; to whom the prophet Isaiah also, saying: *“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains”* (Isaiah 2: 2). Yet, this “Mountain” will be established on the top of all mountains; namely, the apostles, also considered as “mountains”, who work and preach to the account of that “Mountain”, referred to by the prophet Isaiah 2: 2.

The “sea” refers to the nations of this world; ... Namely, It is as though the Lord says: [This Mountain “Me” will be preached among the peoples, and glorified among them, realizing the prophecy saying: *“A people I have not known shall serve Me”* (Psalm 18: 43)

+ *“The water roar and be troubled”* (3). Preaching the gospel to the people of Athens, they said: *“He (the apostle Paul) seems to proclaim of foreign gods”*

(Acts 17: 18); Whereas the Ephesians, in an uproar, cried out for about two hours: “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (Acts 19: 34).

(St. Augustine)

+ There is a great difference between “The mountains of God” and those of the world.

The ‘mountains of the world’ have the devil as their head.

The “mountains of God” have Christ as their Head..

As the “mountains of God” defeat ‘the mountains of the world’, the latter make troubles against the Christians. When the mountains are shaken, the earth quakes, and the waters roar,... But against whom? Against the church, established upon the Rock!

(St. Augustine)

2- THE LORD OF HOSTS, GRANTOR OF GLADNESS: (4 – 7)

“There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God” (4)

If the Word of preaching shakes the earth, moves the mountains, and troubles the seas, it will be to destroy evil, and to set a holy land; well-established mountains that bear “the Mountain” – the Lord Christ – on their tops. It will turn the salty and troubled waters of the sea into “rivers of sweet water that shall make glad the city of God. It will set the church of Christ, the new earth where God dwells; holy mountains, and rivers of living water of the Spirit that flow to satisfy.

According to the gospel: *“Jesus stood and cried out, saying: ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’, but this He spoke concerning the Spirit whom those*

believing in Him would receive, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given” (John 7: 37-39). About this sweet fountain, the prophet Joel said: “It will come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drip with new wine; the hills shall flow of milk; and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; A fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord, and water the Valley of Acacias” (Joel 3: 18)

This flow will destroy evil, destroy the old man with all his works, and set and build the new man; granting the church as a whole, and each of her members, heavenly love, joy, and peace. And according to the apostle: *“For we are to God, the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life” (2 Corinthians 2: 15, 16).*

According to the scholar Origen, “the River” is the Holy Spirit who carries to the believers (the trees planted on its banks) the evangelic and apostolic writings; as well as the help, presented to them by the heavenly hosts from God.

And St. Ambrose speaks to us about this river surrounding us (See Jonah 2: 3), as being the Holy Spirit who waters the heavenly Jerusalem, who flows on the church with the crucified Lord Christ.

+ The Holy Spirit is the (River), the rich River, the great River, that perpetually and unceasingly flows. ... The heavenly Jerusalem is not watered by an earthly river, but by the Holy Spirit; A River, of which a small brook is enough to water us;... A River that flows more abundantly in the midst of those heavenly thrones, authorities, hosts, angels, and archangels; flowing with the abundance of the seven virtues of the Holy Spirit. ... If an earthly river could flood over and cover its banks, How much more would the Spirit do, who flows over every creature He touches; as though over the lowly valleys of our minds, to make glad the heavenly creatures with the abundance of His holiness.

- + The Old Testament is a deep well, from which water is drawn, yet with difficulty.... Whereas the New Testament is not only a river, but “*out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water*” (John 7: 38); rivers of meditation, spiritual rivers.

(St. Ambrose)

- + The prophetic rain “*are over and gone*” (see Song 2: 11), yet not for a loss to the believers, but rather for more benefit to the church; For what would be our need for rain, when the rivers make glad the city of God? When a fountain of eternal water flows in the heart of every believer?

(The scholar Origen)

The rivers of living water are also the baptism (and the Sacrament of anointment), through which we enjoy sonhood to God, and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us as members of the body of Christ; Hence it is said:

“The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn” (4, 5)

According to St. Augustine: [Referring to the sanctification, it is obvious that those rivers would be understood as the Holy Spirit, by whom every godly soul believing in Christ, is sanctified, to become a citizen of the city of God].

What does the Holy Spirit present to the believer through the church of Christ?

1- The sanctification: Making him a holy dwelling place for the Most High.

- + The Holy Spirit who proceeds from God the Father, is the Source of holiness, the life-Grantor of power, the perfection-Giver of grace; through

whom man enjoys adoption; and the corrupt would become in non-corruption. He who is One with the Father, and the Son in everything: in glory, eternity, power, kingdom, and Divinity. This is to be experienced by the tradition of the baptism of salvation.

(St. Basil the Great)

2- The eternal dwelling of God in man:

+ The baptized will gain in himself the Holy Spirit; and will actually bear the title: 'the temple of God'.

(St. Cyril the Great)

3- Will restore to man his honor and his daring with God:

"God shall help her" (5). That is the secret of gladness and joy of the believer. On the positive aspect, the believer, being the "city of God", he is watered by the rivers; to enjoy the holy life in the Lord, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit; and the daring of sonhood before God. On the negative aspect, God would take evil away from us, and would destroy the works of the old man in us; Hence it is said:

"The nations raged; the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted" (6)

4- THE LORD OF HOSTS, GRANTOR OF CONQUEST: (8 – 11)

"Come, behold the works of the Lord, see what desolations He has brought on the earth; He makes wars cease to the end of the earth" (8, 9)

The Lord granted conquest to His church, set her all over the world, and granted humanity an inner peace instead of trouble and grief. God reigned over the nations, and established the kingdom of His spiritual peace in the hearts of many.

According to some, the word “*behold*” here, came to mean the insight, when the heart sees the inner kingdom. And by the expression: “*to the end of the earth*”, he probably means the body of man as a whole; For when the Lord reigns upon the heart of man, He sanctifies his body with all its members, senses, and feelings; so that he no longer fears the devil, nor his tools, that the Lord destroys by His cross.

“He breaks the bow, and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire” (9)

By this he probably refers to an old custom, that after getting a definite crushing conquest, the weapons were gathered together and burnt in fire (Joshua 11: 6; 2 Samuel 8: 4; Ezekiel 39: 8 – 10). It was said that the Roman emperor Vespasian, celebrating the end of war in Italy and all over the world, made a medal showing the goddess of peace holding in one hand an olive branch, and in the other hand a torch she was about to throw over a heap of weapons to burn them in fire.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, being the King of peace, casts the flame of His Holy Spirit into our heart, to burn the thorns that strangle the soul; and destroy all the weapons of the devil; to grant us His exalted peace.

St. Augustine wonders: [Is that already realized? ... It is realized concerning some; ... It is realized concerning the wheat; but not concerning the tares].

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth” (10)

It is as though God says: Do you wish to experience My peace? Do you wish to see all the destructive tools of war burnt in fire? ... Cease trusting in human arms! Get bound to Me, and I shall lift you up above the nations (the seeking of the body); and exalt you in the earth; carrying you as though by the wings of a dove up to my heavens.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 46

THE LORD OF HOSTS, GRANTING US CONQUEST

- + How amazing You are, O Lord, in Your love;
As a Leader, You go by Yourself foremost in battle;
To bring us forth to a certain conquest'
And, as a Father, You bear us, Your little children, to the bosom of Your Father.

- + You instruct us how to strive even to blood;
You compassionately satisfy our emotions;
We, Your hosts, and Your little children.

- + Let the earth of my cruel heart be moved;
Turn it into a new land full of love;
Let the earthly mountains in me be destroyed;
Establish in me Your holy mountains;
Turn my heart, from being the haughty Babylon, into the humble Jerusalem;
Turn my life from a city of the devil into the city of God.

- + Let Your Holy Spirit work in me;
Let it flow like a divine river, to turn the wilderness of my valley into fruitful
gardens

+ Dwell in me;
Let Your peace dwell in me;
Burn, O Lord, all the weapons of the devil;
And set in me the weapons of the Spirit.



PSALM 47

THE RULER OF THE WHOLE EARTH

A ROYAL MESSIANIC PSALM

According to the “Talmud”, this psalm, in the latter Jewish eras, was used in celebrating the new year; revealing the rejoice in the coronation of God a King on the whole earth. While according to others, this psalm, together with psalms 93; 95-100, were written to celebrate an annual feast as a memorial of an exalted divine work, in which God proclaimed conquest on His enemies, and revealed His kingdom on the creation.

This psalm is closely connected to the last one, and was probably written in the same occasion. And some believe that, like psalm 24, it was written on the occasion of moving the Ark of the Covenant to Mount Zion, to carry a prophecy about the ascension of the Lord Christ to heaven, His royal reign, His sitting on the right hand of God the Father, and the extension of preaching the gospel over the whole world. According to many Rabbinic Interpreters, it is a Messianic psalm.

This psalm bears the three threads of prophecy in the old covenant:

- 1- **The Messiah:** Being the King of the whole earth (7)
- 2- **The Gentiles:** All will submit to the Messianic kingdom (8, 9).
- 3- **The Jews:** As intermediaries to realize that (4).

The Lord Christ opened the doors of His church before all the Gentiles; and reigned spiritually on them, longing to reign on our whole life, namely, on our bodies, spirits,

thoughts, works, and words (Colossians 1: 17, 18); not to control, but to grant the spirit of joy, and to restore our lost honor and glory.

This psalm is bound to the feasts of Epiphany and Ascension; in which the Lord Christ is proclaimed as a spiritual King over the whole earth.

PROGRAMS TO INTERPRET THIS PSALM:

- 1- The historical interpretation:** Some seek the understanding of this psalm in the light of certain historical event or events; probably a conquest in a certain war, or the rebuilding of the temple after the return from captivity. For, with the conquest in a certain battle, the believers expect an overall conquest, by which God reigns over the whole earth, through receiving faith by all the nations. And according to others -- seeing in the temple, the royal divine palace – they longed to enjoy the reign of God on all the nations of the earth... by which the goal of history will be realized, namely, to come to be in the hand, and submitted to God.
- 2- The eschatological interpretation:** According to some, this psalm concerns the great day of the Lord, when creation reaches its goal, with the ultimate and final fall of the kingdom of the devil, and the eternal reign of the Lord.
- 3- The Messianic interpretation:** Accepted by many Jewish interpreters, and proclaimed, as well, by most of the early fathers of the church; seeing the Lord Christ as the King of kings, who, by the cross, has realized His spiritual kingdom.
- 4- The worship interpretation:** Believing that this psalm represents a part of the liturgy of the celebration of the enthronement of God a King on His people.

THE GENERAL FRAME:

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1- Prophesying the overall reign of God | 1 -- 4 |
| 2- The general worship to God the King | 5 -- 7 |
| 3- The glory of God the King | 8 – 9 |

THE TITLE:

To the Chief Musician. A psalm of the sons of Korah. And, according to the Septuagint version: To completion, a psalm of the sons of Korah.

- 1- It is befitting for this psalm to carry the title 'To completion' (consummation) or 'to the ultimate end', for it represents the goal of the law, namely, for the Lord Christ to reign spiritually over the peoples; And probably on account of that this psalm bears an eschatological nature; As the goal of our existence and our whole human history, is for the Lord of glory to come and carry us forth to His eternal kingdom.
- 2- We previously knew how the word "Korah" refers to "Golgotha"; For it is not possible to perceive the Lord Christ as the King of kings, who reigns on the life of man, except by him who has become a son of the Crucified, who, by the spirit of simplicity, throws himself on His chest, like an infant, to be made a king by Him (Revelation 1: 6).

+ 'Childhood' was put before our eyes to follow the example of humility, and to keep away from foolishness.

"The sons of Korah" are the sons of the Groom, who was crucified at the location of atonement (Calvary or Golgotha).

Let us listen to Him, as Christians -- "the sons of Korah", the sons of the Groom, who was crucified by the cruel children at the location of atonement "Calvary".

(St. Augustine)

1- PROPHESYING THE OVERALL REIGN OF GOD: (1 – 4)

“Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples. Shout to God with the voice of triumph” (1)

- 1- The language of this psalm quotes the rejoice in the conquest of a king over His enemies, yet in the spirit of prophecy by which the psalmist saw the King of kings enter a decisive battle to destroy the kingdom of the devil, the real enemy, and to establish His kingdom. By his inner eyes, the psalmist saw the supreme Kingdom, the great battle, and the exalted conquest, ending with the resurrection of the Lord Christ, who destroyed “death” as the last enemy of humanity; ... then set forth to His heavens, bearing His believers up to where He resides; ... and by His ascension, preaching Him stretched, righteousness reigned over all nations of the earth, and the life of believers turned into a kingdom of joy and gladness.

This psalm is therefore, a military song; as, up to this very day, clapping the hands and shouting, are used in the military and political atmosphere (Numbers 23: 21; Joshua 6: 16, 20; 1 Samuel 10: 24; Ezra 3: 12).

- 2- The psalmist seeks from us to celebrate the reign of the Messiah by clapping the hands, together with the voice of gladness, and the shouts of joy; to bind the work of hands with that of the larynx and mouth. For clapping the hands refers to the proclamation of the reign of the kingdom of the Messiah on all nations, through preaching to others by our practical behavior’ and to celebrating the reign of the Messiah a King over our hearts, all our body members, and possibilities, all of which to be dedicated to the account of His kingdom, through our love – if possible – to everyone in the whole world. As to the work of the larynx and the mouth or the tongue, it refers to testifying to His kingdom. By that, the testimony by word will meld with that by work. In other words, we should celebrate the victorious King, proclaiming our rejoice by our practical life, as well as by our words.

3- This psalm repeats the word “Alleluia”, meaning (Praise Jehovah); bearing the spirit of joy, bound to conquest or victory. As the believer sees in His God dwelling in his depths, “*the Conqueror who went out conquering and to conquer*” (Revelation 6: 2).

+ Do not rejoice just by the mouth, while the hands are idle; “*Clap your hands*”.

The hands of believers are their good behavior

+ Rejoice by the tongue, as well as by the hands; The hands should not be idle, and the tongue should not be mute; Let the hands conform to the tongue; confession conform to work; “*Shout to God with the voice of triumph*”

(St. Augustine)

+ The Book instructs us to sing to the Lord, and to dance wisely, according to the words of God to Ezekiel, commanding him to “*pound his fists, and stamp his feet*” (Ezekiel 6: 11); God does not seek from us to do some kind of funny movements by our bodies, but to do it with reverence; the Spirit dancing by the exaltation of the body with good works; when we *hang our harps upon the willows*” (Psalm 137: 2).

+ As preaching faith in Christ has stretched all over the world, the prophecy, therefore, calls all the Gentiles to praise God with joy and gladness.

The psalmist instructs us to clap our hands, which were defiled by the blood of the sacrifices of idols, and are now purified by baptism; namely, to do good works that bring pleasure to the angels, and grief to the demons; the same way clapping the hands would bring pleasure to the conquerors, and grief to the defeated.

Your voices, by which you previously blasphemed, have now become joyful prayers of praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Most High, despite being humble by His incarnation; ... Who is awesome, despite receiving reproach by His own choice.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

“For the Lord Most High is awesome; He is a great King over the earth” (2)

This language only suits the kingdom of Christ, a high and awesome “*kingdom which cannot be shaken*” (Hebrew 12: 28, 29; Deuteronomy 4: 24; 9: 3; 10” 17-21; Nehemiah 1: 5; Zephaniah 2: 11). Our Christ is God, Lover of mankind, who delivers Himself for the sake of everyone; compassionate on sinners; cares for their salvation, without hurting their feelings. Yet, in His love, He is Awesome; Holy; has no fellowship with corruption; Light who endures no darkness; Truth, who does not partake of vanity; and a Royal Way, who knows no diversion.... Let us then love and fear Him at the same time; For loving Him without submission to His will, and obedience to His commandment, is a kind of despise.... Let us worship Him with love, together with fear and terror.

The Lord reigned on the cross; perfectly established His love for us by His shed blood; proclaimed His awe and justice; and by His cross destroyed the hosts of darkness ... By the cross He proclaimed that “*He is a great King over the earth*”, and not just over one nation, as according to St. Augustine: [As It is not enough to have one nation submit to Him, He paid a great price, His blood, to acquire the whole world].

He subdues the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet” (3)

The word “subdue” here, means receiving the word of the apostle, to enter into the meek flock of Christ, when the Gentiles forsake their spirit of pride and haughtiness, and their oppression against the church, to bow, and to carry the cross of her Christ with joy and gladness. According to some fathers, it means the submission of the demons and sins that have for long subdued the heathen nations, and their falling under feet of the cross. For by the submission of the Gentiles in faith with the spirit of love and obedience, their evil collapsed and crushed under the feet of the church.

It is the apostles who talk here, not with the spirit of pride and haughtiness, but with great astonishment and marvel before the work of the cross of Christ in the life of the heathens; For while opposing Him, they were drawn into an utter submission to the preachers, to come to be as though under their feet; and the apostle, in their turn, came to carry them with joy, for all to submit at the feet of the Crucified.

- + We see the saints, through the voice of the psalmist, raised up presenting praises of thanksgiving to Christ who crowns them, saying: *“He subdues the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet”*. The ultimate and serious desire of the saints, is to see those they instruct become partakers of the grace given to them by Christ; according to the epistle sent by the apostle Paul to the Romans, saying: *“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established”* (Romans 1: 11).

(St. Cyril of Alexandria)

“He will choose our inheritance for us, the excellence of Jacob whom He loves” (4)

According to the Hebrew text, it came as: *“He will choose our portion for us, the pride of Jacob whom He loved”* ... If we rejoice because God has, by His cross, drawn the Gentiles to become members of His holy church, in submission to the apostles; the secret of our joy is truly the

work of God, who planned the ordinance of our salvation, gave us Himself as our portion, and received us as His portion and inheritance.

According to the Septuagint version, it came as *"He will choose us as His inheritance"...*

If the Gentiles submit to the church through believing in her Groom, it is not accounted as favor by those entering into faith, because it is the Holy Spirit who draws them, and the Lord who chooses them. ... He chose us, and loved us first; He reflected His beauty on us; and granted us the blessing to be counted as His inheritance.

2- THE GENERAL WORSHIP TO GOD THE KING: (5 – 7)

Our Christ came to open the gates of faith before all nations and peoples, delivering His own life given for all; And by His ascension to His heavens, He opened the gates before all. ... Hence the catholic church will keep on worshipping Him, exultant in His work in her, as long as she is on the earth, until she encounters her Christ who ascended to heaven, on the day of His ultimate coming.

"God has gone up with a shout; the Lord with the sound of a trumpet" (5)

This is interpreted by the psalmist as follows::

- 1- *"With a shout"*, is a sign of worshipping with great joy; according to the words of the gospel: *"It came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God"* (Luke 24: 51 – 53). His ascension did not bring them into sorrow or grief, but into great joy, worshipping, praising, and thanksgiving God; For, in His ascension, they saw their own ascension; and what the Lord has done was to their own account, and in their own names. His ascension turned the church into

an exultant worshipping heaven; partaking of the praise and joy of the heavenly hosts.

2- As to the sound of the trumpet, there is nothing in the New Testament concerning the apostles hearing the sound of a trumpet; Yet we perceive that they saw Him as the victorious and conqueror King, who set forth to Heaven, for heaven to give the sound of trumpets, proclaiming the conquest of her King. ... Hence, on the day of His ultimate coming, the angels will sound the trumpets (1 Corinthians 15: 52; 1 Thessalonians 4: 16).

+ The shouts are the voice of the joyful conquerors; and the trumpet is the sign and proclamation of royalty; Saying: "*God has gone up with a shout*", means, therefore, that after overcoming death, sin, and demons, uprooting vanity, and turning things to the better, He ascended returning to heaven, from which He never separated, nor did from the world, on His incarnation (as His Divinity fills heaven and earth). His ascension was not through a power foreign to Him, like the way Elijah was taken up to heaven, but was by His own power.

Saying: "*with the sound of a trumpet*" concerns the praises of the angels, who were signaling one another to open up the heavenly gates to receive the Lord of glory (Psalm 24: 7 – 10). It is also said that the preaching of the apostles all over the world of the ascension of the Lord, was as though with a trumpet.... The impact of the ascension of our Lord has been so overwhelming to be proclaimed from generation to another.

The psalmist does not say "with the sound of trumpets", but "... *of a trumpet*", on account of the conformity of the views of the angels and the apostles.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- + What are the shouts but the expression of joy, unutterable by words?! ... The apostles, who were sorrowful for His death, rejoiced to see Him ascend to heaven. As that was truly unutterable by mere words, the shouts came to make up for what the words were unable to express.

There was also the sound of trumpets by the angels, to give the good news of the ascension of the Lord; those who said to the apostles: "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*" (Acts 1: 11).

The body might have disappeared from your sight, but God will never forsake your hearts.

Look up at Him ascending; ... Believe in Him a Conqueror; ... Have hope in His ultimate coming; ... But, through His hidden mercy, feel His presence. For He, who ascended to heaven before your eyes, has promised you, saying: "*I am with you always even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28: 20). And faithfully, the apostle addresses us, saying: "*The Lord is near; do not worry about anything*" (Philippians 4: 5).

Christ dwells in heavens; Heavens may be far away; But He who dwells there is close by.

If the Lord Christ ascended to heaven to make it very close to us, the church will do nothing more than continuous praise, being the throne on which her Groom the King sits; Hence the psalmist repeats the word “*sing*” four times in a single verse.

“Sing praises to the Lord, sing praises! Sing praises to our king, sing praises!” (6)

He did not say “Sing to God”, nor “Sing to the king”, but said: “... *to our God*”, and “... *to our King*”; For God is the God of the whole world, and the King on the whole earth. Yet no one can sing to Him unless he feels that He is his own God and king.

He repeated the word “sing” four times, for the psalmist calls the church at the four corners of the world: East, West, North, and South, to be only preoccupied with singing praise to Him; to be prepared to become a chariot for Him to sit in.

He seeks from us to glorify and worship Him with the spirit and with understanding (!
Corinthians 14: 15)

“For God is the King of all the earth, Sing praises with understanding” (7)

+ He teaches and counsels us to sing with understanding, and not to seek the sound to the ear, but the light to the heart.

(St. Augustine)

- + Let us raise our voices with songs and praises in the church, to provoke our adversary the devil to leave in confusion once he hears the holy voice. If our praise is not by action, it has to be by thought and words; for the devil usually crawls toward the silent, or toward those who utter lowly vain words, and keeps away from those whom he sees mentally or vocally preoccupied with praising God.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

3- THE GLORY OF GOD THE KING: (8 – 9)

After proclaiming the overall reign of God, who opens the door of faith before all peoples; and the commitment of the church to sing praises to Him with understanding, the psalmist ends his psalm talking about the glory of the King, proclaimed by the Gentiles receiving faith, and the blessings the believers get:

*“God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne; The princes of the people have gathered together,
the people of the God of Abraham; For the shields of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted”* (8, 9)

The glory of God appears in the following:

- 1- God reigns over all nations, realizing His promises to Abraham: *“By your offspring all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing”* (Genesis 22: 18) The blessings we get in the new covenant were in God’s plans that He revealed to His friend Abraham; hence the psalmist says: *“The shields (Rulers) of the earth gathered together, (with) the people of the God of Abraham”* (9).

- + The psalmist mentioned Abraham, on account of that God has promised him that *By your offspring shall all nations of the earth gain blessing*" (Genesis 22: 18). Once the nations forsook the gods of their fathers, they gathered together joining Abraham, and became one nation.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

2- God is glorified, sitting on His holy throne (8); namely, on the congregation of believers.

- + The throne of God is the righteous for the sake of whose purity, God dwells in them

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- + The soul obeys God who dwells in her; and she commands the body members like the foot, the hand, the eye, and the ear, etc.as her servants, by which she ministers to God dwelling in her.

(St. Augustine)

3- Reigning on man, God grants him strength and glory, to be counted as one of the (shields) of God, For "*The shields*" of God are greatly *exalted in the earth*".(9).

- + Who are the (shields) of God, other than the apostles and all believers. They are "*shields*", namely (strong), on account of that they confronted the whole world, prevailed, and were never defeated.

(St. John Chrysostom)

God is glorified in His church, which He turns into a spiritual army with banners; Out of the weak, He sets “shields”; and “*out of the eater came something to eat* (Judges 14: 14)..

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 47

REIGN, AND BE GLORIFIED, O LORD

- + According to Your true promise to our father Abraham,
You opened the doors of Your house before us;
You blessed us in You, and reigned in our hearts.

- + Reign, O Lord on all the nations;
Control my whole life;
Sanctify all my possibilities to Your account;
Out of my soul, make a throne for Yourself.

- + I give You thanks, for You received me as Your inheritance;
Grant me to be, Yourself, my inheritance;

- + Teach me how to praise You by my mouth, as well as by my hands;
How to testify to You by the joy of my heart, and the practice of practical love.

- + Lift my heart up to Your heavens, to which You ascended;
Grant me, not to blow my trumpet here to gain a temporal glory;
But to wait for the day of Your ultimate coming;
To rejoice when I hear the sound of the trumpets of Your angels.

+ I give You thanks, O King of the whole earth;
For You have reigned in my life;
To make me one of Your “shields”;
To pour Your glory upon me;
Glorify, O Holy One, in me.



PSALM 48

THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING

A PSALM OF ZION (THE CHURCH):

This is one of the psalms of Zion, namely, of the church, used to praise the Great God and His city, filled with glory, in a collective procession. It does not separate between God and His church, but present to them one cry-out of praise.... Counting it as a praise to God, glorified in His church, we should not, therefore, marvel to see it starts by saying: *"Great is the Lord"* (1); and ends by saying: *"For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide, even to death"* (14). For the church, in essence, is *"Life with, and in the Lord"*; In her, the glory of the Great Lord is proclaimed; His exalted care will be shown; and His free amazing grace will be experienced. The beauty, splendor, strength, and growth of the church is in her union with God, and her bond with the Lord Christ, being His body.

The psalmist calls her *"The city of the Great King"*, a title referred to by the Lord Christ in His sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 35). His presence in it is the secret of her glory (1-2), *"her refuge"* (3-8), her joy, her praise, her righteousness, and her testimony (9-14).

Whenever he looked at Zion, as the city of God, the psalmist lifted his eyes to the church of the new covenant that embraces the nations and peoples with the spirit of joy and exaltation in the Lord, to say: *"She is the joy of the whole earth"*; and addresses the Lord saying: *"Your praise to the end of the earth: Your right hand is full of righteousness"* (10) ; and as it is written in Isaiah: *"Many people shall come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks'"* (Isaiah 2: 3, 4).

Its occasion:

It is probably the same for psalms 46 and 47; there are common features between it and psalm 46, at least concerning its atmosphere full of gladness following a great salvation. The three psalms (46 – 48) concentrate on “trust in God”, being “our refuge” (46), and “our King” (47, 48).

According to some, this psalm probably refers to the siege carried out by Sennacherib, in the year 701 B.C. (4 – 8); Whereas according to others, it presents the experience of a pilgrim to Jerusalem, expressing his admiration of her greatness, and listening to a report about her endurance, after going through so many wars, and being subjected to so many adverse cultures, looking at every place in it as a living testimony to God’s dealings with His people, and His exalted care for His believers. Then returning to his household, he tells them about all he saw, heard, and felt.

The general frame:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------|
| 1- The city of the Great King | 1 -- 3 |
| 2- The unconquerable city | 4 -- 8 |
| 3- A worshipping, exultant city | 9 -- 11 |
| 4- A city that testifies to her God | 12 – 14 |

The title:

A song. A psalm of the sons of Korah. And according to the Septuagint version, it came as: A psalm of the sons of Korah. Of the day second to the Sabbath.

- 1- According to St. Gregory, the whole psalm speaks on the tongue of those returning from the Babylonian captivity; For “the Sabbath” refers to the (rest); and they have come back to their rest, to praise God and to give Him thanks. That

would be the meaning of the title of this psalm: (of the day, second to the Sabbath); he probably refers to (the second return).

- 2- According to St. Augustine, "Of the day second to the Sabbath" refers to the second day of creation, when God said: "*Let there be a firmament, ... and He called the firmament 'sky'*" (Genesis 1: 6 – 8). He says that the first day of the Sabbath, is the day of the Lord, whereas the second day of the Sabbath is the day of the church of Christ: Therefore, the children of the church are the children of the firmament, or the children of heaven, who do not submit to temptations. [They are worthy of the name "firmament"; Therefore the church of Christ is in those "strong" about whom the apostle says: "*We then who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak*" (Romans 15: 1)

1- THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING: (1 – 3)

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. In the joy of our God, in the holy mountain" (1)

According to some, this psalm is a (mine) which includes precious titles of the church: [The city of our God; His holy mountain; the mountains of Zion; On the sides of the north; the city of the Great King; the city of the Lord of hosts, etc.]. Every one of these titles reveals an aspect of its living sides:

- **The city of our God:** Namely, the city where we encounter God, being our God referred to us; through personal relationship; by entering with Him into a covenant. The church is, therefore, an encounter of God with His own people, to sign by the last drop of His precious blood on the covenant of love, He proclaimed on the cross.
- **His holy mountain:** Being the city of the Holy God, she rises up as a mountain, testifies before all to His holiness, through practicing the holy life and her

fellowship with Him. She is like a mountain unshakable by any storm of temptation.

- **The mountains of Zion:** (Zion means a stronghold). She is like the mountains, where we find a refuge by God, our Stronghold and High Wall].
- **On the sides of the north:** According to some this refers to the clouds coming to Jerusalem from the North, to provide her with fertility and fruition. Whereas, according to others, this refers to the Assyrian enemies on the north of Jerusalem, who perpetually attacked her, yet she always prevailed.
- **The city of the Great King:** Where the King of kings dwells, to make her people kings and priests to His God and Father” (Revelation 1: 6)
- **The city of the Lord of hosts:** “*Awesome as an army with banners*” (Song 6: 4, 10), under the leadership of God Himself, Grantor of conquest.

It is obvious that the beauty, holiness, and conquest of the city is set upon her belonging to God dwelling in her as a King. The Heavenly One came down to earth to establish a glorious church without blemish, and to qualify her for the heavenly life. Hence the psalmist sings: “*Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, ... in His holy mountain*” (1).

+ Great is the Lord in His Essence, might, and work; hence He is praised by His rational creation; ... While in His church, His majesty became known to all.. And because He, by Himself, ordained His incarnation, it is said that she is His city and the mountain of His sanctuary.

It is also said “His city” about those who righteously walk before Him.

And “His holy city” because there He dwells.

And “the mountain of His Sanctuary”, because of the exalted honor of the divine doctrines; as though set for edification on a high mountain, seen by everyone with insight, to take it as a program for his salvation.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

She is called “*a city*” because she embraces the congregation of believers; not being set upon a certain individual or individuals, She is the dwelling place of God with all believers, since Adam and until the end of time. Everyone enjoys a personal encounter, and personal dealings with God, yet not isolated from the holy congregation.... Being isolated from the congregation of believers, would turn man’s heart from being the city of God, to a wilderness. A city with one inhabitant is closer to desolation whatever are its possibilities

According to father (Mar) Isaac the Syrian: [In him who encounters God through the circle of love, God would set His kingdom, and transfigures; and there he would also encounter God’s angels and saints].

She is also called “*His Holy Mountain*”, on account of her being well established in faith, which no temptation could shake. It refers, as well, to her exalted doctrines and life. Seen by the prophet Daniel as a great mountain filling the earth, set forth through preaching the Lord Christ -- the Cornerstone, cut without hands -- faith that grew all over the world .

+ A certain rejected Cornerstone was found, by which the Jews stumbled, cut without hands from a certain mountain; Namely, came from the Jewish kingdom without hand, on account of that Christ’s birth from St. Mary has been without human seed... According to the prophecy of Daniel, this Rock grew to become a great mountain that filled the whole earth; and reached us; ... Why then, would we seek the mountain, as though it is far from us, while it is present within us, to ascend?! ... Let the Lord in us be Great, and greatly praised.

(St. Augustine)

“Beautiful in elevation; the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north; the city of the Great King” (2)

Seeing the church of the new covenant as *“the city”* where God encounters His people, and as *“the mountain that filled the whole earth”*; bearing God’s holiness and righteousness; the psalmist proclaims her splendor and beauty, and her role as the joy of the earth. She may be rejected, humiliated, and persecuted by the world, seeking to get rid of her; but she, like her Groom, by her spiritual beauty, proclaims her love of the world, ministers as a giving servant, to draw the oppressors to the joy and gladness of the Lord. Preaching the evangelic life, the good news that realize our salvation in the worthiness of the cross, and revealing the divine love, shown by the given precious blood; she attempts to bring all, as children of God the Father, and to grant them the gift of the Holy Spirit, Grantor of life and holiness.

She brings the nations forth to the divine throne; to the eternal joy as wise virgins, yet not spoiled or slothful, but as mighty mountains, hence called *“Mountains of Zion”*.

+ Zion is one mountain; Why then does he say: “Mountains”? ... Because Zion belongs, as well, to those who come from all directions, to meet together at the Cornerstone, to become two walls, two mountains: one from the circumcision, and the other from the un-circumcision; one from the Jews, and the other from the Gentiles; And despite the diversity, there is no difference; on account of the fact that, although they come from different directions, they are now bound together by the Cornerstone.

(St. Augustine)

The whole church gather together, with a diversity of gifts, capabilities and possibilities, unite together at the Cornerstone – our Lord Jesus,

who sends to her His Holy Spirit as golden clouds, pour on her the living water to turn her into gardens bearing the fruits of the Spirit.

- + Golden clouds come from the North. Great is the glory and honor of the Almighty! Great is the glory of the Physician who heals the patient, overcome by despair!.

Golden clouds come from the North, not dark or lowly, but golden, for being enlightened by Christ, coming from "*the sides of the North*", from "*the city of the Great King*".

(St. Augustine)

As long as the church is still on earth, she will be attacked as though from the North; like what the Assyrians did, who came from the North to put Jerusalem under siege, and to captivate her.... Yet she will remain the church, the unconquerable "*the city of the Great King*". ... The "North" has many other meanings as we shall see:

- + The prophet calls her "*The sides of the North*", on account of her smallness, and being hidden by the huge mountains.

And also because the Assyrians who used to fight against the Jews, came from the North; ... Yet, although attacked from people of the North, yet she remained "*the city of the Great King*".

The prophet also call the Gentiles "*People of the North*"; meaning that, by receiving faith in Christ, they were going to become, as well, "*the city of the Great King*", and His dwelling place.

And also because, according to the old law, the lamb of the sacrifice had to be slain at the northern side of the altar; which was a symbol of the Lamb of God --

our Lord Jesus Christ, who was slain for the sake of the forgiveness of the sins of the world; He who cares for the Gentiles and makes them His own, and His stronghold, surrounded by huge mountains; namely, by the saintly apostles, and the guardian angels.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

The church appears as “the city of the Great King”; And the believers appear as the (palaces) through which the king, with all His amazing works, will appear, particularly His covenant with His church, and even with every one of her members; ... caring for her as a holy congregation, and for her members; as one city, with several (palaces). ; He cares for all by His word, promises, and salvation work on the cross, and He cares, as well, for those who have no one to care for them ... He is the Father of the fatherless, Judge of the widows, and who gives justice to the oppressed.

“Within its palaces, God has shown Himself as her refuge” (3)

2- THE UNCONQUERABLE CITY:

After presenting to us the church as: a collective life, practicing the personal relationship with God – her God, ... abiding as a mountain, unmoved by temptations, holy by the Holy One who dwells in her; ... wide enough to accommodate the nations and peoples, by the spirit of joy and exultation; ... enjoying the clouds of the North, raining on her the water of free divine grace; testifying to her Groom by her members as palaces dwelt by the Great King; Now He presents her as a persecuted church; For this persecution or tribulation is a fundamental feature of the bride of the Crucified Groom.

As soon as man practices the true evangelic church life, and as soon as his heart gets wide enough with love for God and men, the world will stir up against him; he will be fought from those inside and outside; by those close to him, and even by his own body; hence the psalmist says:

“For behold, the kings assembled; they passed by together; they saw it, and so they marveled; they were troubled, they hastened away. Fear took hold of them there, and pain as a woman in travail; As when you break the ships of Tarshish with an east wind” (4 – 7) ...

- + The kings and rulers assembled together and came to fight against Jerusalem; but seeing the power of God against them, they marveled, were troubled, and had pain as a woman in travail. That is how it also is with those who fight against the church of Christ.

The psalmist mentions ‘Tarshish’, the richest of the cities on the sea; and says, as the east wind breaks the ships on the sea shores, God will destroy the enemies, crush them, and grind their strength.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

The enemies used to assemble together around Jerusalem to counsel one another how to attack it. But, troubled by its amazing appearance, their counsel got nowhere, and they departed in marvel and confusion.

The psalmist presents two analogies of the terror that dwelt upon those kings:

- 1- A woman in travail; referring to the sudden and strong terror that dwelt upon them. According to St. Augustine:... [They are conceived by the fear of Christ, and through believing in Him whom they fear, they labor and give birth to

salvation, "*Fear took hold of them, and pain as a woman in travail*". Hearing of travail, you expect birth. ... The old man goes into travail, and the new one is born].

- 2- The ships of Tarshish, famed for their greatness, size, and power. According to some, the word 'Tarshish', meaning (ocean) or (sea); It is as though he means (the ships of the oceans or of the seas). And the way the east wind destroys the ships of Tarshish, the Spirit of our Christ, when the sinners receive the work of God's grace in them. will destroy the kingdom of darkness established in their hearts, Whereas those who reject the grace, the Spirit will destroy them by the same troubles they brought upon the churches of Christ.

By these two analogies, he showed that oppression against the church will definitely end in failure; Yet, in case the oppressors receive the fear of God, and believe, their evil will perish, and they will enjoy the birth of the new man in them; while if they reject, their souls will perish by their evil.

+ In truth, the psalmist talks about both the future sorrow and joy: Sorrow because of the judgment, and joy because of the forgiveness.

(St. Ambrose)

According to St. Ambrose, the woman in travail is the soul who gets conceived through the work of the Word; As long as she is still in travail, she suffers pains; but, once she gives birth to a child, she rejoices. The ships of Tarshish are the spiritual ships loaded with Solomon's gold and silver; Namely, our bodies which, according to the words of the apostles, carry a treasure in earthen vessels. It is as though he, who believes in the Lord Christ, instead of resisting His work, would enjoy the birth of the new man in him (in the water of baptism); and would bear the true treasure in him, in peace.

The psalmist ends his talk about the unconquerable church, saying:

“As we have heard, so we have seen, in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God; God will establish it forever” (8)

Along the history, the psalmist heard about the amazing works of God in His holy city; And through his own experience, and by his own eyes, he saw what he heard. History and experience are both great instructors, presenting one and the same lesson, namely, God’s exalted care for His church.

+ What we have heard, we see in the actual experience; Namely, God’s amazing conquest, victories, and care.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ What a blessed church! Hearing at times, and seeing at other times! ... Hearing promises, and seeing their realization!; Hearing prophecies, and seeing the gospel!For everything realized now, has been previously prophesied!

Where do you hear; and Where do you see? In the city of the Lord of hosts; in the city of our God; that God has established forever!

(St. Augustine).

+ I mean that we heard on the tongues of men, and read in books, about the works He has done in old in Egypt, in the wilderness of Sinai, and in the land of Canaan; But now, we see it actually happening in Jerusalem, the city, You have established forever!

But if someone says: If God has established Jerusalem forever, Why then, have the Romans destroyed her? ... We shall answer him that “forever” here, does not mean eternity; the same way the prophecy says about King Hezekiah: *“He asked life from You, and You gave it to Him, length of days forever and ever”* (Psalm 21:

4) ... Here, as well, the prophet says about Jerusalem: “*God will establish it forever*”; namely, for a certain time.

This statement is also a prophecy concerning the rational Jerusalem, the church of Christ, established by God upon the Rock of faith; against which, as the Lord of glory says, “*the gates of hell shall not prevail*” .

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

3- A WORSHIPPING EXULTANT CITY: (9 – 11)

If the church, being the holy city of God, is perpetually at war, yet she remains unconquerable and unshakable; Hence, in her thanksgiving, she remains worshipping God, perpetually praising Him with the spirit of joy and exultation; as though the tribulation would never cause her to lose her peace; but, on the contrary, motivate her to practice the heavenly thanksgiving and exultant life.

*“We have thought, O God, on Your loving kindness, in the midst of Your temple. According to Your name, O God,
so is Your praise to the end of the earth. Your right hand is full of righteousness. Let Mount Zion rejoice; Let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of Your judgments” (9 – 11)*

He previously said: “We heard, ... and we saw”; Now he says “*We have thought*”. He heard about God’s dealings with His church in the past; Now, seeing by his own eyes how they are living and perpetual dealings; he testifies before the people, to confirm that the Lord Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever; He who worked in the past, works in the present, and will remain working forever. This is our concept of the living tradition which is founded on the past, to proclaim its activity in the present, and to deliver it to the generations to come, a deposit of living and active faith.

Such a tradition, deep rooted in the past, working in the present, and remain working in the future, brings forth to the church the spirit of joy and exultation because of God's judgments, whether in the time of comfort or in that of tribulation.

- + We have experienced, O God, Your goodness to Your people; yet not for the sake of virtues on their part, but for Your tender mercy and compassion.

According to Your name, so it is to Your work, for the sake of which You are praised by peoples all over the earth. Your goodness is not something earned, but is of Your Essence. As it is with the sun that, by nature, gives light and burns; So it is with Your Divinity, It gives light to the godly, and punishes the wicked ... The right hand of God, namely His only begotten Son is full of righteousness; for He loosens the shackled, and sets them free, gives light to those in darkness, and lifts up the contrite.

The prophet calls men and women to rejoice and be glad for the sake of God's loving kindness, gifts, and goodness. Mount Zion is the well-established church; ... whose building are the souls of the believers, and the rest of God's temples all over the world; that rejoice for the sake of the rich gifts granted to them by God.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- + O Mount Zion, O daughters of Judah, Now you labor among tares, chaff , and thorns; But, rejoice for the sake of God's judgments; For He would never err in His judgment.

Do not think of the "*daughter of Judah*", as the Jews, For "Judah" means (confession); Namely, all the children of confession are the children of Judah.

(t. Augustine)

The psalmist sees the church as a worshipping congregation, exultant in God, for the sake of His works and judgments.... Abraham would never forget Mount Moriah and Jacob would never forget Bethel.

4- A CITY THAT TESTIFIES TO HER GOD: (12 – 14)

Experiencing the salvation work of God, and enjoying Conquest, Mount Zion or the daughter of Judah set forth as though in a procession to testify to God's work with them; As it happened when Nehemiah finished building the wall, he let two groups go around the wall with the spirit of joy and exultation, to testify to God's work with them; *"They rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off"* (Nehemiah 12: 43).

"Walk about Zion, and go all around her; Count her towers; Mark well her bulwarks; Consider her palaces, that you may tell it to the generation following. For this is God, Our God forever and ever; He will be our guide, even to death" (12 – 14).

It is befitting of those who enjoy the blessings of salvation, which exalt them as the high Zion, to walk around the land, ... to tell about the amazing divine work; ... to talk about the high bulwarks set by the Spirit of God, where the believers would take refuge against the attacks of the enemy; ... to put their trust in the power of the church, namely, "the life in Christ Jesus"; ... and to enjoy her palaces, namely, God's gifts through His church. That is God, who loves His church, and cares for her, forever and ever, until He comes on the clouds to take her with Him. This is our testimony for the generation to follow; This is the deposit of faith, namely the living delivery, or the experienced tradition, that we present by our life, as well as by our words. For, how could we talk about the bulwarks and palaces of the church, namely, about her strongholds and riches, unless we, ourselves, are bulwarks, and in spiritual riches. Hence St. Clement of Alexandria says: [I believe he hints here to those who embraced

the Word (the Logos in an exalted way, to become high bulwarks, and to become well-established in faith and knowledge]

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 48

THE CITY OF THE LORD OF HOSTS

- + How amazing You are, O Lord;
Out of Your people You have set Your own city;
And out of them, You made a holy mountain in which You proclaim Your holiness.

- + You came down to us as the rejected Cornerstone;
You collected us from all nations and peoples, to set out of us, Your holy city;
You filled the whole earth with joy;
When You set Your kingdom inside us.

- + Let the whole world gather together against Your church;
For she will remain the city of the Great King;
As they see Your amazing hand;
I wish they would receive and fear You.

- + How amazing You are, O Lord of hosts!
You proclaim Your tender mercy among Your people;
Out of them You set high Bulwarks;
And out of them You set magnificent palaces.

- + We heard from the previous generations about You;
And here we see by our own eyes, Your work with us;
Let Your Holy Spirit sanctify us, to tell, by our own life, the next generation.

+ Draw us from all the nations, as a holy church for Yourself;
Set Your temple in every soul;
And carry us all to Your heavenly temple;
To the high city of Jerusalem;
The dwelling place of God with men.



PSALM 49

FAILURE OF RICHES AND HONOR TO ENDURE

This psalm of wisdom is the last of the psalms of the sons of Korah. In the most of them, the writer tends to pray or to praise God, but in this one, he preaches; gives a sermon that teaches us to trust in God, and not in the arm of man, nor in the temporal honor or wealth -- god of this age.

Its occasion:

The psalmist probably wrote it when he got disturbed, seeing around him poor godly men, and rich wicked ones.

The general frame:

1- A call to Give ear	1 -- 4
2- Failure to endure of riches and honor	5 -- 13
3- The blessings of righteousness	14 -- 15
4- A counsel and a warning.	16 – 20

The title:

To the Chief Musician. A psalm of the sons of Korah. And according to the Septuagint version: To completion (consummation), A psalm of the sons of Korah..

(To completion). We previously said that the Lord Christ is the consummation, or the ultimate goal of the law; of our worship, strife, and life. Here in this psalm, the psalmist reveals the end of those who trust in the arm of men, and in the honor

and riches of this world, and compares it to that of those who trust in the righteousness of Christ.

- + Telling about the inevitable end of all men, the title of this psalm came to say: "To completion" (consummation), a fact that we should keep in mind all the time; for our ultimate goal is happiness in the age to come; for which the apostle Paul says in his epistle to the Corinthians: "*Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father ; when He puts an end to all rule, and all authority and power*" (1 Corinthians 15: 24).

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

1- A CALL TO GIVE EAR:

"Hear this, all you peoples; Give ear, all you inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together" (1, 2)

A collective call addressed to mankind everywhere; the elites and the commoners, the rich and the poor, the Jews and the Gentiles; being all servants of God, called to listen to Him and to obey Him, in order to enjoy the Word of God and His wisdom.

The psalm starts by the word "*Hear*", the same word by which all the ten commandments started: "Give ear" (1); a command that implies a divine promise; As He who seeks from us to hear, grants our ears the circumcision, to let us have a spiritual ear, capable of hearing, understanding, and obeying with joy and gladness of the heart; Hence it is written: "*He who has an ear, let him hear*" (Revelation 2: 29)..

According to Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem, who quotes many fathers, and in particular the scholar Origen, and St. Basil the Great: The psalmist here

mentions three categories of people: All peoples, all inhabitants of the world, rich and poor men:

- 1- All people: The non-believers; As the Lord Christ came as a divine Physician to heal the ill, by calling them to encounter God.
- 2- All the inhabitants of the world: The upright in mind; For they too, are in need of the divine counsel and wisdom, as long as they are still on earth.
- 3- The earthly men, lovers of the earth, rich and poor.

In other word, all mankind need the divine counsel to enjoy salvation; to work together, and to strive with the spirit of unity and love, through the mutual feeling of their need for the salvation and for the Savior; whether they are Gentiles or believers; earthly or spiritual; rich or poor.

- + How high should we raise our voice, for all mankind to hear? ... Proclaimed by our Lord Jesus Christ through the apostles, by many tongues?... Here, this psalm which was read just in one nation – in the synagogue of the Jews; we see it read in the whole world, in all churches; realizing the words said in this psalm: “*Hear this, all you peoples*” (1).
- + He says: “*Give ear*”; namely, Do not listen just for curiosity!
- + By the expression: “*All inhabitants of **the earth***”, he probably means, in a broader sense, (all nations), (all the wicked); Whereas, by “*All the inhabitants of **the world***”, he probably means: (all the righteous).

Hence, He, not only addresses the wicked, but the righteous as well, those who hear with a goal; who spiritually rule the world, and are not ruled by the world.

- + Again he says: “*All you inhabitants of the earth*”, namely, (the earthly humans; the sons of Adam); referring to the sinners; And by “*the sons of men*”, he refers to the believers and the righteous. ... By “*the inhabitants of the earth*”, he means those who desire the earthly inheritance; And by the “*the sons of men*”, he refer to those who belong to “*the Son of Man*”, ... Those who are attached to “Adam” are “*the sons of the earth*”, while those who are attached to Christ, are the “*the sons of men*”.

(St. Augustine)

The call is addressed to all: the Gentiles and the Jews; To the earthlies, who have put their hearts down to dust, and to those whose hearts are attached to the “Son of Man”; ... To the rich, who trust in their wealth, authority, and honor, to end up poor in faith, and to the poor, who have acquired the Savior as their treasure ... It is time for all to receive the Word of the Lord, for the nonbelievers to receive faith, for the fallen to receive repentance; and for those who strive in the righteousness of Christ, to have the continuity of their spiritual work... It is time for all to submit to learning: priests and congregation alike; For the time of judgment will come, when the righteous will not gather together with the wicked.

- + Now, let the rich and poor hear together; ... I wish, both the sheep and the goats feed on the same pasture; until the time comes, when He separates the ones on His right hand, from those on His left hand.... I wish all hear Him together, being the Teacher; Lest they would be separated, when they hear His voice as a Judge.

(St. Augustine)

“My mouth shall speak wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall bring understanding” (3)

The psalmist presents himself as a living role model to the teachers, and even to all Christians. For, while his mouth speaks with the divine wisdom, granted to him as a gift from God, through sitting, together with Mary, sister of Lazarus, at the feet of the Lord, listening to Him; his heart soars high in divine contemplations, in understanding and spiritual perception. His wisdom is not mere human experience, but a gift from the Father of Lights (James 1: 5), who fills both the mind and the heart with wisdom and understanding; and wisdom is translated practically in their daily life; so that the saying: *“These people draw near to Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me”* (Isaiah 29: 13), would not apply to them.

- + The prophet says: My intention is not to negotiate worldly things, out of my own mind, but to talk wisdom, with words that I understood in my heart, according to what I heard by the inspiration of The Holy Spirit, to whom I inclined my spiritual ear.

The divine apostle Paul, in the tenth chapter of his epistle to the Romans says: *“For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation”* (Romans 10: 10). If man does both (testimony by the heart and the tongue), he would be doing the perfect goodness. For if goodness is not already treasured in the heart, how could the mouth utter what is treasured?! ... And if man is serious in his heart, yet does not demonstrate it by his mouth, what would be the benefit of what is treasured and hidden?! It is imperative, according to the prophet, for the benefit of others, to: *“Meditate with the heart, and to utter with the mouth”*.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

Opening up his mind and heart to receive the wisdom of God, the psalmist inclines his spiritual ear to the proverbs of the Lord, and his depths exult to sing them with joy as though with a harp. That is a beautiful portrait of how the disciples sat around the Lord Christ to have Him explain His proverbs, and have their hearts burn with love for His kingdom.

“I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will disclose my dark saying on the harp” (4)

- + Why “*to the proverbs*”?... For, according to the apostle: “*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face*” (1 Corinthians 13: 12); as “*knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5: 6). Once our vision comes to face to face, there will be no need for proverbs, riddles, or analogies.

(St. Augustine)

- + Saying: “*I will incline my ear to a proverb*” is a prophecy by the psalmist, about how our Lord Jesus Christ cared to interpret to His disciples alone what He says to others with proverbs.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

2- FAILURE TO ENDURE OF RICHES AND HONOR: (5 – 13)

This section starts by a question presented by the righteous who suffer from the oppression of the wicked rich, saying:

“Why should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity at my heels surrounds me?”

Why should I get myself into a range of fear and enter into a feeling of failure, when I am confronted with a catastrophe, when a wicked rich man, of authority come to cast me down to the ground?

+ Responding to this, we say that there is no “*days of evil*”; for all the days, created by God; are very good and not evil.

When the prophet is asked: Why do you fear? He answers: I fear nothing of what you assume to be fearful; I do not fear illness, poverty, tribulation, or harm from men; What I fear is sin, and sin alone; that turns the good day into a day of evil, into a day of punishment and torture; according to the words of the blessed Paul: “*In accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart, you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath*” (Romans 2: 5).

While, according to Origen, “*The iniquity of heel*” is the disobedience of Adam that caused the serpent to have authority to crush his heel.

“*The iniquity of heel*” to fear, is the day of judgment, when man is judged by a sin he practices at “the heel of his age” (namely, at the end of his life without repentance).

The “*heel*” of our Lord Jesus Christ is ‘Judas’ who delivered Him; who kept his eyes on His steps (His heels); Yet our Lord would say: I have no fear of the day of crucifixion, craftily prepared for me by the wicked.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

Let us then fear, not the people, nor the events, but falling into sin, or into the “*iniquity of heel*”; namely, to deflect from the way of the Lord’s commandments.

For that is what we ought to fear, as it would turn our days into “*days of evil*”, and would turn the great day of the Lord, from a day of eternal wedding into one of horrible judgment.

- + Once man gets rid of the “*iniquity of his heel*”, and walks along the way of the Lord, he would not come to “*the day of evil*” ... And for him, the ultimate day would not be “*a day of evil*”. Striving to take the iniquity away from their heel, and to walk along that “Way”, of Him who says: “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*”; he will not fear “*the day of evil*”; For He who is “the Way”, will grant him security; pending that he is committed to avoid “the iniquity of his heel”.

(St. Augustine)

The most serious of iniquities is probably the love of money, which is “*a root of all kinds of evil*” (1 Timothy 6: 10); For he who loves money would set it as a god to worship. But, as it is not the wealth in itself, but loving or trusting in it, that would have control of our life; the psalmist goes on to say:

“Those who trust in their wealth, and boast in the multitude of their riches” (6)

However great is our riches, it may eventually leave us, and not benefit us in the time of tribulation as it did happen to the righteous ‘Job’, It is better for us, then, to be poor, trust in God, and has Him as our portion and inheritance, than to be rich and worship the wealth. For the love of wealth may provoke man to pride, selfishness, oppression, and violence; and may deliver him from one sin to another, to become a play tool of the evil thoughts and deeds.

- + If you do not do mercy, out of your wealth, in your time, Wealth will not go with you to eternity, nor will benefit you on the day of evil; namely, on the day of judgment.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- + I wish we do not trust in our virtues (strengths); I wish we do not boast in the multitude of our riches; but boast in Him who promised us, in Him, by whose humility He rose up, threatening judgment on the proud; By this we would never be overcome by "*the iniquity of our heel*".

(St. Augustine)

- + If you are asked: What is the thing most cherished by you, for which you are probably envied by others? You may answer: authority, riches, and reputation! Yet, what is more miserable than all these things, if compared to the freedom of Christians?! .. A ruler may submit to the wrath of mobs, or of those in a higher rank; or to anxiety for the sake of those under him. ... He who was a ruler yesterday may become a regular citizen today.... The present life is like a play on a stage of a theater, in which one plays a king, another a leader, a third a soldier; And once the play comes to an end, every one of them will earn his wages, not according to his rank in the play, but according to his labor and effort. ... Now, is it glory which is the most cherished by man; that which could wither like grass? ... Or is it the riches that do not grant happiness to their possessor; as we read: "*Woe to you who are rich*" (Luke 6: 24); and: "*Woe to you who trust in your wealth, and boast in the multitude of your riches*"/

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + It is befitting of us not to put the hope of our salvation In anything other than our righteous works according to the grace of God ... If we happen to have exalted ancestors, we are committed to strive to become more exalted; being sure that, in the judgment to come, we shall benefit nothing from the strife of our ancestors; but it would rather be judgment on us, that we belong to such righteous household, and have such good role models, whom we have not imitated.

(St. John Chrysostom)

If we cannot trust in our wealth and strength for dealing with our temporal problems, we would rather not trust them for our eternal salvation; For no man, nor any human possibilities can redeem us against death, justify us before the holy God, or bring us forth into fellowship of the eternal inheritance. A rich man may acquire some temporal possessions, or gain authority or honor; but he cannot acquire the eternal life, except by the living faith working with love. This is what motivate us to consider how the Savior has delivered His life for our sake, how He redeemed us, not by gold or silver, but by His precious blood, as the Lamb of God without blemish.

“None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him. For the redemption of their souls is costly” (7, 8)

- + Namely, if man does not repent his sin, and does good works that bring pleasure to God, he will not be redeemed by a brother, or any of his relatives or close friends, even the virtuous among them; for everyone is rewarded alone according to his own works.

Nothing in the world would equal the value of the soul to redeem her.
“*Though those three men: Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness’, says the Lord God; ... they would deliver neither sons nor daughters*” (Ezekiel 14, 16)

But, if you say: [Would the intercession of such men not be of benefit?]. . . We answer that it would be of benefit, yet it needs the repentance of the sinner, and the labor in this age, in order to acquire the eternal life. . . . A sinner like us, would not be able to redeem us, nor to ask God’s forgiveness on our behalf; . . . Nothing could, but the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior God.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- + Some people may tend to mention their friends, boast in their virtues (strength), and others in their riches. But that would be nothing but human haughtiness that does not trust in God . . . If a brother would not be able to redeem his own brother, Can he redeem any other man? Do you expect some man to redeem you from the wrath to come?!

(St. Augustine)

- + Do not consider a brother for your salvation; but consider the incarnate God Jesus Christ, who alone, can redeem us all.by the extremely holy and precious blood shed for our sake.

Not, that, because He came to dwell among us “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Romans 8: 3), you would assume that our Lord has become a mere man, and would forget the power of His Divinity. . . . He is in no need to present to God a ransom for Himself; “*He who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth*” (1 Peter 2: 21).

(St. Basil the Great)

- + He who is cast there (in the river of fire), will stay there forever; No one could save him from his punishment, whether a father, a mother, or a brother.

- + Ezekiel says: *“Even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they would deliver neither sons nor daughters”* (Ezekiel 14: 16). There is only one way; namely, the works (in the Lord); he who does not have them, will never be saved by any other means. Getting preoccupied with these things, and continuously meditating in them, will purify our life, and increase its splendor; We would behold the Lord with daring, and would get the promise of goodness, with the grace and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ, by, and with whom, glory will be forever and ever, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

- + The prophet also said: *“None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for Him (7)*. No, not even if it is Moses, Samuel, or Jeremiah!. Listen, as an example to what God says to his prophet Jeremiah concerning this: *“Do not pray for these people, for I shall not listen to you”; “Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, Yet My mind could not be favorable toward these people”....* And Ezekiel says: *“Even though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they would neither deliver sons nor daughters”* (Ezekiel 14: 16); ... And if he Patriarch Abraham supplicates for the sake of some, God would leave him and go His way (Genesis 18: 33); ... And to Samuel God said: *“Do not mourn for Saul”* (1 Samuel 16: 1); ... And to Moses, who prayed for the sake of his sister, God said: *“If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be ashamed seven days?”* (Numbers 12: 14).

- + Though Abraham called the rich man “Son” (Luke 16: 25), yet he was not able to do to him what a father would do to his son. And though the rich man called him “Father”, he could not enjoy what a son would expect his father would do of goodness. The Lord said this parable to teach you that neither family relationship, nor love, or emotion, would help him who is betrayed by his own life.

- + We have elaborately shown that, according to God’s compassion, love, and grace, we are committed to have the hope of salvation in our own righteous works, regardless of our fathers, grandfathers, grandfathers’ fathers, relatives, friends, or neighbors; for *“none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him”* ... The five foolish virgins vainly begged their companions for some oil; ... And despite the excuses presented by him who buried his talent in the ground, he, nevertheless was condemned.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“That one should live on forever, and never see the grave, When we look at the wise, they die; fool and senseless person perish together, and leave their wealth to others; Their graves are their homes forever; their dwelling places to all generations, though they call their lands after their own names” (8 – 10)

- + The prophet started to sermon the poor and those who labor, and to exhort them to strive, saying: [Your labor in this short life will bring forth to you an eternal life in the age to come; And, according to the apostle Paul: *“I labored more abundantly than they all”* (1 Corinthians 15: 10); ... *“in labor more abundant”* (2 Corinthians 11: 23).

He who preferred the tough life to the easy rich one; and chose to walk along the narrow and sorrowful way, for the sake of his love for Christ, will not be affected by the punishments prepared for those pretending to have the wisdom of this world, called “foolishness” by the apostle. And he who, seeing the poor, the rich, and the wise, all die like any others, would not hate poverty, nor be grieved by the labor they suffer in this age.

“The fool” is he who lives a heathen life; and *“the senseless”* is he who is enlightened by the statutes of the Jews, rather than does what would bring pleasure to God. Both of them perished in their foolishness and ignorance; and left their possessions to us – the believers. And with their deadly and ugly works, their bodies, the dwelling place of their souls, became like graves containing corruption; and moved from decorated houses to graves where they will remain forever; likened by the Lord to *“whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead man’s bones and all uncleanness”* (Matthew 23: 27).

Cain’s son was the first to build a city and to call it after his name; then many kings and rulers followed suit; whom the prophet rebukes for not having their remembrance by something spiritual, the way the apostles and many saints did, by virtues, and their reputation by heavenly and not by earthly things.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- + It means that man does not understand what ‘death’ is! ... Seeing some wise man die, he would say: If such a wise man who worshiped God with piety, dies, Let me then enjoy myself, as long as I am alive; For if the wise could do otherwise, they would not die. So the Jews did when they saw Christ hanged on the cross, they despised him, saying: *“If this man is the*

Son of God, let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe him”
(Matthew 27: 42) In this, they did not perceive what is death!

He is not wise, he who does not perceive how evil his condition is.

(St. Augustine)

- + The Holy Book truthfully says: *“The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, and no torment will ever touch them”* (Wisdom 3: 1); For the death of the saints is not death but (falling asleep); Having strived for the sake of eternity, they will live forever. *“For precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints”* (Psalm 116: 15) What would be more precious than to be in the hands of God? As God is Life and Light, those in His hands will live in Life and Light.

(Father John of Damascus)

“Nevertheless man, though in honor, cannot abide in his pomp; he is like the beasts that perish” (12)

He who assumes to abide in this world, and keep on enjoying its pleasures, is foolish and without understanding, and would be counted like the beasts. Hence the prophets used to liken the wicked who are attached to temporal things, to wolves, lions, dogs, oxen, serpents, etc. for being irrational. Whereas the righteous, attached to the heavenlies, are likened to certain birds, or some other animals, for some other reasons.

The church is likened to the dove, on account of her purity, and to the lamb for its meekness; Even Christ was likened to a lamb, being the sacrifice and ransom for the sake of humanity; And to the lion coming from the tribe of Judah, who defends His people against the devil and his hosts.

- + Anyway, “*Man, though in honor, and cannot abide in his pomp,.... “Though in honor”*”, refers to the fact that he is created in the image of God, and according to His likeness, Preferring man to beasts, God did not create man the way He created beasts; but created him to have authority over beasts.

He, who was created in the image of God, came to be compared to, and like the senseless beasts; being said: “*Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding*” (Psalm 32: 9)..

(St. Augustine)

- + If we do otherwise, not perceiving that we are in the image of God, and be preoccupied with our bodies more than with our souls, the Holy Book would rebuke us, saying through the prophet: “*Man, though in honor, and cannot abide in his pomp, he is like the beasts that perish*” (12).
- + If man, who is supposed to be attached to his wife without limits, looks with passion to another man’s wife, daughter, or maidservant – which is an extremely grave sin – he would be overcome by the beastly lusts, come to be like beasts, and lose his humanity; ... If you do not fear to be like beasts, Fear at least to die like them!

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- + “*Man, though in honor*”, have come to be like beasts; because of his personal fault; having, by his life, likened their irrational life.
- + He will be justly condemned; For having been created rational, then lost his true rational nature, which he has got from God, led such an irrational life,

contrary to the righteousness of God, delivered himself to every earthly spirit, and submitted to all lusts; he would be worthy to hear the prophet say: *“Man, though in honor, and cannot abide in his pomp, he is like beasts that perish”*.

(St. Erinaos)

- + On another aspect, rejecting the yoke of his Creator, disregarding His divine commands, submitting his soul to his body, preferring the pleasures of the flesh; man would not be perceiving his honor, would be likened to irrational beasts, and would be prone to death and corruption.

(Father John of Damascus)

- + Bowing their heads toward the ground, the beasts look down at their bellies; and only seek what is for their bellies.

Man, your head is directed up toward heaven, and your eyes look up high; If you come to degrade yourself to the covetousness of the flesh, and submit yourself to your belly, and to your sexual organs, you would be likened to the lowly irrational beasts, and would even be counted as one.

Being called to more honorable cares; Seek what is up, where Christ sits; ... Exalt your heads above the earthly things; ... Fix your behavior in heaven, your true home, the Higher Jerusalem; For your fellow citizens are the firstborns, whose names are written in heaven.

(St. Basil the Great)

- + The honor of rational nature is shown in discerning good from evil; And those who waste it, are truly likened to irrational and senseless beasts,

By such ability of perception, we can find our way to God. It is the natural knowledge, which precedes faith and is its origin; It is the way to God.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

- + Since the early man sinned and disobeyed God, it was said: "*Man became like beasts*"; counted like irrational animals. Wisdom says: "*The fornicator and the adulterer have become like an irrational beast*"; meaning that man no more utters; having become like irrational beast, over-ridden by lusts.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

- + The Lord rode a colt (Mark 11: 1 – 8; John 12: 13); to turn the soul (that, according to the prophet became like irrational beasts) to the image of God, and to submit her to His Divinity.

(Father Dorotheos of Gazza)

- + God of all has created man on earth, with a mind capable of wisdom, and with the ability of understanding; Yet he was deceived by the devil. Despite being created in the image of God, he preferred not to have the knowledge of his Creator. The devil caused the inhabitants of the earth to go down to the lowest rank of ignorance and irrationality. Perceiving this, the blessed David weeps bitterly, and says: "*Man, though in honor, cannot abide in his pomp; he is like beasts that perish*".

(St. Cyril the Great)

That is what the carnal covetousness has done to us. Hence, having perceived how far down he descended, to be no more able to know the

secret of God – it is befitting of man to receive again God’s divine work in his life;

And like the two disciples who loosed the donkey and her colt (Matthew 21: 3); it is befitting of him to loose his soul and body from the bonds of sin, by the Holy Spirit, and bring them as a fiery divine chariot to set freely forth toward the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4: 26). The psalmist remain in his sorrow for the misery of humanity; for, as men trust in their riches, they foolishly walk along that way, and go down to the pit. Then comes the following generation, and, not learning a lesson from their predecessor, they walk along the same way; *“the way of those who are foolish, and of their posterity who approve their sayings”* (13).

3- THE BLESSINGS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS: (14-15)

As the trust in the riches of this world bring men forth to a life of beasts; as though to the slaughter or death; and causes them to become in humiliation under the authority of their befitting shepherd, namely, death.

Whereas, those who have the righteousness of Christ; will, themselves, have true authority.

“Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for He shall receive me” (14, 15)

- + Those who did not care for what would benefit their eternity, and those who followed suit, became in Sheol like sheep to the slaughter. Refusing to be under the care of the Good Shepherd, *“death shall be their shepherd”*,

namely, perdition; And their “form”, namely, their riches and strength, in which they trust, will grow old and waste away in Sheol; They will be bared of their glory.

Upon the upright, the morning will shine; waking up in the divine light in the age to come, they will have dominion and will become rulers and masters.

According to St. Basil the Great, man, though in honor, that he did not recognize; has been likened to the irrational beasts. Hence, the crafty devil took over the entire human race; gathered all men in Sheol, like sheep, helpless and irrational, pushed them down to death. and kept shepherding them since Adam up to the coming of the Lord Christ, Glory be to Him; who said in the gospel: *“I am the Good Shepherd”*, and the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep, which were shepherded by death..... Now, in the morning, when the day of the Sun of Righteousness – namely, our Lord Jesus Christ – shone; The upright who believed in Him, He redeemed from the dominion of mental death, namely, from being away from the eternal life; and delivered them to be guarded by the upright, namely by the angels, a guardian angel is given the responsibility to guard a believer, and to ordain his life for the sake of the salvation of his soul,

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- + If Christ is “Life”, the devil is “death”; ... not that he, himself, is death, but, because of him, death dwells.

For the non-believers, death is the shepherd; Whereas for the believers “Life” is the Shepherd. ... If, in Sheol, there are the sheep whose shepherd is “death”; In heaven, on the other hand, there will be the sheep whose shepherd is “Life”. ... In flesh, we walk on earth, but with the heart we dwell in heaven, if we send there ahead of us everything that touch us.

The fruit of our labor will appear in the morning; Those who labor now will reign; whereas the proud and the haughty here, will go down below. *“The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning”* (14)

(St. Augustine)

- + The wicked will get ready and prepare themselves to encounter (the angel of death), who will waste their form; and will take away the beauty of their nature; as their bodies deteriorate in dust.

Blessed is he who, with joy, celebrates being saved of that perdition.

(Mar Isaac the Syrian)

4- A COUNSEL AND A WARNING: (16 – 20)

The psalmist ends his psalm by the following counsels:

- 1- If death is the shepherd of the wicked , and Sheol is their eternal dwelling place; God is the Shepherd of my soul, who, alone, can ransom my soul from the power of Sheol; and death will have no dominion over me (15).
- 2- Do not be afraid of those with riches and authority, for they will dies, and will carry nothing with them (16); They will follow the generation of their fathers, who took the same way, and lost everything. In other words, he counsels us not to preoccupy ourselves with the seen temporal issues, nor with those who have got much of them.

“Do not be afraid when one becomes rich; when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he shall

carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him” (16, 17)

- + Do you wish to have eyes, only to see the present things? ... He who resurrected, although He promised things of the future, yet He did not promise peace in this world, nor comfort in this life.

Those who seek comfort, seek something good, yet they do not seek it in its proper place. For there is no peace in this life. He promised us to have in heaven, what we seek on earth; He promised to give us in the world to come, what we seek in this world.

(St. Augustine)

- + The glory of this world is valueless and not permanent; and if it endures for sometime, it will eventually end up by death. It is written: *“His glory shall not descend after him”*. And for many, it did not even endure until the end of their life. ... Things concerning God are, however, permanent, and are beyond any change or end; ... For It is not something on the outside, but inside;... It is not set on a multitude of servants, vehicles, and expensive attire; but with it, man is clothed by an inner glory, without which, he would be naked.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- + When you see him (the rich man) alive, Count him as dead! ... Do not consider what he has here; but what he will take away with him ... He may have a storehouse of gold and silver, many possessions, and a multitude of servants; but when he dies, all these will stay after him, and will belong to someone he may not even know; Many have got what is not left for them; and many have lost what was left for them.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- 3- Seek the blessing, yet not according to your own way, but according to the counsel of the Lord; ... For many assume the blessed happy life to be in banquets and temporal pleasures.

“Though in their lifetime they count themselves happy – for you are praised when you do well for yourself” (18)

The wicked may consider his blessings and happiness are in temporal things, and my acknowledge God’s favor given to him; Yet, once he enters into a tribulation, he will do wrong toward God. According to St. Augustine, such a man thinks that he does himself good by excessive eating, drinking, and having fun; not perceiving that he is actually doing himself harm.

+ He is used to feed on banquets by his carnal mouth.... And on iniquity by the mouth of his heart....

Can man feed on iniquity?

It is not I who say so; ... Listen to the Holy Book, saying: “As *vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, (so is iniquity to those who use it*” (Proverb 10: 26). He who feeds on iniquity, namely, he who practices it through his own will, cannot feed on righteousness; For righteousness is bread! ... Who is this Bread? ... It is He who proclaims: “*I am the living bread which came down from heaven*” (John 6: 51) He is Christ, the Bread of the heart.

(St. Augustine)

- 4- We are committed not to follow the lead of our ancestors in their love of the world, lest we would join them in their destiny.

“They shall go to the company of their ancestors, who will never again see the light” (19)

Commenting on this, St. Augustine says: [He follows the lead of his ancestors; ... The day will come when we know where Abel is, and where Cain is; as well as all those who follow the lead of Abel, and those who follow the lead of Cain; and so forth, until the end of the world].

- 5- He ends the psalm by confirming the importance, for man, of keeping his honor, through enjoying the nature by which God created him in His own image and according to His likeness; and not through going down to the level of irrational beasts (20).

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 49

YOU ARE MY RICHES, O LORD

- + Grant me, O Lord, a spiritual ear to hear Your voice;
To perceive Your commandment;
And to recognize the works of Your love.

- + You created me in Your image, and honored me with reason and understanding;
But, in my foolishness, I forsook every true knowledge;
I bowed my head to the dust;
And, when I desired the world's glory and riches,

Instead of the riches, I got the inner poverty;
And instead of the understanding, I got the irrational nature of beasts.

- + You came down to me, O Rich One;
You became poor, to make me rich by Your poverty;
Grant me Yourself;
Let me acquire You;
For You are my riches and glory.

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PSALM 50 (49)
THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE
Or
WORSHIP IN SPIRIT

This psalm is the first Asaph psalm. Asaph means "the gatherer." Assaph was the chief of the sacred music, in the tent where the Ark was placed, who played the cymbals. He was also a psalm writer (2 Chronicles 29:30).

While the preceding psalms of the sons of Korah (42-49) manifested delicacy and restraint, melancholy and hope, this psalm of Asaph appears vigorous and direct, confident and regal. While Korah was demoted, Asaph was not only put in charge by David and "prophesied under the direction of the king " (1 Chron. 25:1-2) but remained among the upper echelon of temple singers all the way into the postexilic era (Ezr. 3:10). The temple singers of Asaph must have inherited a strong character to interact with prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Michah, or their disciples, and yet maintain their own dignity, self-respect and control over the renewal of temple liturgy. In Ps. 50 we detect an interaction with such prophetic pieces as Amos 5:21-22; Hos. 6:1-6; Isa. 1:2-20; Mic. 6:1-8)¹.

This psalm belongs to the pre-exilic period, when Jerusalem existed in the perfect of beauty [2].

In this powerful prophetic psalm the imagined scene is a majestic theophany, God appearing in fire and tempest at mount Zion to summon the entire world to His judgment seat. But if all eyes are on Him, His eyes are on Israel. The whole psalm is addressed to the covenant-people, speaking first to the unthinkingly religious, and then to the hardened and hypocritical, to bring them a sharp breath of reality. It is the message which the prophets and finally our Lord Jesus had to put to a church that had forgotten that its dealings were with the living God².

The features that recall mount Sinai and the covenant(1-5),the allusions to the Ten Commandments(7,18-20), and the reference to reciting these and to professing allegiance to the covenant(16), combine to give the impression of a ceremony of covenant remembrance and renewal as the setting of the psalm.

It treats of the nature of true religion, what it requires of towards God and man. It warns us against hypocrisy and formality in worship; it shows us how exalted and pure is God, and points us to His awful judgments against sinners.It calls us for close self-examination in our worship and our conduct.

OUTLINE

1. The majestic theophany [1-3].
2. Gather My saints together unto Me [4-6].

3. The Judge appears [7-15].
4. What God says to the wicked [16-21].
5. The parting charges [22-23].

THE MAJESTIC THEOPHANY [1-3]

*"The God of gods, the Lord, has spoken
and has called the earth from sunshine to sunset.
The loveliness of His beauty
has appeared out of Zion
God will come visibly;
no longer will our God keep silence.
A fire will burn before Him,
and a mighty storm will rage round Him" [1-3].*

The summons is universal; it is addressed to all the inhabitants of the earth that were near and that afar off. The purpose of this call is to show His dealing with His people. He shines forth out of Zion, the Church, the place of His choice and the display of His Kingly glory. He wants his church glorifies Him in her worship and in her conduct, for some believers offered worship in a literal formalities, as if God was in need of it, instead of practicing worship in spirit, as an expression of thanksgiving [14], and in acknowledgment of their dependence upon Him. He summon heaven and earth to judge His people.

According to the Septuagint, "beauty" is in apposition to God, while in Hebrew it appears that to Zion. The spiritual beauty of the Church reveals God's beauty, for He bought her by His precious blood and deposit His pure words and gospel to her. The word of God goes forth from the new Jerusalem, the church of the New Testament (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2). The church, where God is worshiped in Spirit and His word is purely preached, is the most beautiful thing in this world. Also the pious believer who worships God in Spirit, meditates in the word of God and fulfills the divine will is very beautiful in the eyes of God. The longer God delays punishment, the more terrible will it be when it comes. God waited a hundred and twenty years with old world; but when the deluge came, it swept all away. Its scenes of horror were more dreadful than imagination has ever conceived⁴.

God will come to judge; He will not keep silence, that is He will show that His long-suffering has long been silent because of His mercy, waiting our repentance. Now in the day of judgment He will reveal Himself a consuming fire.

Verse 1

But then who are those gods, or where are they, of whom God is the true God? Another Psalm says, "God has stood in the synagogue of gods, but in the midst He judges gods."

St. Augustine

See in the same Psalm those to whom he says, "I have said, Ye are gods, and children of the Highest all; but ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes." It is evident then, that He has called men gods, that are defied of His Grace, not born of His Substance. For He does justify, who is just through His own self, and not of another; and He does deify who is God through Himself, not by the partaking of another. But He that justifies does Himself deify, in that by justifying He does make sons of God. "For He has given them power to

become the sons of God." If we have been made sons of God, we have also been made gods: but this is the effect of Grace adopting, not of nature generating.

St. Augustine

Has spoken many ways. By Angels He has Himself spoken, by Prophets He has Himself spoken, by His own mouth He has Himself spoken, by His faithful He does Himself speak, by our lowliness, when we say anything true, He does Himself speak. See then, by speaking diversely, many ways, by many vessels, by many instruments, yet He does Himself sound everywhere, by touching, moulding, inspiring: see what He has done.

St. Augustine

He that has called the world, has called even the whole world: He that has called the world, has called as much as He has formed.

St. Augustine

Verse 2

For in that place were His disciples, who received the Holy Ghost sent from heaven on the fiftieth day after His resurrection. Thence the Gospel, thence the preaching, thence the whole world filled, and that in the Grace of Faith.

St. Augustine

For when the Lord Himself had come, because He came to suffer, He came hidden: and though He was strong in Himself, He appeared in the flesh weak. For He must needs appear in order that He might not be perceived; be despised, in order that He might be slain. There was semblance of glory in divinity, but it lay concealed in flesh. "for if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory." So then He walked hidden among the Jews, among His enemies, doing marvels, suffering ills, until He was hanged on the tree, and the Jews seeing Him hanging both despised Him the more, and before the Cross wagging their heads they said, "If He be the Son of God, let Him come down from the Cross." Hidden then was the God of gods, and He gave forth words more out of compassion for us than out of His own majesty.

St. Augustine

Hidden then is the God of gods, both to those among whom He walked, and to those by whom He was crucified, and to those before whose eyes He rose, and to us who believe on Him in heaven sitting, whom we have not seen on earth walking. But even if we were to see, should we not see that which the Jews saw and crucified? It is more, that not seeing we seeing we believe Christ to be God, than that they seeing deemed Him only to be man. They in a word by thinking evil slew, we by believing well are made alive.

St. Augustine

Verse 3

This God of gods, both then hidden, and now hidden, shall He ever be hidden? Evidently not: hear what follows: "God shall come manifest". He that came hidden, shall come manifest. Hidden He came to be judged, manifest He shall come to judge: hidden He came that He might stand before a judge, manifest He shall come that He may be judge even of judges: "He shall come manifest, and shall not be silent." But why? Is He now silent? And whence are all the words that we say? whence those precepts? whence those warnings? whence that trumpet of terror? He is not silent, and is silent: is not silent from warning, is silent from avenging: is not silent from precept, is silent from judgment.

St. Augustine

He is silent then from judgment, He is hidden in heaven, as yet He intercedes for us: He is doing-suffering to sinners, not putting forth His wrath, but awaiting penitence.

St. Augustine

"Fire shall go before Him." Do we fear? Be we changed, and we shall not fear. Let chaff fear the fire: what does it do to gold?

St. Augustine

The sweetness of His presence shall come; thou art not changed, thou art not awakened, thou sighest not, thou longest not: thou embracest thy sins and the delights of thy flesh, thou art heaping stubble to thyself, the fire will come.

St. Augustine

If we believe a judgment to come, brethren, let us live well. Now is time to mercy, then will be time of judgment. No one will say, "Call me back to my former years."

St. Augustine

"And a mighty tempest round about Him" "A mighty tempest," in order to winnow so great a floor. In this tempest shall be that winnowing whereby from the saints shall be put away everything impure, from the faithful every unreality; from godly men and them that fear the Word of God, every scorner and every proud man.

St. Augustine

Doubtless this tempest is to make a sort of separation. It is that separation which they waited not for, who brake the nets, before they came to land. But in this separation there is made a sort of distinction between good men and bad men. There be some that now follow Christ with lightened shoulders without the load of the world's cares, who have not heard in vain, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me:" to which sort is said, "You shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Some then shall be judging with the Lord: But others to be judged, but to be placed on the right hand.

St. Augustine

+ God shall come manifestly. (3), not as he came first, in obscurity, but as the Scripture says, "manifestly". for it was fitting that he should come in obscurity so that he might be judged; but he shall come manifestly when he is to pass judgment. (Sermon 263:1).

St. Augustine

+ "For he shall come and shall not keep silence;" when He shall come to judge the quick and dead, to render to every one according to his work; when the terrible trumpet with its mighty voice shall wake those that have slept through the ages, and they that have done good shall come forth unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation⁴.

St. Basil

+ when He shall come manifest in His second advent, will not be silent. For although He came first shrouded in humility, yet he shall come manifest in power⁵

St. Cyprian

GATHER MY SAINTS TOGETHER UNTO ME [4-6]

*"He will summon heaven above
and the earth to judge His people.
Gather His saints together to Him-
those who have made a covenant with Him for sacrifice.
And the heaven will declare His justice,
for God is judge" [4-6].*

Heaven and earth are summoned as the witnesses of His judgment, by which He will separate the sincere believers from hypocrites, or the wheat from the chaff.

Who are the saints (chasideim = pious ones) who are to be gathered unto Him? They are the sincere Church members as St. Paul mentions (2 Thess. 2:1), who make a covenant with Him through the sacrifice of His beloved Son [5]; or who place God's covenant above animal sacrifices.

As "the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son;" verse 6 clearly points to Our Lord Jesus Christ.

God spoke to men from Eden as the Creator; from Sinai as the Law-giver; from Zion (the Church) as the Redeemer, and at the Last Day as the Judge⁶.

Verse 4

"He will call the heaven from above". The heaven, all the Saints, those made perfect that shall judge, them He shall call from above, to be sitters with Him to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. For how shall "He call the heaven from above,"

St. Augustine

For see the Lord severing in judgment: "He shall call the heaven from above and the earth, to sever His people." From whom but from evil men? Of whom here afterwards no mention is made, now as it were condemned to punishment.

St. Augustine

For at first He called them together, "when the God of gods spake and called the world from the rising of the sun unto the going down," He had not yet severed: those servants had been sent to bid to the marriage, who had gathered good and bad. But when the God of gods shall come manifest and shall not keep silence, He shall so call the "heaven from above "that it may judge with Him. For what the heaven is, the heavens themselves are; just as what the earth is, the lands themselves, just as what the Church is, the Churches themselves: "He shall call the heaven from above, and the earth, to sever His people."

St. Augustine

Verse 5

"Gather to Him righteous" The voice divine and prophetic, seeing future things as if present does exhort the Angels gathering. For He shall send His Angels, and before Him shall be gathered all nations. Gather to Him His righteous. What righteous men save those that live of faith and do works of mercy? For those works are works of righteousness. Thou hast the Gospel: "Beware of doing your righteousness before men to be seen of them."

St. Augustine

Verse 6

Truly this righteousness of God to us the "heavens have declared," the Evangelists have foretold. Through them we have heard that some will be on the righthand, to whom the Householder says, "Come, you blessed of My Father, receive.

St. Augustine

Truly judge not confounding but severing. For "the Lord knowes them that are His." Even if grains lie hid in the chaff, they are known to the husbandman. Let no one fear that he is a grain even among the chaff; the eyes of our winnower are not deceived. Fear not lest that tempest, which shall be round about Him, should confound thee with chaff.

St. Augustine

THE JUDGE APPEARS [7-15]

"Listen, My people, and I will speak" [7].

or This section opens with an introduction in verse 7 which emphasizes that the speaker is God, Our God, who attributes us to Himself, Saying "My people," and Himself to us, saying, "Your God." He is our Friend, Guide, Law-giver and Savior. Perhaps here He rebukes His people whom He accepts as His own, although He is not so regarded or so treated by them.

Then this section declares the correct appreciation of sacrifice. The principal types of sacrifice are mentioned: communion sacrifice, holocaust or burnt-offering, thanksgiving sacrifice. These were not offered to God as if He was in need of food but for practicing the covenant of life with one another and with God.

Verse 7

He shall come and shall not keep silence; see how that even now, if you hear, He is not silent. Hear, my people, and I will speak to thee. For if thou hearest not, I will not speak to thee.

St. Augustine

When hearest thou? If thou art my people. For, "Hear my people:" thou hearest not if thou art an alien people.

St. Augustine

Behold God Himself, who shall give, is thine own. What richer than He? Gifts thou wast desiring, thou hast the Giver Himself. "God, thy God, I am."

St. Augustine

*" I find no fault with your sacrifices;
your whole burnt offerings are before Me continually.
It is not bullocks from your farm I will welcome,
nor he-goats from your folds" [8, 9].*

God refused to accept the animal sacrifices from the Jews in their wicked state of mind, as if these sacrifices were pleasing Him. He asks not for animal sacrifices, for He is no need of them. These sacrifices are but a shadow of His self-sacrifice that has the power to reconcile us with Him, renew our inner life and to offer acceptable spiritual sacrifices. He looks to the will of the deed, even of offering sacrifices, and not for the deed itself.

Verse 8

I will not say to thee, Wherefore hast thou not slain for me a fat bull? why hast thou not selected the best he-goat from thy flock? Wherefore does that ram amble among thy sheep, and is not laid upon mine altar?

St. Augustine

Verse 9

He says that certain holocausts God will accept. But what is a holocaust? A whole consumed with fire: *causis* is burning, *holon* is whole: but a "holocaust" is a whole consumed with fire. There is a certain fire of most burning love: be the mind inflamed with love, let the same love hurry off the limbs to its use, let it not allow them to serve cupidity, in order that we may wholly glow with fire of divine love that will offer to God a holocaust. Such "holocausts of thine are in My sight always."

St. Augustine

He is foretelling the New Testament, wherein all those sacrifices have ceased. For they were then foretelling a certain Sacrifice which was to be, with the Blood whereof we should be cleansed. "I will not accept calves of thy house, nor he-goats of thy flocks."

St. Augustine

+ According He neither takes sacrifices from you nor commanded them at first to be offered because they are needed to Him, but because of your sins. For indeed the temple, which is called the temple in Jerusalem, He admitted to be His house or court, not as though He needed it, but in order that you, in this view of it, giving yourselves to Him, might not worship idols. And that is so, Isaiah says: "what house have you built Me? said the Lord. Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool."⁷

St. Justine the Martyr

It soon appears that the judgment scene is not for passing sentence but for bringing truth to light and sinners to repentance.

+ And the blessed Paul also shows that the service that is by the law is powerless unto justification⁸.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

*"For all the beasts of the forest are Mine,
the herds and cattle on the mountains.
I know all the birds of the sky,
and all the beauty of the countryside is Mine" [10, 11].*

It signifies that God creates all animals and birds for man, and He feeds them wherever they are. If He needs sacrifices, He will not require to seek them of man, as His whole creation stands at His command.

Verse 10

Mine are those which thou possessest not, Mine are these which thou possessest. For if thou art My servant, the whole of thy property is Mine.

St. Augustine

Verse 11

"I know all the winged creatures of heaven," which thou to Me canst not give. The things which thou wast about to slay for Me, I know all: not because I made I know, but in order that I might make. "And the beauty of the field is with Me." The fairness of the field, the abundance of all things engendering upon earth, "is with Me," He says.

St. Augustine

Thou needest that which is with thee, God needes not the field which is with Him. With Him is field, with Him beauty of earth, with Him beauty of heaven, with Him all winged creatures, because He is Himself everywhere. And wherefore are all things near Him? Because even before that all things were, or were created to Him were known all things.

St. Augustine

If God knows the beasts, cattle and birds, how much more He is taking care of every man, for whom He created these creatures?! God is not in need of these creatures but asks for man's heart, for He is His own beloved! He asks for spiritual offerings and vow, that is praising God and heartily devotion. The psalmist says:

*If i am hungry, I well not tell you;
for the world is Mine, and all that is in it.
Am I to eat bulls' flesh,
or drink the blood of goats?!
Offer to God a sacrifice of praise,
and pay your vows to Most High" [12-14].*

The fire, which descended from heaven upon the sacrifices, was considered mystically as the mouth of God, which devoured the flesh of the victims, and it was on that account that had expressly forbidden to consume them by fire obtained elsewhere, because this strange fire, not being that which descended from heaven, could not be regarded mystically as the mouth of God. Perhaps some suppose that God had some physical necessity for food and drink. Therefore he reproaches them, declaring that God is not enjoying more bloody but spiritual sacrifices⁹.

+ Now what is a spiritual burnt offering?"The sacrifice of praise." And in what place do we offer it? In the Holy Spirit¹⁰.

St. Basil

10. On the Spirit, 26 (62).

Vow" here means the serious desire of devotion, which relates to a life of holiness.

Even in offering the sacrifices of praise or paying vow-sacrifices, we and not God are the beneficiaries, for through love we accept as our Deliverer.

Verse 12

These words are said to convince little understanding; not that God has declared His hunger. Though for our sake this God of gods deigned even to hunger. He came to hunger, and to fill; He came to thirst, and give drink; He came to be clothed with mortality, and to clothe with immortality; He came poor, to make rich. For He lost not His riches by taking to Him our poverty, for, "In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden." "If I shall be hungry, I will not tell thee. For Mine is the whole world, and the fulness thereof." Do not then labour to find what to give Me, without whom I have what I will.

St. Augustine

Verse 13

If thou hast a fat bull, kill for the poor: let them eat the flesh of bulls, though they shall not drink the blood of he-goats. Which, when thou shalt have done, He will account it to thee, that has said, "If I shall be hungry, I will not tell thee:" and He shall say to thee, "I was hungry, and thou gavest Me to eat." "Shall I eat the flesh of bulls, or shall I drink the blood of he-goats?"

St. Augustine

Verse 14

Zacchaeus had this sacrifice of praise in his patrimony; the widow had it in her bag; some poor host or other has had it in his jar: another neither in patrimony, nor in bag, nor in jar, has had anything, had it wholly in his heart: salvation was to the house of Zacchaeus; and more this poor widow cast in than those rich men: this man, that does offer a cup of cold water, shall not lose his reward: but there is even "peace on earth to men of good will." "Immolate to God the sacrifice of praise." O sacrifice gratuitous, by grace given! I have not indeed

bought this to offer but Thou hast given: for not even this should I have had. And this is the immolation of the sacrifice of praise, to render thanks to Him from whom thou hast whatever of good thou hast, and by whose mercy is forgiven thee whatsoever of evil of thine thou hast. "Immolate to God the sacrifice of praise: and render to the Highest thy prayers." With this odour the Lord is well pleased.

St. Augustine

*" Then call upon Me in the day of trouble;
and I will deliver you and you will glorify Me" [15].*

Verse 15

He found tribulation as it were some profitable thing; he had rotted in the slough of his sins; now he had continued without feeling, he found tribulation to be a sort of caustic and cutting. "I found," he says, "tribulation and grief, and on the Name of the Lord I called."

St. Augustine

Let such tribulations find us: there is a certain tribulation which we ought to seek to find. What is that? The abovenamed felicity in this world, abundance of temporal things: that is not indeed tribulation, these are the solaces of our tribulation. Of what tribulation? Of our sojourning. For the very fact that we are not yet with God, the very fact that we are living amidst trials and difficulties, that we cannot be without fear, is tribulation: for there is not that peace which is promised us.

St. Augustine

WHAT GOD SAYS TO THE WICKED [16-21]

This section contains plain words addressed to the hypocrites, addressed not to the heathen but to the nominally believers. God spoke to His people who combined wickedness and worship, for they were involved in offering sacrifices, and preserved in their ritualistic observances outwardly, without offering thanksgiving from their heart, and disregarded kindness towards their neighbors. Here we find God's uncovering sin and His rebuke. He unmasks hypocrisy.

God is seen coming in righteousness to judge His people. The way of salvation is mentioned, that is repentance confession, and love.

I. To obey the Word of God and not only utter it.

*"But to the sinner God says:
Why do you declare My rights,
and take My covenant in your mouth,
while you hate correction,
and turn your back on My Words?" [16, 17].*

Verse 16

We take the Covenant of God in our mouth, and we preach to you the instruction and judgment of God.

St. Augustine

Verse 17

Thou hatest discipline. When I spare, thou singest and praisest: when I chasten, thou murmurest: as though, when I spare, I am thy God: and, when I chasten, I am not thy God.

St. Augustine

+ For what does it profit a man to gain the ornaments of heavenly eloquence and the most precious beauty of the Scriptures if by clinging to filthy deeds and thoughts he destroys it by burying it in the foulest ground, or defiles it by the dirty wallowing of his own lusts? For the result will be that which is an ornament to those who rightly use it, is not only unable to adorn them, but actually becomes dirty by the increased filth and mud. For "from the mouth of a sinner praise is not comely:" as to him it is said by the prophet: "Wherefore does you declare My righteous acts, and takes My covenant in your lips?"¹¹

Abbot Nesteros

+ 'Praise is not comely in the mouth of a sinner (Ps 1:16).' For how is it possible for us to praise God with an impure mouth? since things which are contrary to each other cannot coexist. For what communion has righteousness with iniquity? or, what fellowship is there between light and darkness? So exclaims Paul a minister of the Gospel (2 Cor 6:14)¹².

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

+ But the heretic, though he use scriptural terms, yet, as being equally dangerous and depraved, shall be asked in the words of the Spirit, 'Why does thou preach My laws, and takes My covenant in thy mouth'(Ps.1. 16)? thus whereas the devil, though speaking from the Scriptures, is silenced by the Saviour¹³.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

+ And the Lord himself, even if the demons spoke the truth,-for they said truly: their mouths and suffered them not to speak; lest happily they should sow their evil along with the truth, and that he might accustom us never to speak what is true. for it is unseemly that front the Saviour, should be taught by the devil who has not kept his own order but has gone from one mind to another. Wherefore even when he uses the language of Scripture he forbids him, saying: but to the sinner said God, wherefore does thou declare my ordinances and takes my covenant in thy mouth?¹⁴

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

+ For to declare the righteousness and the covenant of the Lord, and not to do the same that the Lord did, what else is it than to cast away His words and to despise the Lord's instruction, to commit not earthly, but spiritual thefts and adulteries?¹⁵

St. Cyprian

+ In this field the grape is found that was pressed and poured out blood and washed the world clean; in this field is the fig tree, and beneath it the saints will find rest and be renewed by a good and spiritual grace; in this field is the olive tree fruitful in the overflowing ointment of the peace of the Lord; in this field flourish the pomegranate trees, that shelter many fruits with the one bulwark of faith and nature them with the warm embrace of love, so to speak¹⁶.

St. Ambrose

+ For to declare the righteousness and the covenant of the lord, and the same that the Lord did, what else is it than to cast away His words and to despise the Lord's instruction, to commit not earthly, but spiritual thefts and adulteries? While any one is stealing from, evangelical truth the words and doings of our Lord he is corrupting and adulterating the divine precepts, as it is written in Jeremiah. He says, "What is the chaff to the wheat? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who steal my words every one from his neighbor, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness." Also in the same prophet, on another place, He says, "She committed adultery with stocks and atones, and yet for all this she turned not unto me."¹⁷

St. Cyprian

*"If you see a thief, you run with him,
and you throw in your lot with adulterers"* [18].

+ According to this, fellowship of thought would entail sharing the sentiments of the one doing the work and taking pleasure in it with him... Let us fear, therefore, and obey the apostle when he says, "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste" (1 Cor. 5:7)¹⁸

St. Basil the Great

+ It is not enough that we do no such things ourselves, unless we break all connection also with those who do. "If thou saw a thief," says the Scripture, "thou consented with him." Would that we did not even inhabit the same world with these wicked men! But though that wish cannot be realized, yet even now we are separate from them in what is of the world; for the world is God's, but the worldly is the devil's¹⁹.

Tertullian

2. Not to be tattler:

*"Your mouth exaggerates malice,
and your tongue weaves deceit.*

*You sit and speak against your brother,
and provoke a scandal against your own mother's son"* [19, 20].

+ Beware too of having a tongue or ears that itch: that is, do not defame others or listen to people who defame others²⁰.

St. Jerome

+ We have become tattlers, nothing remains in our mind. Hear the exhortation of a wise man who says, "Have you heard a word? Let it die in you, be bold; it will not burst you" [Ecclus. 19:10]. And again, "A fool hears a word, and travails, as a woman in a labor of a child" [Ecclus 19:11]. We are ready to make accusations, prepared for condemning²¹.

St. John Chrysostom

+ When he says 'you sit' he wants to show that the slander was not in passing, nor was he overtaken by surprise and thus spoke evil of his neighbors. 'You sit', that is, at leisure, as if unoccupied for the very purpose of discrediting your neighbor. 'When you do these things, shall I be deaf to it?' Let no one deceive himself with false assurance, dearly beloved, thinking that he will not come before the tribunal of Christ to render an account of his deeds. Truly, 'May' the Lord 'our God come and not be deaf to us !' Indeed, now He is said to be silent, because he still seems to suspend punishment. 'When you do these things, shall I be deaf to it?' except I did not pass judgment, I postponed my severity, I prolonged my patience for your benefit, for a long time I awaited your

repentance? 'When you do these things, shall I be deaf to it? Although I looked for this very thing, that you should repent, you still despised me and refused to heed the Apostle; but 'According to thy hardness and unrepentant heart, you do treasure up to thyself wrath on the day of wrath and of the revelation of the just judgment of God.'

'Think you that I am like yourself?' It is not enough that your wicked deeds please you, you think they also please me. Since you do not suffer God as an avenger at once, you want to keep a partner and to have a companion of your plunder as a corrupt judge. Of the many goods you have seized, you give little alms and still do not desert your sins, you would deceive yourself even if you gave away everything, by losing your money and not redeeming your sins. 'Think you that I am like yourself? I will correct you.' Indeed, when our Lord and God comes, He will not be silent. 'I will correct you.'

What will I do to reprove you? What will I do to you? Now you do not see yourself, but I will make you behold yourself; because if you saw yourself and displeased yourself, you would please me. Since you do not see yourself, you are satisfied with yourself and will displease both me and you: me when you will be rejudged, yourself when you will burn in hell. Indeed, what will I do to you, someone says?

'I will draw you up before your eyes.' In the fact that you want to be concealed from yourself, you are behind your own back and do not see yourself. I will make you see yourself by placing before your face what you put behind your back. You will see your hideousness, not in order to correct it, but to blush at it. Truly, beloved brethren, all lovers of dissipation who commit sin with delight, now throw their sins behind them. But if by chance on some occasion they do something good, they put it before themselves and continually boast of it saying: 'I freed that man, I did good to him, I gave him so much. While they thus attribute to themselves the good which God did through them, by their vanity they destroy what they seem to acquire by almsgiving. Therefore, before the tribunal of Christ, since they have lost the good things which they kept before them, the sins which they had thrown behind their back will be summoned before their face. Then they will suffer punishment without end, because they refused to procure a remedy for themselves while they lived. This is the case with men who love present things more than future ones. However, men who think more attentively about the salvation of their soul act in a contrary manner; they throw the good which they do behind their back, and place before their eyes the evil which has overtaken them. In the present life they blush over their sins, striving with all the devotion of faith to heal what was wounded, to revive what was dead, and to cleanse what was defiled. When these men come before the tribunal of Christ on judgment day, the evil which they had placed before their face and redeemed by good works will be taken away and the good deeds which they had cast behind their back because of vanity will be set before their eyes and they will merit to hear: 'Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom.' Although this is true, we should not despair of those who are still unwilling to correct their vices and do not even blush to defend them. In a similar way hope was not abandoned for that city of which it is written: 'Three days more and Ninive shall be destroyed'; yet in those three days it was able to be converted, pray, bewail, and merit mercy from the threatened punishment. Therefore, let all who are such listen to God while it is possible to hear Him in His silence, that is, not punishing at present; for He will come and will not be silent, and will then reprove when there is no chance of amendment. 'I will draw you up before your eyes.' Therefore, do you whoever are like this as was already said above, do what the Lord threatens to do to you. Remove yourself from behind you where you do not want to see yourself, hiding your deeds and put yourself before you. Ascend the tribunal of your mind, be your own judge. Let fear torment you, a confession of your guilt result, and say to your God: 'For I acknowledge my offense, and my sin is before me always.' Let what was behind you come before you, and when it is before yourself by God the judge and have no place where you may flee from yourself.

Now 'Consider this, you who forget God.' You did not think about your evil life; understand yourself,, you that have forgotten the Lord: 'Lest I rend you like a lion and there be no one to rescue you.' What does it

mean, 'Like a lion'? Like someone powerful and strong, whom no one can resist. Those lovers of the world whom we mentioned above seem to praise God with their mouth, but they are proven by their deeds to do far otherwise. According to what the prophet says: 'This people honors me with their hearts are far from me.' To them the Holy Ghost exclaims: 'But to the wicked man God says: "Why do you recite my statutes, and profess my covenant with your mouth?" It is as if He were saying: It does you no good to praise God. It is profitable for those who live well to praise Him, but if you praise Him and do not abandon your sins, it avails nothing. Why do you praise me? Listen to the Scriptures say: 'Unseemly is praise on a sinner's lips.' If you live a wicked life and say good things, you do not yet praise God/ Again, if when you have begun to live well you attribute it to your own merits, you do not yet praise God. I do not want you to be a robber deriding the cross of our Lord, but neither do I want you as His temple to throw away His merits in you and conceal His wounds. If you are wicked any persevere in that evil, I will not tell you: You praise will not profit you, but: You do not praise me, because I do not consider it as praise. Again, if you seem just, that is, humble and good, but go along puffed up with your justice, despising others in comparison with yourself or exalting yourself in a boasting way because of your merits, you do not praise me. Neither he who lives a wicked life nor he who lives well as though by his own merits praises me. Was that Pharisee such by himself when he said: 'I thank thee that I am not like the rest of men'? He thanked God that he had some good in himself. Therefore, even if there is some good in you, do not acknowledge it as proceeding from yourself, but admit that you received what is good from God. If you extol yourself above another who does not possess this good, in this you will be considered proud and not yet one who praises me. First of all, then be corrected from your very wicked path. Begin to live well, and realize that you cannot amend your life except by the gift of God; for 'By the Lord are the steps of a man made firm.' When you have understood this, help other men so that they may also be what you are; for you once were what they are. Assist them as much as you can and do not despair. God is not rich only as far as you are concerned, and believe that what He has given to you, He both will and can bestow upon others. Therefore, a man does not praise God if, when he has begun to live well, he thinks it is by himself that he lives well and not something received from God. Nor does a man praise Him if, although he knows the fact that he lives well is a gift from God, still he wants God to be rich only to himself and does not want Him to be merciful to others. For this reason could not the Pharisee who said: 'O God I thank thee that I am not like the rest of men, dishonest, robbers, adulterers, or even like this publican,' also say: O Lord, give also to this publican what you have given to me, and fill me with what you have not yet given? Instead he vomited, as though he was satiated. However, what did that poor man or publican say? 'O Lord, be merciful to me the sinner!' Therefore, 'The publican went back justified rather than the Pharisee.' Now listen, both you who live well and you who lead a wicked life: 'He that offers praise as a sacrifice glorifies me.' No one offers this sacrifice to me and is wicked. I do not say: Let not the wicked offer it, but: No wicked man offers it. The man who praises me is good, because if he praises me he lives well. If he praises me, not only his tongue does so, but his life agrees with his tongue.

Therefore, I exhort you, dearly beloved. With God's help, let us endeavor as much as we can to praise God by a good life just as we do with words, for it would be better to be silent and do good than to praise Him and commit sin. If a man praises God at the same time by his life and his tongue, equally with words and good deeds, he calls forth the grace of God doubly upon himself. Indeed, if he is unable to praise Him with words, let him do so by good works, continual prayer, and holy thoughts. If we diligently do this, we can both praise the Lord with a secure conscience in this world and happily reach eternally joy on the life to come²².

Fr. Caesarius of Arles

THE PARTING CHARGES [22-23]

*"Now consider this, you who forget God,
lest death snatch you away*

and there is no one to save you.

*The sacrifice of praise glorifies Me,
and this is the way I will show him My salvation" [22, 23].*

Verse 22 displays the twin characteristics of God's wrath: that it is reluctantly unleashed, but irresistible once that point is reached.

In joy and sorrow, sick and well, at home and abroad, let us abound in praise [23]. The circumstances of SS. Paul and Silas in jail, were very distressing, and so they prayed. Many blessings and mercies remained to them, and so they sang praises²³.

1. *Sch. p. 252-3.*
2. *Kidner, p. 186.*
3. *W. Plumer: The Psalms, p. 552.*
4. *Ep. 46:5.*
5. *Treatise 9,23.*
6. *Plumer, p. 552.*
7. *Dial. with Trypho, 22.*
8. *Comm. on Luke, Hom. 74.*
9. *Plumer, p. 549, 550.*
11. *Cassian: Conf. 14:16.*
12. *Paschal letters, 7:4.*
13. *Councils of Aminum and Seleucia, 39.*
14. *Life of Antony, 26.*
15. *Ep. 62 (Oxford 63):18.*
16. *Jacob and the Happy Life, 2:1:3.*
17. *Epistle 62:18.*
18. *Concerning Baptism, Q. 9.*
19. *De Spectaculis, 15.*
20. *Ep. 52 to Nepotian, 14.*
21. *In Heb. Hom. 21:7.*
22. *Sermon 133.*

A COMMENTARY ON

**BOOK OF PSALMS
(PSALMS 51 to 60)**

BY

FATHER TADROS Y. MALATY

CHAPTER 51

THE TRUE REPENTANCE

Perceiving that “*No man born to a woman is without sin, even if his life is one day on earth*”, and knowing that no man however holy he is will not commit sin, the church gave this psalm a special place among the psalms. According to the Egyptian Coptic rite, most of prayers begin with the recitation of this psalm right after the Lord’s prayer and the prayer of thanksgiving. By this it confirms the following points:

1- It is not allowed for the church, as a holy congregation, nor for any of its members, to stand to pray, unless he gives thanks to God for His gifts, and confesses His need for the divine mercies. These two lines – the thanksgiving and the repentance – represent general and main tendencies in both the public and personal worship.

2- The church, by the spirit of prayer, present a true program for repentance, through a practical actuality lived by a great prophet who fell and stood aright by the Lord. That is why a study of this psalm is extremely essential to reveal the concept of repentance, and its practical practice.

3- Praying this psalm on a daily basis, even in our bed, is like a warning to us lest we become slothful with sin, or postpone repentance.

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem: [Exposing the falls of the saints in the holy books is allowed by God to exhort us toward repentance and perpetual awareness, when we see great virtuous men of God like the prophet David and the apostle Peter, have sinned and fallen because of slothfulness and lack of awareness].

4- According to **St. Augustine**, this psalm, together with the rest of the psalms of repentance, which he was very fond, having written them with large font, and hanged on the wall, to pray with tears while on his death bed; represent a call to receive affliction with joy; saying:

[David did not fall in this sin while suffering the persecution of king Saul ... Namely. He was much closer to God when he was more miserable. Anguish may sometimes be of benefit, like the scalpel of the surgeon for a gravely sick man¹].

Its features:

1- This psalm, the fourth of the psalms of repentance, and the most famous, was written by the prophet David confessing his sin when the prophet Nathan delivered to him the divine message (2 Samuel 12: 1-3). He presented it in the darkest moments of his life, in which his own soul was exposed before his eyes; and by which, he does not only reveal the depths of his sorrow for what he has done against God, but rejoices, becomes glad, prais God, and testifies to His salvation works; His sorrows become mixed with joy, and the tears of his grief with those of joy.

There are many who look at repentance from only one aspect, to see in it just tears, sufferings, and sorrows, forgetting that repentance is nothing but the experience of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ; And that it is a joyful royal way, according to the saying of the Lord: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3: 2; 4: 17). That is why this psalm starts by seeking the divine mercies, to set forth to testifying to the compassionate God toward the sinners; then entering into a state of praising and

¹ On Ps 50 (51). 4.plumer: the Psalms ;. 555.

enjoying the Higher Jerusalem, where God smells our life as a joyful burnt offering, a subject of His pleasure.

2- This psalm, together with psalm 32, although they were written in the same bitter circumstances, yet psalm 32 talks about what the prophet David has reached of misery because of the sin, before he repents, and what he got of joy and happiness after his confession. Whereas the psalm here, talks to us in more detail about the experience he lived by a spirit of piety¹.

3- This psalm, revealing to us the nature of sin, being a rebellion, iniquity, and evil, and its seriousness as much as we can perceive; we long to rid ourselves of it, its authority, curse, and the rest of its bitter fruits².

4- David sinned, yet when his sin became public, he was ashamed of it, yet was not ashamed to confess it publicly before the right person (the prophet Nathan), even though the later was of less religious and temoral stature than his own; then confessed it before the whole world later on, through his psalms of repentance which became a part of the collective worship.

Its general frame:

1- An initial call for purification	1 - 2
2- A confession of iniquity	3 - 5
3- The joy of forgiveness	6 - 9
4- A continuous renewal	10 - 12
5- A testimony before the sinners	13
6- Offering a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving	14 - 17
7- An enjoyment of a spiritual church life	18 - 19

The title:

A prayer of repentance To the Chief Musician. A psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

The title came to open the door of hope before every man whatever his sin is; as the Lord longs for our return to Him. God sent to David, the prophet and king, someone to reveal to him the wounds of his soul, to make him resort to the heavenly Physician.

❖ Let the sinner be aware of the seriousness of the wound, and not despair of the greatness of the Physician. As the sin, together with despair is a sure death.

❖ Whatever is your case, O sinner, if you hesitate to repent, do not despair of your salvation; Just listen to the sighs of Daved.

He did not send Nathan to you, but He sends to you David Himself.

Listen to him crying, and cry together with him.

Listen to him sighing, and sigh together with him.

Listen to him weeping, and mix your tears with his.

Listen to him putting himself aright, and rejoice with him.

In case you did not alienate yourself from sin, do not alienate yourself from hope in forgiveness.

¹ *Ibid* 561.

² *Epistle* 122: 3.

Take notice of the extent of humility of the king; how he did not despise his counsel; how he did not say to him: How dare you talk to me in such a way, I the king?! If the king gave heed to a prophet; Let the humble people of God give heed to Christ!

- ❖ If David's sin is counted as an iniquity; I wish the iniquitous do not despair of them. If God forgave the iniquitous (David), Let them look up to Him, to whom they should resort, and whose ways they should learn!

St. Augustine

1- AN INITIAL CALL FOR PURIFICATION:

The psalmist opens this psalm of repentance by seeking the mercies of God, which grants purification, and forgiveness of sin.

“Hive mercy upon me, O God, according to your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (1, 2)

Having felt the heavy burden of his iniquities, the prophet David proclaims, not only his need for the mercy of the Lord, but for His loving kindness and the multitude of the divine tender mercies. He stayed for nearly a year and a half crying out *“When I kept silent my body wasted away, through my groaning all day long”* (Psalm 32: 2)

Although David has been the first man, no congregation or individual -- whatever his civil or religious stature is could condemn him with death; yet he perceived that sin could issue such verdict against him; and no one could save him of it except the mercies and grace of God.

The prophet David talks with the language of someone who is utterly helpless of saving himself by himself or through anyone else; together with a complete faith and trust in the multitude of God's mercies.

- ❖ His sin was so heavy, that it needs great mercies to forgive¹.

St. Jerome

- ❖ It is befitting of a sinner not to despair, as long as he is under the care of such mighty divine Physician; whose multitude of mercies are so great, that He does not only forgive the sins of those who seek to reform their life, but would allow them, as well, to enjoy the eternal rewards².

- ❖ In case one of you commits such serious transgressions, let him listen to these words, and say together with David: *“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness”*. If someone prays for the sake of the multitude of mercies, let him add to them the greatness of his misery.

Those who sin out of ignorance, let them seek Your simple mercies; But as for me, have mercy upon me, pour Your loving kindness on me, to heal my serious wound, according to Your great healing ability. As much as what I did is mighty serious, yet I am resorting to the mighty One.

If I do not find such a great Physician as You, I would despair because of the deadly nature of my wound³.

¹ Sermon 184: 6.

² Sermon 134: 5.

³ راجع أنثيموس الأورشليمي: تفسير المزامير، مزمور 50.

Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle

- ❖ He who seeks the multitude of mercy, confesses the greatness of his misery.
- ❖ I beseech You, O the wholly Goodness, Do not count on me my serious transgression.
- ❖ “*Do not enter into judgment with Your servant*” (Psalm 143: 2).
“*According to the multitude of Your mercies, blot out my transgressions*” (Psalm 51: 1).

Woe to me, O miserable man, The day of judgment is at hand, and what is secret in my conscience will be made public.

When the voice will be heard: [There is the man, and there are his deeds!

What shall I say then, O my Lord, and my God, when heaven reveals my sins, and earth stands against me?!

St. Augustine

- ❖ As the wound of the prophet was great, he sought from the Physician of souls a great medicine, which is mercy and a multitude of tender compassion. Actually, there are no greater mercies or compassion than the incarnation of the Word of God who wipes out iniquities.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

- ❖ I see many who beat their chests, saying: ‘We have sinned’; and assume that their hearts utter it together with them. To them and the like I say: Not everyone who says: ‘I have sinned; I have sinned’, will be forgiven; the same as, “*Not everyone who says to me: ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 7: 21).

In the Holy Book I see that Judas said before the Jewish chief priests and elders: ‘I have sinned’ (Matthew 27: 3). It was also said by king Saul before Samuel the prophet (1 Samuel 15: 24-34). And it was said, as well, by king David before Nathan the prophet. Yet, only one out of those three heard a clear answer of forgiveness, namely David (2 Samuel 12: 13). That was because David said it truly from the heart (Psalm 51: 1), as obvious from his prayers in the book of psalms.

St. John Chrysostom

According to **St. Cyril**¹, The psalmist’s cries seeking the cleansing of his heart and conscience refer to the cleansing in the water of baptism.

There were several cleansings and purifications according to the Mosaic statutes, based upon the blood of animals to cleanse the body.

Whereas the cleansing of the inner man needs the water of baptism, set upon the work of the Lord Christ, capable of purifying the depths, and renewing the human nature; As according to the apostle Paul: “*If the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*” (Hebrew 9: 14).

This free cleansing, set upon the worthiness of the Savior, needs the confession of our iniquities; namely, our need for the Savior.

2- A CONFESSION OF INIQUITY:

“For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (3)

¹ St. Augustine : On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 12: 13.

Although David no doubt knew that he has sinned, yet he put his sin behind his back, and did not confess it, until the prophet Nathan came and put it before his eyes. Since those moments, having felt the work of God who lifted its burden up from him, he hid it no more behind his back, but confessed it all the time, namely confessed his weakness.

David perceived the importance of confessing his sins, and that God shows compassion on him who confesses his sins; whereas on him, who hide them out of pride, God shows no compassion.

Although God forgave David, yet the later, trusting in the greatness of God's mercies, and the multitude of His loving kindness, never forgot his sins; not out of despair, but perpetually remembered them to perceive his weakness, and to seek the mercies of God, and in order to be aware of the causes of sin, particularly slothfulness and lack of care, even for moments; to glorify the divine grace.

❖ He who perpetually remember his sin with a feeling of shame, would remorse, and would consequently be aware not to fall again; in order to gain forgiveness.

Everyone who accuses himself, confessing his sin, will have it forgiven; For God says: *"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins. Put Me in remembrance; Let us contend together; State your case, that you may be acquitted"* (Isaiah 43: 25, 26),

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

❖ ***"For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me"*** (3). I shall not put what I have done behind my back, to watch the others, forgetting about myself. I shall not claim removing the speck out of my brother's eye, not considering the plank in my own eye (Matthew 7: 5).

My sin is before and not behind me. It was before behind me, until God sent the prophet Nathan to me, who said to me: *"There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. A traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who came to him. What do you think that man deserve?"*. David's anger was greatly aroused; not knowing that that parable was said about him (2 Samuel 12).

Because his sin was not yet before him but behind him; And he has not yet confessed his iniquity; he did not forgive the sin of the others (having said that such a man shall surely die). The prophet Nathan took the sin from behind David and put it before his eyes, to see that the verdict he uttered in great anger was upon him; he made his tongue be a weapon by which to wound his heart.

❖ To be called a man, this is the work of God; And to be called a sinner, that is the work of man himself. You should blot out what you have done, to let God save what He has made.

It is befitting of you to hate your own work, and to love God's work in you.

Once you are not pleased with your own works; those good works of God will begin; finding the wrong in your evil works,

Confessing the evil works is the beginning of the good ones.

How can you perform the truth? Do not spoil yourself, nor flatter it. Do not say: 'I am righteous', while you are actually not. By that you start to do the truth.

You can come to light, to proclaim that your works are done through God; because you cannot hate your sin unless God shines on you, and reveals the truth to you. Whereas he who loves his sins, even after he is counseled, he hates the light who counsels him, and flee from him. The works which he loves do not appear evil to him. He who does the truth will accuse the evil works in him, will not justify himself, nor forgives himself, for God to forgive him.

He who wants God to forgive him, let him first acknowledge his sins by himself, and come to light, where he thanks God who reveals to him what he should hate in himself. He would say to God: "*Hide your face from my sins*" (9). Yet, with what face can he say that, unless he adds: "*For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me*" (3). Let your transgressions be ever before you, you who do not intend for them to be before God. Whereas, if you put your sins behind you, God will bring them forth before your eyes, and will do that at a time when there is no more fruits of repentance¹.

St. Augustine

❖ "*For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me*" (3). I will not put what I do behind me. I will not look at the others and forget myself. I will not strive to remove the speck out of my brother's eye, and not consider the plank in my own eye. My sin is ever before me, and not behind me. It was indeed behind me, when God sent His prophet to me to teach me by the parable of the poor shepherd of sheep².

Father Caesarius, bishop of Arles

❖ The beginning of the way to repentance is our condemnation of our sins³.

St. John Chrysostom

❖ In case a sinner is embarrassed to reveal his sin to the priest of God, let him seek the cure from the saying: "I said: let me confess my iniquity to the Lord; and He will forgive the evil of my heart". It is like when man vomits the indigested food that weighs down his stomach, he would be relieved, the same way when he sins and hides his iniquity in himself, and feels uneasy within himself; and would be relieved if he confesses his sin, and vomits his iniquity⁴.

The scholar Tertullian

❖ What man is embarrassed to reveal and expose to the priest of God, is a sign that it is something bad, and a devilish⁵.

St. John Cassian

❖ The sinful thought will become weak once it is revealed ... By the power of confession, the serpent of uncleanness would retreat from its dark hidden cave, and

¹ Sermon 134: 6.

² Resisting the Temptation of the Devil. Hom 2: 6.

³ In 1 Cor., hom 11.

⁴ المرجع السابق، ص 267.

⁵ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، 1965، ص 266.

would escape in disgrace. The devilish thoughts would have authority on us, as long as it remains hidden inside our hearts¹.

Father Moussa

- ❖ John the Baptist used to command those who came to him to confess their sins before they could be baptized; not that he would so need; but for their own peace. As the confessor would then become relieved of the burden over his heart and conscience. The strife against uncleanness is far better than the strife against pride².

St. John El-Dargy

- ❖ Do not say all your thoughts to everyone, lest you cause them offense ... But put in your heart to listen to your father of confession, to have God's blessing on you³.

St. Anthony the Great

- ❖ What I have already said concerning the remembrance of sins is actually of great benefit, and necessary for those who begin their repentance, that, by continually beating their chests, they would say: *“For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me”* (3); and also: *“For I will declare my iniquity”* (Psalm 38: 18); As during our repentance, till sorrowful for remembering our past sins; the flow of our tears caused by our confession of sins would certainly quench the fire kindling in our conscience⁴.

Father Penovius

It is thus befitting of the repentant to confess his sins before God, and before his father of confession, the way David, the prophet and king did before the prophet Nathan. What did he confess?

“Against You, You alone, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight –That You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge” (4)

The prophet David realized that all his sins were directed against God alone – the Limitless, the eternal, the Holy, the Good, and the Truth; And that he did wrong against Bathsheba, against her husband Uriah the Hittite, who was faithful to him, against the whole people of Israel, and against himself. But perceiving that his body, as well as his soul is the procession of God, and his neighbor is in the image of God; the prophet David counts every sin directed against himself or the others will be an offense against God Himself. By that we can realize the seriousness of the sin, and the need to be saved from it by a divine work. On another aspect, perceiving that God is Righteous in His love for us, as well as in His promises and sayings, and how much He cares for our salvation, we resort to Him as a Savior, before being a Judge, to be able to be justified before Him on His coming.

The secret of David's strength was probably because he was only preoccupied with God and His commandment and truth. He did wrong to men, but what grieved him the most, was that he hurt the feelings of divine love toward him. He did not defend himself or make any excuse for his deeds, but, with the spirit of surrender, he confessed that he would never be justified before God.

¹ St. Cassian. Conf. 2.

² المرجع السابق، ص 268.

³ المرجع السابق، ص 284.

⁴ Cassian, Conferences 20: 7.

- ❖ Your goodness and gifts to me are uncountable: You have brought me forth from shepherding the sheep, set me a king, gave me victory over my enemies, and saved me from a multitude of difficulties. I, though, having forgotten all that, disobeyed your commands, O my Creator and God. I have not done wrong against men, as much as I did against You *“Against You, You alone, I have sinned”*

By this, he probably means that, although my sin might be hidden from men, yet it is not hidden from you, who knows all hidden things.

Or it may probably means that, as the king, does not submit to the statutes of people, but only to those of God, he says: *“Against You, You alone, I have sinned”*, through disobeying your law.

Or it may mean that people with their flattering nature do not care that I have sinned and became worthy of punishment; and they would never say to my face that I did. But you, on the other hand, being Righteous, You do not wish for your creation to perish.

If your goodness is compared to the wrong I did in my foolishness, you will appear True, And I would be a denier. And in case there is a trial, you will be the Winner, and I the loser; For You have not failed to care for me, even though I sinned.... As according to St. John the evangelist: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1: 8).

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

- ❖ Those who have an abundance knowledge of the divine teachings, in case they sin, they do that in the presence of God and before Him, according to the saying of the psalmist: *“My sin is ever before you”* (3).... The privilege of him who sins before God is that he is quick to repent, and to say: *“I have sinned”*. Whereas he who flee from God’s face will not be able to repent, nor to get purified of his sins¹.

The scholar Origen

- ❖ Having such a great love toward man, caring for our salvation, and longing for closing shut the mouths of the foolish, He never ceases to work on His side, even though men would not care. Knowing that, the psalmist says: *“that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge”* (4)².
- ❖ Although God presented everything possible to men, they have not changed to the better³.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ He who needs no defense, would keep silent; whereas he who fears defeat would hasten to talk and defend himself. If Christ is judged, He would overcome; as according to the prophet, *“You are found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge”* (4). What is therefore His need to speak when judged, if His trial would always end in complete victory for Himself?!⁴

Father Maximus, bishop of Turin

Standing before God, confessing his sins, and confirming that what he does is planted in his nature, the psalmist does not justify himself, but accusing his nature, seeking a divine help to change it.

¹ In Exod., hom. 11: 5.

² In John, hom 56: 1.

³ Homilies on Rom. Hom 7.

⁴ Fr. Maximus of Turin: Sermon 57: 1.

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me”

(5)

We are told about the piety of his mother (Psalm 116: 16); what he means here is the original sin; confessing that he is brought forth in this world by the seeds of iniquity.

❖ There is no conceiving without sin, as there are no parents who have not fallen¹.

St. Ambrose

❖ Is David, the son of Jesse, the righteous man (1 Samuel 16: 18), brought forth through adultery? Then, what does he mean by saying: *“I was brought forth in iniquity”*; but that the iniquity has come down from Adam!

If children are righteous ... Why would their mothers hasten with them to the church when sick?! ... What do baptism and the forgiveness of sin mean?! ... What does baptism cleanse?! ... What does grace absolve? It absolves the results of sin. ... If a child can talk, or if he has the knowledge of David, he would say: You do not see my works, of which I have none; but I was brought forth in iniquity, and I was fed sins by my mother while still in her womb!

❖ No one is pure in the sight of God, not even a babe of one day on earth; although these are counted as exceptions, and beyond the limits of our human measurements to enquire about the rank they are worthy of in the portion of the saints, promised in the future²!

St. Augustine

❖ *“No one born of woman is without sin, even if his life is one day on earth”* (Job); And David groans, saying: *“I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me”* (5); And as proclaimed by the apostle: *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood”* (Romans 3: 23-25). Hence, the forgiveness of sins is given to those who believe; according to the words of the Lord Himself: *“This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins”* (Matthew 26: 28)³.

St. Basil the Great

❖ According to the Holy Scripture, everyone who enters into this world is said to carry a certain corruption. This actually happens in his mother’s womb (Job 3: 11); when he takes a body out of the parental seeds, to be said to *“defiled in his father and mother”* (Leviticus 21: 11).

Do not you know that when a male child reaches 40 days of age, he is presented to the altar to be purified (Leviticus 12: 2) ... as though he has been defiled when conceived by his parental seeds or in his mother’s womb? That is why everyone *“is defiled in his father and mother”* (Leviticus 21: 12); except for My Lord Jesus Christ alone who came pure into this world pure, undefiled in His mother, having entered into an undefiled womb (as *“the Holy Spirit came upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadowed*

¹ *Explanation of David the Prophet, 1: 11: 56.*

² *Sermons, 351: 2.*

³ *Concerning Baptism, Book 1, chapter 2.*

her” (Luke 1: 35); He who, since a long time said: “*Being good, I entered an undefiled body*” (Wisdom 8: 20)¹.

The scholar Origen

- ❖ About the church of the Gentiles it is said: “*I am black and beautiful*” (Song 1: 5). She is black by nature, but beautiful by grace. She is black because “*I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived her*” (Psalm 51: 5). And she is beautiful because: “*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow*” (Psalm 51: 7)².

Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle

- ❖ If the beginning warrants punishment, How about the end? ... Who will rejoice in a life that begins with sorrow? The prophet was aware of that when he said: “*I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me*” (5)³.

Father Peter Christologus

3- THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS:

Proclaiming that his sins are deep in his nature since he was conceived, the psalmist does not fall into despair, for he sees God who loves the truth reveal to him the secrets of His divine love and His salvation works; For He is the Savior of souls from corruption! That was what restored to David his joy and gladness.

“You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart” (6)

- ❖ Once David said: “*I have sinned against the Lord*”, the Spirit of God in the prophet Nathan proclaimed to him: “*The Lord also has put away your sin*” (2 Samuel 12: 13).

St. Augustine

- ❖ “*Against You, You alone, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight*”; Yet You did not deal with me according to my sins, but instead, You did with me according to Your goodness; You, not only forgave me, but granted me the grace of adoption, by which I got to know clearly what You hid from the others concerning the things to come.

Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem

- ❖ That was not a verdict of a Judge in a court of justice, nor of One who punishes on a sin, but of Him who grants forgiveness⁴.

St. John Chrysostom

According to **St. Cyril**⁵: [The “Truth” beloved by the Father is the “Son”, by whose salvation work He gives purification of the body and soul. By that, the wisdom of God revealed to David that purification is realized, not through the cleansings of the Mosaic law, but through the blood of Christ; And that the Father’s pleasure in us is in Christ “the Truth”. And once the psalmist discovered the work of Christ “the Truth”, he daringly said:

¹ Homilies on Leviticus, homily 12: 4: 1.

² Sermon 124: 1.

³ Fr. Peter Chrysologus: Selected Sermons, 44.

⁴ Homilies on Penance 3: 4.

⁵ راجع أنثيموس الأورشليمي: تفسير المزامير، مزمور 50.

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (7)

The prophet David perceived the defilement of his inner depths, and felt as though leprosy has infected his soul through sin; hence he became in need of the hyssop that was used in sprinkling the blood of the Passover (Exodus 12: 22); in the water of purification (Numbers 19: 6, 18); and in the ritual for cleansing healed lepers (Leviticus 14: 6).

The “*hyssop*” refers to the Lord Christ who, in His humility became like grass of no value, by which His blood is sprinkled on His people to purify them.

- ❖ The hyssop is a weak and lowly kind of grass, but with deep and strong roots, that cling to a rock, by which to enter into the hearts of the saints, that “*they may be able to comprehend what is the width, length, depth, and height*” (Ephesians 3: 17-18), to recognize the cross of our Lord¹.

In case, by the roots of love, you cling to your Rock (Your Christ), be humble by your humble God, to become glorified by your glorified God; to be sprinkled by the hyssop, and be cleansed by the humility of Christ.

Do not despise the grass; Consider the activity of the medicine.

- ❖ He says: “*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow*” (Isaiah 1: 18). Out of those people, Christ “*might present to Himself a glorious church (garment) not having spot or wrinkles, holy and without blemish*” (Ephesians 5: 27). That is why, when He transfigured on the mount, “*His clothes became as white as the light*” (Matthew 17: 2); a reference to the church purified from all the defilement of sin.

St. Augustine

Pouring His love in humility, our Christ cleanses us from our sins, to become as white as snow, and to be clothed with Christ as our white wedding attire.

- ❖ There is the purification of the soul of the defilement accumulated on it through the bodily thoughts; and as it is written: “*Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow*” (7). We are not washed according to the Jewish rite whenever we are defiled, but we had baptism for salvation².

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ This washing (whitening), we are committed to understand as originating from radiations of the true light, coming down from the splendor of heavenly visions³.

The scholar Origen

- ❖ Confess, O man, your sins to have the forgiveness; “*Set forth your case, so that you may be proved right*” (Isaiah 43: 26 LXX).

Why would you be ashamed to confess. when you are brought forth in them (Psalm 51: 5). He who denies his transgression, and does not confess it, is actually denying his birth...

Let the sinner, and the unholy confess; and let the righteous not be lifted up nor be haughty, lest he would lose the reward of his righteousness by pride (Job 10: 15)⁴.

St. Ambrose

¹ *On Christian Doctrine 2: 41.*

² *On the Spirit 15 (35).*

³ *Homilies on Numbers 27: 12.*

⁴ *The prayer of Job and David, Book 1, 6: 19.*

By becoming the blameless clothing of Christ, as He transfigures on Mount Tabor in our midst, our life becomes filled with joy and gladness, with the spirit of humility. Our gladness is that, while weak, we became by Christ strong, and while sinners we got His righteousness!

- ❖ After that you were given white attire as a sign that you have taken off the garment of sin and put on the garment of purity and innocence, about which the prophet says: *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow”* (7). He who is baptized becomes pure according to both the law and the gospel; for Moses has sprinkled the blood of the lamb by a bunch of hyssop (Exodus 12: 22); While, according to the gospel, the clothing of Christ became white like snow, as He appeared in the glory of His resurrection. He, therefore, whose iniquity is forgiven, will become whiter than snow; hence, it is said in Isaiah: *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow”* (Isaiah 1: 18)¹.

St. Ambrose

“Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which You had broken may rejoice” (8)

Through the true confession of David of his sins, his humble bones trembled; but God’s grace brought him forth to joy and gladness. As much as his bones were broken in him by repentance, his soul exulted in him, when he felt that God has brought him forth from the darkness to the light; and from the corruption to non-corruption; to live as though in heaven.

The psalmist probably felt that the sin has broken up his bones or his inner man; Yet the grace of God that took off the authority of sin, has set in him the new man who is according to the image of his Creator. He who does not grieve on his sins, and on those of his brethren, will never experience the inner joy.

- ❖ When you were preoccupied with defending your sins, you were defeated ... Your defense is not for your own good; For, who are you, who defend yourself? It was befitting of you to accuse yourself. Do not say: ‘I did nothing’, or ‘what serious thing have I done?’ or ‘All the others are doing the same’!

If you commit a sin, and said that you did nothing, you, yourself, will become nothing; and will get nothing from God.

He is ready to grant forgiveness; yet you are closing the door on yourself!

He is ready to give; So do not resist by locking the door; but open up the bosom of confession *“to hear joy and gladness”*.

- ❖ Enter into the depths of your souls, away from all noise. Meditate in your depths; Search for a quiet place for the retreat of the conscience, where there is no disturbance, debate, or struggle; where there are no thoughts of bigotry and strife. Listen to the Word of God with meekness to get to understand it. Say: *“Make me to hear joy and gladness, that my bones may rejoice”* (8); yet the humble, and not the haughty bones².
- ❖ Whatever is the wealth that man brings with him from Egypt, he will not be saved unless he keeps the Passover.

¹ الأسرار .7

² Sermon on NT Lessons, 2: 22.

Now, Christ is our Passover; He who was slain for our sake. There is nothing like the sacrifice of Christ that clearly teaches us the call that He, Himself, directs to those whom He sees labor in Egypt under the authority of Pharaoh; to say to them: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”* (Matthew 11: 28-30).

Who are they whose burden is light but the meek and the lowly in heart? Who are not puffed up by knowledge, but are edified by love? ... Let them remember that those who celebrated Passover then, were a shadow, when they stroked the lintel and the doorposts of their doors with the blood of the lamb, using a bunch of hyssop (Exodus 12: 22), which, although, a weak and humble kind of grass; yet it is a symbol of the virtue of purification. Let no one become haughty by the knowledge that puffs up; Nor boast of the wealth he brought forth with him from Egypt. For the psalmist, who says: *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow; Make me to hear joy and gladness”* (7, 8); adds to it right away: *“that the bones which You have broken may rejoice”*; showing that the hyssop refers to purification from pride¹.

St. Augustine

Opening up the door of the true gladness by his confession of his sins, in humility and faithfulness, the believer will see God, the Forgiver of sin, and the Savior of souls from corruption; and will say with surety:

“Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities” (9)

“Hide Your face”, not from me, but *“from my sins”*; as, he in another place prays, saying: *“Do not hide your face from me: (Psalm 143: 7) He himself, does not hide his face from his own sins, saying: “For I acknowledge my transgressions” (3).*

❖ You cannot ask God to hide His face from your sins, when you, yourself would not hide your face from them. ... If you put your sin behind your back, God will hold His face fast on them.

Turn your sin to be before your own face, if you want God to hide His face from it; for then, you would safely seek, and He would listen to you.

St. Augustine

❖ Here, the prophet seeks from God to blot out all his iniquities, because in case one single sin remains, it would deny him entering into the kingdom of God; as, a little defilement, found in the attire, would keep us from entering into the sanctuary. This conforms to the saying of the apostle Paul: *“Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God”* (1 Corinthians 6: 9-10).

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

❖ They are committed to be aware, and never cease to remember their sins, all the days of their life; so that the just Judge would forget their iniquities. That is why David supplicates: *“Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities” (9)*; and a little way back he says: *“My sin is ever before me” (3)*. It is as though he says: [I pray, do not look at my sins, for they are ever before me]; according to the words of the

¹ On Christian Doctrine 41.

Lord on the tongue of the prophet: “*I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins*” (Isaiah 43: 25)¹.

Father Gregory the Great

4- A CONTINUOUS RENEWAL:

Discovering the heavy burden of sin and the corruption of human nature since the moments of conception, did not lead the prophet David to despair, but to cry out to God, who is capable by His holy spirit to grant the complete renewal of the inner man, He believes in God the

Creator, who does not reform the heart by putting new wine into old wineskins, or a piece of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment, but by creation anew; or, according to the apostle Paul: “*a new creation in Christ Jesus*”. ... Having known God’s possibility, the prophet David does not seek from Him less than the miracle of creation.

**“*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me*”
(10)**

❖ We would become truly free when God ordains our life, namely, forms and creates us, not as human beings, which He has already done, but He lets us be good people, something He is doing now by His grace, to be new creation in Christ Jesus. That is why we present the prayer: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me*” (10).

“Being His work, created in Jesus Christ for good works, He previously destined for us to do”. What is his goal of saying this?

❖ By these “works”, he does not mean those which you think you are their initiator, but think of those works which God conforms and creates in you; which the apostle means. Saying “created”, he does not talk about being created as man, but that about which the psalmist says: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God*” (10); and the apostle says: “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God*” (2 Corinthians 5: 17;18)².

St. Augustine

❖ “*Create in me a clean heart, O God*” (10). The psalmist seeks such a creation; not that he has no heart; but, having corrupted it, he desires to have it renewed and cleaned as it was before³.

St. Dedymus, the blind

❖ The heart is originally clean, being created by God, who creates everything good and clean, and need no renewing. But saying “a heart”, he seeks purifying the mind from the thoughts that have gone astray; according to the words of the prophet Ezekiel: “*I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you*” (Ezekiel 36: 26).

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

¹ *Pastoral Care*, 3: 29.

² *Grace & Freewill*, 20.

³ *Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon, Fragment 8: 22*

- ❖ It is not the uncleanness of the body, but that of the soul, that is abhorred by God ... About which the prophet says: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God*” (10); and also: “*Wash your heart from wickedness*” (Jeremiah 4: 14)¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ God shows that people with clean hearts are blessed; those who, living by faith in God, by pure mind, and by a wrinkle-free conscience, seek the truth in the vision of the God of glory in the heavenly kingdom to come. And, as said by the apostle: “*not in a mirror, dimly, but face to face*” (see 1 Corinthians 13: 12)².

Father Chromatius

If we have got the new birth in the water of baptism, and became with a new heart and an upright spirit, yet we need a continuous daily

renewal by a perpetual repentance, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the worthiness of the blood. According to **St. Augustine**, those with a clean heart, feeling their sins, present on them a perpetual repentance; Whereas the diverted, think of themselves as righteous, and in case they fall in an affliction, they blame God.

By a clean heart and an upright spirit within ourselves, we see God as a Savior, and cast ourselves at His feet, seeking the forgiveness of our sins; our heart get into His bosoms, where we find our eternal inheritance, Seeing in our brethren the image of God, we appreciate them; and in case anyone of them happen to fall, whatever the seriousness of his fall, we do not despair of his salvation, but pray for his sake, and present to him works of love, that draw him toward the heavenly Groom Himself! That is the work of the Holy Spirit in us, rebukes us on our sins, and kindles our hearts with love toward God and men. That is why the psalmist cries out, saying:

“Do not cast me away from Your presence; and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (11)

In case sin deprives us our encounter with God, and the fellowship with Him, the Holy Spirit of God who rebukes on sin, and grants forgiveness, will bring us back to Him.

- ❖ A servant considers hiding his master’s face from him a great loss; So it is with the son from whom his father hides his face, or the soldier from whom his king hides his face. Whereas, if God hides His face from man, it will be his perdition and destruction; because God is our Master, Father, King, Creator, the cause of our existence, salvation, and well being.

Hiding God’s face means taking His holy Spirit away from us. And as the Holy Spirit is the gift of God; as when our Lord breathed in His saintly apostles, and said to them: “*Receive the Holy Spirit*” (John 20: 22), by whom He gave them the authority to forgive and to retain the sins of men (John 20: 23).

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

- ❖ The psalm sought the coming of the holy Spirit; The gospel promised His coming (John 16: 13; And the Book of Acts told us about the actual fact of its coming (Acts 2) ... In the psalm there was supplication; in the gospel, a promise; and the Book of Acts the fulfillment of the promise³.

¹ *Homilies on 2 Timothy, 6.*

² *Tractate on Matt hem 17: 6: 3-4.*

³ *Fr. Caesarius of Arles, Sermon 211: 1.*

Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle

- ❖ Before the Word incarnated and became Man, the saints were given the Holy Spirit, being His Spirit; He was given to the prophet Moses, as well as to seventy others; And David prayed through the Word seeking from the father, saying: *“Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me”* (11). On another aspect, when He became Man, he said to His disciples: *“I will to you the Helper, the Spirit of Truth”* (John 14: 26); which He did, being faithful in His promise (Acts 2) ¹.

St. Athanasius, the apostolic

“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your (prevalent) Spirit” (12)

The psalmist counted that his sin made him lose the enjoyment of the face of God; and deprived him of the work of the Holy Spirit, the

Grantor of true joy of salvation, and the Grantor of authority; reigning on the inner man to lead the soul and the body, with all their energies along a royal holy way with no divergence; And made him lose, as well, the power to testify before the others.

- ❖ Believing that the Holy Spirit could be given and withdrawn, David prays not to be taken from him, saying: *“Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Spirit from me”* (11); and in the following verse he seeks the gift that was withdrawn from him because of the sin, saying: *“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your (Prevalent) Spirit”*².
- ❖ Restore to me what I have got; what I lost through sin; namely, what concerns your Christ.

St. Augustine

- ❖ The Holy Spirit whom the prophet David sought for mankind, saying: *“Uphold me with Your (prevalent Spirit)”*, who came down on the disciples on the day of the Pentecost after the ascension of the Lord; has the power to gather together all the nations to the entrance of life, and to set a new covenant with those who with one accord praise God with all tongues. He brought forth the tribes from far away to unity, presenting to God the Father the firstfruit of all the nations.

St. Erinaos

- ❖ In case man falls into a sin, he loses the gladness of his heart, and walks around sorrowful and depressed because of his troubled conscience. But once he is saved from that sin through repentance, the gladness of salvation is restored to him.

So will be the salvation of the nations, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That is why the prophet seeks from God the Father to bring joy forth to the world by the coming of His Son to it incarnated.

As to the (prevalent) Spirit, He is the Holy Spirit who has the (prevalence) and authority over the whole creation.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

- ❖ Once again we gather together to practice the prayer of the third hour, after having been scattered to do their diverse works for living; to remember the gift of the Holy

¹ *Four Discourses against the Arians, 1: 12.*

² *In Lev., hom 6.*

Spirit given to the disciples at the third hour. We are committed to worship together with one accord, to be qualified, as well, to receive His sanctification of us. We are committed to seek His leadership for us, and His teaching according to our needs; according to the saying of the psalmist: “*Clean in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast Spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take Your Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with Your (prevalent) Spirit*” (10-12).

St. Basil the Great

If sin made man, as well as all mankind, lose their true inner peace, and sound joy; the salvation work of God restore to us the joy; makes us cry over our sins, and let our souls dance exultant for the work of God in us. That was what the Lord Christ meant when he rebuked the

Jews who rejected His salvation; saying: “*We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not weep*” (Luke 7: 32). He started by the dancing, as God, even though seeks our tears for repentance, yet He desires our inner joy, and our enjoyment of the blessed life.

According to **(Mar) Isaac** the Syrian: [There is difference between those preoccupied in the things of this world, and those preoccupied with meditation in godly things. Concerning the former, it starts with giving them joy, pleasure and gladness, but ends up with sadness and grief.

Whereas, concerning the later, on the other hand, it starts bitter, sorrowful, and dark, yet ends up with joy, pleasure, and gladness. He who tasted the two ways knows for sure the value of what I say¹].

5- A TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SINNERS:

The prophet David is amazing in his repentance. Having enjoyed the work of God that restored to him the joy of his salvation, the tears of repentance, however much or continuous they are, did not lead him to despair, but to gladness with God the Savior. He was not preoccupied with himself at the expense of the congregation, or of mankind, as the true repentance brings forth joy and love; or, in other words, brings forth the spaciousness of heart to receive the joyful kingdom, and the testimony to the Savior; hence the psalmist says:

“Then I will teach transgressors Your ways; and sinners shall be converted to You” (13)

The psalmist here binds between the renewal and the testimony to the Savior; or between the gladness of salvation and leading others to the spiritual knowledge. As the Lord Christ said to Simon Peter: “*And when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren*” (Luke 22: 32).

❖ Everyone who repents his sin, and returns to what is better, will become a role model for transgressors to follow, to return to God, to seek His mercy.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

❖ David became a teacher of repentance ...

Once the fever left Peter’s mother-in-law, she got up and served Christ².

¹ للمؤلف: الحب الرعوي، 1965، ص 266.

² On Ps. Hom. 76.

St. Jerome

6- OFFERING A SACRIFICE OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING:

How could David testify before the transgressors, to restore the hypocrites to the truth? By the life of praise and thanksgiving, coming from pure lips and clean heart.

“Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness” (14)

The psalmist often proclaims that the wicked who holds fast to his iniquity, cannot praise or give thanks to God, even if he recites many praises by his mouth. Now, he cries out to God to deliver him from bloodshed, to make his inner tongue exult, and sing aloud of God’s righteousness.

❖ Deliver me from bloodshed, or from evil, and purify me from every corruption.

St. Augustine

❖ According to **St. Athanasius**, the prophet David beseeches God to deliver him from his crime of shedding the blood of Uriah (2 Samuel 11); Or he probably seeks putting an end to the animal sacrifices as includes in the Mosaic law.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise” (15)

God’s work with the sinners does not stop at restoring the joy to the soul, but He also opens the lips, for the praise to come out salted with the salt of the Spirit. Namely, the praise is the work of God Himself in us. How simple it is for man to present animal sacrifices and burn offerings to the Lord. But God seeks the depths, seeks the soul, to be sanctified by the sacrifice of the Savior; that man, himself, would become a burnt offering of love, although humble in his own eyes, yet the object of pleasure to God.

“For you do not desire sacrifices, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise” (16-17)

God is in no need for sacrifices, as **he clarified in the last psalm**¹ (Psalm 50: 7-15); But, in His amazing love for man, He seeks man’s love, as though thirsty for it; He seeks his love, humility, holiness, and righteousness, to live together with Him in the heavenlies; for all these are divine gifts, He presents to him who seeks them.

❖ Those sacrifices were symbols of the One saving Sacrifice. We were not left without a sacrifice to offer to God; We were given the sacrifice of the fellowship of the cross.

Do not seek to slay a sacrifice from outside of you; As inside you there is what to slay.

St. Augustine

❖ Without humility, the heart will not cease to scatter; as humility keeps the heart from scattering².

❖ Let us learn how to draw God’s heart to mercy by prayers mixed with humility and meekness; For God provided us with the key to His heart; saying: *“Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matthew 11:

¹ راجع تفسير مز 50 :7-15.

² Ascetic Homilies 8.

29). David, as well, knew that, and said: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise*” (17). Does does not love more than a humble and a meek soul.

- ❖ Such a man (the contrite) is worthy of admiration, and of being a friend of God; as it is said by a prophet: “To whom shall I look, except to the humble and the contrite, he who is terrified of my words?!”¹
- ❖ The moderate and controlled thought is lifted up to God, according to what is written that God will not despise the broken and contrite heart².

St. Cyril the Great

- ❖ Blessed is he who knows his weakness, for this will be to him a foundation and a beginning for everything good and beautiful. By realizing truly that he is weak, man would take away from himself every false glitter that scatters knowledge, and would become more alert on him.

Yet, no one can perceive his weakness unless he does without some little things, disregard them, and become surrounded by temptations, whether in things that cause suffering to the body, or by ways through which the soul submits to sufferings. Only then, meditating in his weakness, he would realize the greatness of the help that comes from God.

Once man perceives that he is in need of divine help, he presents many prayers; and doing that, his heart becomes contrite ... and “*God will not despise the broken and contrite heart*”.

A heart that is not contrite is always wandering around; Contrition causes the heart to concentrate³.

St. Mar Isaac the Syrian

- ❖ The contrite is not aggressive, but receives the bad treatment, and does not pay it back; however bad he is treated, he remains peaceful, and does not think of avenging himself⁴.
- ❖ (Contrition) is the golden altar; It is the spiritual place of the sacrifice, for the broken heart is a sacrifice to God.

Contrition is the father of wisdom.

In case man has this virtue, he would have all the rest of them⁵.

- ❖ “***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven***” (Matthew 5: 3) ... There are different kinds of contrition: there is the contrite according to the measure of his stature; and he who gets down to extreme contrition; the later is the kind of heart commended by the blessed prophet, who portrays to us, not just the submission of the soul, but its entire breaking, saying: “*The sacrifice of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise*” (17). ... The three saintly young men present such a contrition to God as the ultimate

¹ *Comm... on Luke, hom. 27.*

² *Comm... on Luke, hom. 102.*

³ *A. J. Wensinck: Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh, 1923, p. 70.*

Dana Miller: The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian, 1948, p. 67.

Robert Liewelyn, The Joy of the Saints, Spiritual Readings throughout the Year, Springfield, Illinois, 1989, p. 31.

⁴ *On the Epistle to the Hebrew, Hom. 9: 8.*

⁵ *In Matt. Hom. 47: 4.*

sacrifice, saying: In a broken soul and a contrite spirit, we wish we are accepted by You, O God” (Daniel 3: 39 – consummation of Daniel); that is what Christ blesses now¹.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ I think that compassion, philanthropy, and deep piety, are the foundation of the spiritual knowledge of the Gnostic; and that these virtues are an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God (Philippians 4: 18). The Holy Book confirms that the contrite heart, together with knowledge is a burnt offering to God; and that everyone who walks in holiness is enlightened to an unbreakable unity².

St. Clement of Alexandria

- ❖ You present such a sacrifice to God, and celebrate it unceasingly day and night; becoming sacrifices to God, presenting yourselves holy and undefiled offerings, according to the words of the apostle: “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God; ... And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*” (Romans 12: 1)³.

St. Cyprian

- ❖ The heart, drwned in the foolishness of pleasures, God intends to purify by remorse; to lead toward salvation. And the pride that brings on us painful wounds, God intends to heal by the contrition of broken life; according to the words of the Holy Book, saying: “*Do not lift up your horn on high; do not speak with a stiff neck*” (Psalm 75: 4). As, when the transgressors fall, and do not confess their evil, nor present a repentance in contrition, they are lifting their horns up high; Hence the Book says: “*A broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise*” (17). All those who mourn their sins without forsaking them, have a contrite heart, but they are not ready yet to break it; Whereas they who forsake their sins, and do not mourn them, they contrite their hearts, yet without breaking them⁴.

St. Gregory the Great

- ❖ Nothing would benefit the soul like contrition; as it is written: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit*” (17). Contrition is a feature of the cross; while pride is dear to the heart of the demin enemies. With contrition, there is chance of falling to a lower level⁵. In case the demons intend to bring the contrite down from his level, there is no range below him to accommodate him in case he falls⁶.
- ❖ The suffering of he who is contrite by remorse for his fall, is less than that of him who rides high on the horse of pride, and walks with haughtiness; for the former practices a spiritual behavior, clearly demonstrated in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector⁷.

¹ عظة ربنا يسوع المسيح على الجبل.

² Stromata 7: 3.

³ Epist. 77: 4.

⁴ Pastoral Care, 3: 30.

⁵ الرسالة الخامسة.

⁶ الرسالة الثامنة والثلاثون.

⁷ الرسالة الثانية والثلاثون.

St. Mar Jacob El-Serougi

- ❖ He said to them: “*For I did not speak to your fathers or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices; But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people’*” (Jeremiah 7: 22); “*Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath*” (Zechariah 8: 17)... He says: “*The sacrifice of God is a contrite spirit*” (17); The contrite heart is a fragrance to God who created it¹.
- ❖ We should not get tired of praying; but keep on crying out to God day and night, supplicating to Him with a contrite spirit and a broken heart; for “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart – these, O God, you will not despise*” (17)².

Martyrius – Sahdona

- ❖ Both the body and the soul, namely, the whole man, intend to become a holy sacrifice to God. The psalmist proclaims that the soul is a sacrifice presented to God, saying: “*The sacrifice to God is a broken spirit*”³.

Let us present our souls a sacrifice by fasting; as we cannot present to God a better sacrifice. This is confirmed by the prophet, saying: “*The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart – these, O God, you will not despise*” (17). Therefore, O man, present your soul to God; present the sacrifice of fasting; make yourself a pure sacrifice, a holy sacrifice, a living sacrifice that stay yours while presenting it to God⁴.

Father Peter Christologos

7- AN ENJOYMENT OF A SPIRITUAL CHURCH LIFE:

No wonder that the psalmist begins his psalm of repentance by seeking mercy for himself, personally, as a confession of his sins; then ends it by an enjoyment of the strong and exultant spiritual church life.... If the sin committed by ‘Achan the son of Carmi has done wrong to the whole people of Israel; as it is said: “*There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies, until you take away the accursed thing from among you*” (Joshua 7: 13); David felt that his repentance is taking away the accursed thing, to give himself a true fellowship together with a holy people; and to let the people enjoy the blessing of his repentance; when God is pleased with him and them.

“Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar” (18-19)

Having repented, David discovered by the spirit of prophecy God’s pleasure in humanity; as the Word of God comes down incarnate, presenting Himself a sacrifice of pleasure to the Father in the name of all believers; and setting His disciples and apostles as living walls for the church established upon Christ, the living Foundation, and the

¹ The Epistle of Bernabas, 12.

² كتاب الكمال، 75.

³ Fr. Peter Chrystologus, Selected Sermons, 1093.

⁴ Selected Sermon.

burnt offering well-received by the Father. Through Him, we offer the “bulls”, namely, a multitude of spiritual offerings.

- ❖ ‘**Zion**’ is interpreted as (the anticipated), and ‘**Jerusalem**’ as (vision of peace); to perceive that you, yourselves, are in Zion and Jerusalem, if you anticipate with hope and surety that you will so become, and that you have peace with God.... The walls of Jerusalem were built; and on them are built (platforms or galleries) of eternity, faith, hope, and love.
- ❖ What is a burnt offering? An animal sacrifice completely burnt by fire on the altar. I wish we are lifted up, and wholly consumed by the divine fire; ... not just our souls, lifted up by the fire of wisdom, but our bodies as well, gain eternity, through being presented as a burnt offering, and death to be swallowed up.
- ❖ In several occasions, the people of Israel offered a multitude of animal sacrifices. Thinking of the lesson which we may learn from this subject, we shall find it connected in our mind to a secret, namely, to the importance of sacrificing our lusts: “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – These, O God, You will not despise*” (17). Our sacrifice would be to glorify the One of sweet fragrance – the Lord Christ; that rises up higher than any symbolic fragrance of the law; the soul would become of sweet fragrance in her life, would smell of the bitterness of priesthood, and the incense of the conscience, representing the diverse virtues; and her life would become sweet fragrance to the Groom. Comparing the holy feeling to the material perfume of the law, Solomon said that the virtues give a sweet non-material fragrance; saying: “*The fragrance of your good ointments is more sweet than any other*” (Songs 1: 3)¹.

St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa

- ❖ He did not reject their sacrifices, because he was offended like a man, as some dare to claim; but, out of compassion on their blindness, and because He seeks for them the true sacrifice that would bring pleasure to God, to receive life from Him².

St. Erinaos

So, the psalmist started by strong cries by which to seek the great mercies of God, confessing his iniquity, and trusting in His salvation work;

He who grants Him the following gifts through repentance:

- 1- The forgiveness of his sins, to make his soul as white as snow.
- 2- Restore to him the joy of His salvation, instead of the sorrow that came into his heart by the sin.
- 3- Grants him a complete and continuous renewal of his nature, by repentance.
- 4- Sanctifies his lips, and opens them to show forth His praise.
- 5- Grants him the strength of testimony, to bring the hypocrites back to the joyful kingdom of God.
- 6- To offer the sacrifices of praise with humility.
- 7- To enjoy the joyful collective spiritual church spirit.

¹ عظة 9 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

² Adv. Haer. 4: 17: 1.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 51

RESTORE ME, AND I WILL RETURN

- ❖ Teach me, O Lord, how to acquire a harp of love;
To accompany the prophet David in his repentance;
With a broken contrite spirit;
And a true hope in the riches of Your mercy.
- ❖ Send David to me, as You sent the prophet Nathan to him;
To make me discover myself, and confess my sins;
Make me cry out together with him;
And weep together with him;
And sigh together with him;
And rejoice together with him, for Your salvation work.
- ❖ I often hid my sin behind my back;
But it came to be before Your face;
And I was denied standing in Your presence;
Let Your Holy Spirit carry it;
And put it before my eyes;
To hide Your face from it;
While my soul gets attached to you;
And sees the splendor of Your face.
- ❖ Now I can say: “My sin is ever before me”;
But the grace of Your Holy Spirit will never get away from my eyes;
I am utterly weak;
You forgive the sins;
You renew of the depths;
You save the souls from corruption;
- ❖ I did wrong to my poor soul;
I did wrong to my beloved church;
I offended all those around me;
Yet truly perceiving Your goodness, I would say:
To You alone, I have sinned;
You alone are without sin;
Yet You received me in Your fellowship;
I misbehaved;
And Your goodness is without limits;
What, then, is my excuse in my sin?!
- ❖ I will not put the blame on circumstances;
I will not use my family as an excuse;
Nor will use the ministers of Your word;
Nor will use the cruelty of men;
But I shall accuse myself before You;
And say: I have sinned.
- ❖ How amazing You are in Your love!

You mix the tears of my repentance with those of my joy;
You turn my bitterness into sweetness!
You turn my fall into conquest!
You grant me the work of Your fiery Spirit;
You make me enjoy a (prevalent) spirit;
You make me no more fear sin;
Nor fear the devil;
As long as You are my support;
Without You, I would perish; And by You I overcome!

- ❖ Turn my repentance into a testimony of truth;
To teach the transgressors Your ways;
And the sinners would be converted to You;
Use me as a vessel for the serious ever-lasting life of repentance.
- ❖ I praise and glorify You;
For, making me repent, You bring me forth to Zion;
And lift my heart up to Jerusalem;
And grant me a heavenly church life.

PSALM 52

THE END OF THE WICKED AND THE PEACE OF THE GODLY

The circumstances of its writing:

The title of this psalm concerns one of the bitter temptations of the prophet David; when he came to 'Ahimalech' the priest in 'Nob', fleeing from king 'Saul'. There. He took the sword of Goliath the Philistine; and he, together with those who were with him ate from the holy bread; then fled to 'Gath', where he hid in the cave of 'Adullam', together with all those with bitter souls (1 Samuel 21-22). When Saul heard of that, and assumed that there was a treason against him among his men, there came 'Doeg the Edomite' and told Saul that he saw David in 'Nob', and that 'Ahimalech' the priest gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath. Saul gave the order to kill Ahimalech together with all the priests in 'Nob'; and when the servants of the king refused to stretch their hands on the priests of God, 'Doug the Edomite' took that role upon himself, and killed 85 priests. In the Septuagint version the number of those killed was 305 men; while Josephus raised it to 385 men. Although it was according to the order of king Saul, yet, what Doeg the Edomite did stamped him as blood-thirsty.

The whole city of the priests in Nob was struck by the sword; except for 'Abiathar' son of Abimalech who fled after David, who said to him: "*I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house. Stay with me; do not fear, for he who seeks my life seeks your life, but with me you shall be safe*" (1 Samuel 22: 22, 23).

Here, the psalmist tell us about the end of evil, and the glory of the persecuted children of God; that made him praise God, and glorify His holy name.

1- The wicked man	1 - 4
2- The destiny of the wicked liars	5
3- The salvation of God	6 - 8
4- Praising God	9

The title:

To the Chief Musician. A contemplation of David when Doeg the Edomite went and told Saul, and said to him, "david has gone to Ahimalech".

'Doeg the Edomite'. 'Doeg' is an Edomite name, meaning (terrified or troubled).

He probably was the same servant who accompanied Saul the son of Kish, when he went to look for the lost donkey of his father (1 Samuel 9: 3); And became the chief of the herdsmen of Saul (1 Samuel 21: 7). And because the herds were the main part of Saul's wealth, the chief of his herdsmen must have been an important person. According to a Jewish tradition, he was one of the most prominent personalities of his time.

According to **St. Augustine**, the word 'Doeg' means (movement), and 'Edom' means (dust) or (earth). It is as though he represented an earthly, and not a heavenly movement, that corrupts the ministry of the Lord.

And according to a Syrian text, this psalm is directed against evil in a general sense; presents a prophecy about the perdition of evil; and constitutes a warning against the kind of religion corrupted by personal selfish motives.

This psalm came to proclaim the boasting by Doeg the Edomite of his evil and violence; symbolizing in this the anti-Christ who boasts of his opposition to the truth, and his persecution of the Lord Christ in the person of His church. It reveals, as well, the deadly weapon of the devil; namely, 'his tongue', or the blasphemy of God.

Some believe that 'Doeg the Edomite' symbolizes 'Judas' who betrayed his Lord, under the pretense of the kiss; the same way 'Doeg the Edomite' delivered the priests to death, under the pretense of appearing as loyal to his master, and caring about the peace of the people.

1- THE WICKED MAN:

“Why do you boast of evil, O mighty one? The goodness of God endures continually” (1)

Some believe that the psalms 52 to 55 present to us a clear portrait of the 'antichrist'. Here, the psalmist talks about the wicked man who persecutes the righteous. This persecution accompanied humanity since Cain killed Abel. There is 'Cain' in every era; but it reaches its climax by the persecution by the anti-Christ of the church. The Holy Book calls this era *“the great tribulation”* (Matthew 24: 21). The wicked is characterized by iniquity mixed with pride, love of deception, and lies.

❖ It would be better for us not to become angry; but in case it happens, this feeling should not, according to the counsel of the apostle, endure longer than one day... And yet, you delay it until the sunset of your life!

Do not you know how to say: *“sufficient for the day is its own trouble”* (Matthew 6: 34)?

Why should you hold grudge against him who offended you? It is not he who did wrong against you, but the devil. You should hate the disease and not the patient!

“Why do you boast of evil, O mighty one?” (1). The psalm proclaimed that about you when it said: *“Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceit all day long”* (2). Namely, all along the days of your life, you disobey the Law-Giver who says: *“Do not let the sun go down on your wrath”* (Ephesians 4: 26); and you never stop talking evil against your neighbor. Therefore the divine revenge uttered by the psalmist by the Spirit, is true; saying: *“God shall likewise destroy you forever, He shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place, and uproot you from the land of the living”* (5). These punishments are the reward of this iniquity.

(St. Mother Sankletiki)

Of the features of the wicked, according to the psalmist are the following:

1- Boasting of evil: Doeg the Edomite, the herdsman or the chief of the herdsmen of Saul, appeared as a butcher who slays and kills without mercy. He killed the priests who were clothed with the Ephod, helpless men, women, and children, and destroyed a weaponless city; Nevertheless, he showed himself as a strong hero and a mighty man, accusing the righteous of lacking loyalty to the king and the state (1 Samuel 22: 8); but his real interest was gaining the favor of Saul, and the material benefit, beside killing the priests, friends of David¹.

❖ do; those who glorify in goodness and not in malice:

a- Human beings need to be mighty, but in righteousness, not in malice ...

¹ W. Plumer: *Psalms*, p. 556.

let him who boasts boast in the Lord. (1 Cor 1: 31)

They glorify in the Lord, and not in themselves.

b- They practice the works for edification with zeal, practice them as strong and steadfast; whereas, if they have to practice seemingly destructive. They do them for edification, and not as pressure on the innocent.

(St. Augustine)

It is a bitter portrait repeated along the history: There is always a 'Doeg' who, counting himself the 'mighty', by his position, carrying the sword of authority, he, clothed with violence like his father the devil, directs his hatred toward those clothed with the 'ephod' who did him nothing wrong, who are clothed with the spirit of worship to God the heavenly Father.

2- Persistence on evil: They do not stop at doing evil, and boasting of it, but the wicked persists on doing it; practice evil, if not by work or by words, it would be by thought; if his hands are not doing oppression, his heart would keep on moving on the way of evil, never getting tired or bored in their love of iniquity, and in practicing it.

❖ **The whole day, and your tongue thought injustice** Every time relentlessly, taking or rest periods, and without stop, when does not make you think sin, as is not in your hand Sin-making is not divert your heart.

(St. Augustine)

❖ As saying, "**the whole day**" means the duration of the life of that, strong, it does not shy, and does not regret of his work and announcing injustice.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

3- Violence mixed with deception:

"Your tongue devices destruction, like a sharp razor working deceitfully" (2)

Doeg the Edomite was characterized by cheating and deceit. In his talk to Saul about Ahimelech the priest, he cut off the truth and distorted it; having purposely not hid the actual conversation that occurred between Ahimelech and David, to show the intention of the former, but, by cutting it off he portrayed him as a traitor who helped David the enemy of the king, which greatly stirred up the anger of Saul.

Being an Edomite, he deceitfully pretended to accept faith, became a proselyte who presented offerings to the temple, and practiced worship to appear as a righteous man, until he got the chance to realize his heart's desire to kill the priests and their families. Appearing like a sharp razor, he only managed just to cut the hair off the head, namely, what is extra in man's life, which is the most that the wicked can do to the children of God, by depriving them of the mortal temporal things, or even of the temporal life itself, by killing the body, that will eventually be gloriously resurrected, sharing with the soul the same crowns.

The work of the wicked is nothing more than cutting the hair off the head. Yet, when the Lord Christ says: "*The very hairs of your head are all numbered; do not fear therefore*" (Matthew 10: 30, 31); Let the wicked strike with his sword as much as he wishes, as not a single hair will fall off our head apart from our Father's will.

When Pilate said to the Lord Christ: "*Do you not know that I have the power to crucify you, and the power to release You; Jesus answered: You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above*" (John 19: 10, 11).

- ❖ By the deception of his tongue, more than by his sword, Doeg the Edomite could kill the priests.

He joyfully and gladly, cut them off like hair by a sharp razor.

On the day Jerusalem was under siege, Rabshakeh, by his deceitful tongue, sharper than a razor, said to the Jews: “Your God cannot deliver you from my hand; I shall take you to a land more fertile than yours” (see 2 kings 18: 19-35). Talking to them in their own tongue, he attempted to draw their hearts to him, when he, in truth, intended to cut them off like a sharp razor does to hair.

We can also apply that more to Judas (Iscaiot), who said to the chief priests: What will you give me, to deliver Jesus to your hands. When they promised to give him 30 pieces of silver, he sought how he might conveniently betray Him. When the night came, he did what he uttered by day light, and attempted like a sharp razor to wipe off our Lord.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ What could the razor of Doeg do to someone who concentrates his eyes on the kingdom of heaven; looking forward to dwell together with God? He can only turn him bald without hair, by which he would belong to Christ who was crucified at the Golgotha, namely the place of the skull (Matthew 27: 33) .The hair refers to the temporal unimportant things that are only extra.

Let Doeg the Edomite, then, move his deceitful tongue as much as he wants, for he only can take off the temporal things, while the important ones will last forever

(St. Augustine).

4- He loved evil more than good:

“You love evil more than good, and lying rather than speaking righteousness”

(3)

- ❖ Judas chose evil, namely, the devil, rather than good, namely, Christ. And oppression, or lying rather than preaching the gospel. He preferred to be with the killers of the incarnate God, rather than being among the saintly apostles.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

5- He loved the deceitful:

Here the wicked reaches the climax of his evil; as he, not only practices evil, but boasts it, and loves it as well, and he even loves the wicked people, partakes of their evil, and provokes them to do it with more violence. His pleasure becomes in keeping the company of the wicked, not for any other goal than to enjoy seeing the perdition of people.

“You love all devouring words, O deceitful tongue” (4)

The devil is called the killer, the liar, and the father of liars. So are the features of the anti-christ, and his followers; about which the psalmist has already talked¹.

2- THE DESTINY OF THE WICKED LIARS:

“God shall likewise destroy you forever, He shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place, and uproot you from the land of the living” (5)

There are three interpretations of those threats:

¹ راجع تفسير مزمو ر 14.

a- Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the prophet David proclaims the tribulations to dwell upon Doeg the Edomite unless he repents. To show His goal of that threat, God says: “*The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, If that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight, so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it*” (Jeremiah 18: 7-10). That is what happened in the case of Nineveh, whom God threatened through Jonah the prophet; but, once it repented, it enjoyed the divine mercies; and it was said that “*God relented and turned away from His fierce anger*” (Jonah 3: 9)¹.

b- Having seen through his experience that the wicked who persist upon their evil, particularly on their violence and deception, would meet a sudden death (Psalm 55: 23), David believed that Doeg the Edomite will not be an exception².

c- This threat was a prophecy about what will dwell upon Judas, the son of perdition, who went and hanged himself; or about the anti-Christ, whose reign would not last for more than three and a half years.

In this threat, three things could be noticed:

a- If **destruction** is to be the natural fruit of cheating, deception, or of vanity, for what is vain will certainly end up with vanity, Yet the psalmist refers the process of destruction to God; for, every evil is actually directed personally to God. As for us, our role is not to seek revenge, but repentance of the others. And in case they persist on evil, they would fall into vanity according to the divine justice.

Such destruction, being eternal; namely, forever, does not realize instantly; for God in His longsuffering, anticipates the repentance of all;

Yet His longsuffering does not imply disregarding the matter.

b- **Taking the wicked away from, and plucking them out of their dwelling places**, means that all what they enjoy of possibilities and capacities: strength, power, authority, possessions, intelligence, wits, etc., are divine gifts that God will take away if they misuse them.

c- **Uprooting them from the land of the living**: If our world is the land of the dead; where no one will live forever, the wicked could live in it like the tares with the wheat. Yet, on the great day of the Lord, the wicked will not enter the land of the living, where the believers who strive with God live, partake of the praises of the heavenly creatures, and enjoy the fellowship of eternal inheritance.

❖ Everything built on cheating and lies will be destroyed by God; and every plant not planted by the heavenly Father will be uprooted; the same way with Doeg, who, after having been a heathen Edomite, then entered into the Jewish religion; once he told on David, he was plucked out by God of his dwelling place, namely of the congregation of believers. So it will be with Judas who delivered Christ; He was plucked out of the dwelling place of the apostles, and from the land of the living, namely from among the righteous, and even from the life of this age; as he went and hanged himself. So it is, as well, with those who crucified Christ; He destroyed their city, temple, authority, and sent them to exile..... He scattered them away from their dwelling places, namely,

¹ Cf. W. Plumer: *The Psalms*. 567.

² Cf. W. Plumer: *The Psalms*. 567.

from the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem, and sent them away from the inheritance of the righteous.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ We should have roots in the land of the living. The root could be hidden from sight; whereas the fruits would be visible ... Our root is our love, while our fruits are our works.

If your works come out of love, your roots are in the land of the living.

(St. Augustine)

If “*love never fails*” (1 Corinthians 13: 8), let us, therefore, practice all our works motivated by true love. Then we shall have an inexhaustible deposit in the heavenly places. Whereas, if we practice all our works, “*and though we bestow all our goods to feed the poor, and though we give our bodies to be burned, but have not love, it profits us nothing*” (1 Corinthians 13: 3).

Let us have love, to have God, and to dwell together with Him in His heavens forever.

3- THE SALVATION OF GOD:

“The righteous shall also see and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying, ‘Here is the man who did not make God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness’ (6, 7)

While the wicked despises the longsuffering of God, the righteous, on the other hand, seeing what dwell upon the wicked, they would fear the Lord, and laugh at the weakness and the vanity of evil, and would have benefit for their life, perceiving that whoever trust in the abundance of his riches or in his temporal authority, and in God, would perish; as according to the apostle: “*All these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition*” (1 Corinthians 10: 11).

Practicing their worship and their behavior with others, motivated by love which they enjoy as a divine gift, they will have a complete daring with God, without disregarding His honor and awe: “*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2: 12); and, “*Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling*” (Psalm 2: 11).

According to **St. Augustine**, we, in this world are like those who walk in a dark night, carrying the lamps of the prophetic word. They walk in fear and trembling until the day of eternity dawns, when there will be no more fear. As according to the apostle Peter: “*We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*” (2 Peter 1: 19).

This is on the negative aspect, when the righteous fear falling into what the wicked do, with their trust in the abundance of their riches and vanity. Whereas on the positive aspect, being planted like olive trees in the house of God, their roots go deep in the sacred soil, to feed on God’s love, mercies, holiness, and word. About the nourishment that their roots absorb as olive trees, the psalmist proclaims:

“But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever” (8)

The kingdom of God likens virgins (Matthew 25: 1), like olive trees, some, bearing the practical fruits of love, tool oil in their vessels; while others, without fruits,

have no oil in their vessels; and hence unable to meet the Bridegroom, nor to enter together with Him into the eternal wedding.

- ❖ I count the Mount of Olives, symbolically refers to the churches of the Gentiles, among which olive trees were planted, and each church can say: *“I am like a green olive tree in the house of God”* (8).

Probably also in the Mount of Olives, where the roots of the good olive trees live; and the branches of the wild olive trees are grafted

in the good tree instead of the branches that are broken off because of unbelief (Romans 11: 20).

The farmer who dwells on the Mount of olives is the Word of God who works in the church, namely, Christ, who perpetually grafts the wild olive branches in the good tree of Moses and the other prophets; so that being strengthened by the saintly prophets who perceived that their prophecies refer to Christ, the new branches would give forth more fruition than those of the early olive tree that was broken off, and became unprofitable because of the curse of the law¹.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ It is not good enough for us to be like olive trees, laden with commandments on every side, but we have to be fruitful as well².
- ❖ The virgins, as we well know, had oil, albeit not enough to hold until the time when the Bridegroom arrives (Matthew 25: 3, 8). That is why we are committed to have a plenty of oil, and to be like an olive tree in the house of the Lord. Let us meditate in the heavy burden of sins that each one of us commits against the other; And let us practice works of mercy as much as them³.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ Be an olive tree in the house of God. Do not ever lose hope, but hold fast to faith with the splendor of faithfulness, to liken that plant, and even to surpass it in fruition; through giving an abundance of alms⁴.

(St. Basil the Great)

- ❖ Jesus came to the Mount of Olives (Luke 19: 2, 9), to plant new olive trees on the top of the Mount of virtue, in the Higher Jerusalem, which is the mother of all (Galatians 4: 26).

The heavenly Gardner is on this Mount, where all those planted in the house of the Lord would be able to proclaim: *“But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God”* (8 LXX). This Mount is probably Christ Himself; For who else can produce such fruition, in the perfection of the Spirit in the fruitful nations? For, through Him we ascend, and to Him we ascend (John 3: 13)⁵.

(St. Ambrose)

By killing the priests of God, Doeg the Edomite came to be like him who cuts off olive trees in the house of the Lord, to have the wrath of God dwell on him and on those around him. David, the fugitive, on the other hand, although physically denied the

¹ *Commentary on Matt 32.*

² *In Hebr., hom. 32: 8.*

³ *Homilies on Ephesians, 24.*

⁴ *Hexameron 5: 6.*

⁵ *Exposition of Luke 9: 2.*

presence in the house of the Lord, Yet, by his fruitful heart, he is like a green olive tree planted in the house of God. Whereas the wicked priests who minister in the temple by their bodies, and not by their hearts, are out of the spiritual house of God, considered as strangers to God, and to His house.

Let the wicked do whatever they will; for they shall not be able to uproot the good from the house of the Lord, nor to deny them of their spiritual fruition. On the contrary, the more they oppose and drive them out, the deeper their hidden roots will be in the house of the Lord.

4- PRAISING GOD:

The psalmist ends the psalm by praising God, and holding fast to His holy name, saying:

“I will praise You forever, because You have done it; and in the presence of Your saints, I will wait on Your name, for it is good” (9)

❖ He says: On my own, I have not made myself a fruitful olive tree in the house of my God, But it is Your mercy and Your help that have done it. Hence, I should thank You, and perpetually praise Your name, for the sake of the rest of Your goodness, for You are Good, and the Doer of every goodness; something well known by Your righteous servants.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Doeg is condemned, and David is crowned!

It is a great confession of Your works.

Bitter is the world; While Your name is exultant (good). As, even though there are sweet things in the world, yet they will eventually turn bitter. Your name is preferred, not only for the sake of its greatness, but for the sake of its exultation as well.

He says: *“Taste and see that the Lord is good”* (Psalm 34: 8)

Your name is exultant, yet not in the eyes of the wicked.

I know how sweet it is, yet only for those who taste it.

(St. Augustine)

By that, the psalmist revealed the features of the wicked who opposes God in the persons of His saints; using both violence and craftiness; and will perish because of his evil, will get to vanity, and will be driven out of the land of the living. The righteous, on the other hand, who endures the persecution of the wicked for the sake of the Lord, will be planted by God in His house as an olive tree, that bears the fruition of the Spirit, and is watered by love and divine mercy. By this, the righteous will experience the sweetness of the mercies of God; will glorify His name, and will praise Him forever.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 52

**PLANT ME IN YOUR HOUSE
A FRUITFUL OLIVE TREE**

- ❖ Plant me in Your house, a fruitful olive tree;
Let me carry oil in my vessel;
To enter together with the wise virgins into Your wedding;
And enjoy fellowship with You in Your glories.
- ❖ Hold fast the roots of love in me;
To be nourished by Your love and Your mercy.
And to bear the fruition of the Spirit, that bring pleasure to the heart of the Father.
- ❖ Let the wicked enemy strike with his whole energies;
He will never be able to uproot me from Your house;
Let him strike my head with his razor;
He will only take away the hair from it;
In all that, You even care to count the number of hairs in my head;
Of them not a single hair will fall down without Your permission.

PSALM 53

UNFAITHFULNESS LEADS TO UNGODLINESS

Between Psalms 14 and 53:

Psalm 53 could almost be a repetition of psalm 14. Both represent a cry out to the ignorant person who denies the existence of God; if not by public atheism, it would be by practical behavior. Atheism would lead to ungodliness, which in turn would lead to denying the existence of God, as a kind of covering or calming down the conscience.

In the two psalms, it is to be noticed:

1- The name of God came seven times in each one of the psalms. Yet in psalm 14, it came four times (in Hebrew) as “Jehovah”, and three times as “Elohim”; Whereas in psalm 53, it came as “Elohim” the seven times. As we know, the name “Jehovah” concerns God in His relationship with His people, “The Being” (He who is among His people), who enters with them into a covenant. Whereas “Elohim” concerns God the (Creator) ¹.

2- In psalm 14: 1, the expression “*abominable works*” came (in Hebrew) as (lila); while in psalm 53, the expression “*abominable iniquity*” came as (awel).

3- In psalm 14: 3, the expression “turned aside” came (in Hebrew) as (hakhalsar); while in psalm 53, it came as “(hullosag), meaning (gone astray).

4- The two verses 5 and 6, in psalm 14, are put together as one verse in psalm 53.

Why the repetition?

Some may wonder why what came in psalm 14 would be repeated in psalm 53 with minor differences. Could there be a repetition in the inspiration?

1- This repetition confirms that there no forgery in the Holy Book; Or else this repetition, counted as meaningless would be omitted.

2- Psalm 14 came in its right place; As the talk in the first division of the psalms as a whole (Psalms 1 to 41), concerns man and salvation.

On the personal level, man is committed to confess the corruption of his nature, and consequently, his need of a personal Savior. In the psalm preceding it, the psalmist cried out: “*How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?*”

(Psalm 13: 1). The answer, as it came in psalm 14: God did not hide His face from man, but it is because of man’s ignorance and corrupted nature. Looking down from heaven, God finds no one understand or seek Him. The next psalm (15) gives the features of the pious man who is qualified to dwell in the house of the Lord; particularly, “*walking uprightly*”, a feature which only applies perfectly on the incarnate Word. Namely, there is no salvation for the believer, except by uniting to Him, in order to be prepared to enjoy the divine sanctuaries.

In the second division of the psalms (Psalms 42 to 72), the talk is about the church and salvation. If the wicked intend to uproot the righteous from the church, God, however plants them like fruitful olive trees in the house of God (Psalm 52). Once again, he confirms, on a collective level, that it is our corruptive nature, and not the apparent enemies, that denies us the enjoyment of the holy life of the spiritual church. ... Psalm

¹راجع المقدمة في المزامير: مزامير إلهيم.

14, therefore, gives the secret of our corruption as individuals; while psalm 52 confirms that, for this same reason, the whole congregation gets corrupted.

3- Each of the two psalm, although very much alike, was used in a different situation.

The general frame, and the interpretation:

We can get back to psalm 14 to avoid repetition; But I shall only add few commentaries to the previous interpretation:

1- Between lack of faith and ungodliness	1 - 2
2-A collective corruption	3
3- “They eat up My people as they eat bread”	4 - 5
4- The church rejoices for the spiritual freedom	6

The title:

Folly of the Godless, and the restoration of Israel To the Chief Musician, Set to ‘Mahalath’. A contemplation of David.

The word ‘Mahalath’, only found in the title of psalm 88, some believe it to refer to the tune of the song; others believe it to refer to a special kind of musical instrument used to play it; while still others translate it as “Chief” or a “Band leader”.

Some translate it as (our maladies), and believe that it refers to the malady of sin, and the weakness it causes.... And believe that this psalm was used in the time of affliction, when the believers feel as though they entered into weakness because of the scoffing and ridicule against them by the wicked¹. ... And according to **St. Augustine**, it means entering into a condition like the pains of giving birth. Therefore, if the wicked bring pain on the church, yet it will eventually transform into a case of giving birth; the church will produce new members, in whom Christ is conformed.

❖ As the Hebrew word ‘Malath’ in psalm 53, refers to her, who goes through pains, like that of childbirth; The believer should know that the One who suffers or feels pain in the world where we live, is Christ, both His Head up, and the members of His body below. For He who does not feel or suffer pain, would not say: “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*” (Acts 9: 4). Yet, Saul who persecuted Him, and caused Him pain, came to believe in Him, and to suffer pain. He, himself, got enlightened, and was grafted in the same members he used to persecute, to proclaim: “*My little children, for whom I labor in birth again, until Christ is formed in you*” (Galatians 4: 19).

(**St. Augustine**)

1- BETWEEN LACK OF FAITH AND UNGODLINESS:

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God’. They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity. There is none who does good” (1)

The word “fool” here, does not mean ignorance or lack of knowledge or of wisdom, but it bears, as well, behavioral corruption, particularly in opposing faith in God, and foolishly rejecting His will. In psalm 74: 22 it came: “*Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily*”..... The righteous ‘Job’ called his wife, who grumbled against the will of God: “*like one of the foolish women*”; And the prophet Isaiah says: “*The foolish person will no longer be called ‘generous’,*

¹ Cf. *The NIV Study Bible, 1985, p. 840*

nor the miser said to be bountiful. For the foolish person will speak foolishness, and his heart will work iniquity; to practice ungodliness, to utter error against the Lord” (Isaiah 32: 5-6).

The “*foolish*” here means a no-body, licentious, lowly, with a mud-filled head, and a defiled heart; who walks in the darkness¹.

- ❖ “*There is no God*”. This expression should not be taken literally; namely, that the foolish is always an atheist who denies the existence of God. But it means here the practical atheism; Despite not denying the existence of God, yet they deny His divine care; if not by their tongue, it will be by their hearts and inner thoughts; They see in God, the cruel Being who looks for any fault done by man, or for any weakness in his life, to punish him.
- ❖ Who can think right, and does not know that God is there?! ... Yet, it so happens once, and often, despite the fact that everything commits us to recognize God, but the evil pleasures provoke us to deny His existence; to utter in our hearts the counsel of evil to receive it, that is against faith².

(St. Hilary, bishop of Poitier)

- ❖ He who dares to say that there is no God is foolish; which was the feature of the ‘Rabsaris’, and the ‘Rabshakeh’, who said: “*Who among all the gods of the land have delivered their countries from my hand,; that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?* (2 kings 18: 35). The prophet, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has known what they believed in their hearts that there is no God.

We say that those who deny the Deity of the Lord Christ are foolish; for they deny the great wonders He performed, that proclaim His Deity.

And also who say: Yes, There is God who created things from the beginning, but He cares no more! Those are all foolish.

- ❖ He who says in his heart “*There is no God*”, departs from the true faith, and falls in unbelief; for by this he corrupts what God has planted in the hearts of men of sound dogma; for faith is only set on works; as it is said about the good works of Cornelius (Acts 10) and others, who were enlightened by the light of upright faith; whereas he who is against this is corrupt.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Corruption begins by evil dogma, which leads to ungodliness, then to iniquities.

How corrupt and ungodly were those who cried out, saying: “*If He is the Son of God, let Him come down from the cross*” (Mathew 27: 40); they are publicly saying: There is no God.

(St. Augustine)

“*They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; there is none who does good*” (1). Here, the psalmist talks about the collective corruption that dwelt upon humanity since the fall of Adam and Eve: “*And God saw that the earth was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth*” (Genesis 6: 12).

Here, the psalm uses the Hebrew word “*Elohim*”, meaning (God the Creator). If the peoples have rejected entering into a covenant with Him, and His dwelling among

¹ Cf. Adzm Clarke on ps 14: 1.

² On Ps. 52 (53): 2.

them, He, being a Creator who loves His creation, looks at mankind, hoping that, when they come to understand His feature as Philanthropic, they would seek Him. Psalm 33 says: *“The Lord looks from heaven, He sees all the sons of men; from the place of His habitation He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth”* (Psalm 33: 13, 14). If man foolishly thinks that God lives in seclusion in His heavens, and does not care for mankind; the psalmist, on the other hand, shows that God, in His humility, using human expressions, says He looks at the sons of men, to pour in them the understanding and wisdom, to perceive His mercy, and to come to have a covenant with Him.

By saying: *“They have together become corrupt”* (3), the psalmist demonstrates the collective work; as though all men have done together a joint pact to apostate from God their Creator, who cares for them. Humanity has rejected the divine Truth, and decided together to take the twisted ways.

“God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God” (2)

According to **St. Augustine**, may lead one to wonder: Is God not aware of everything, to have to look down from heaven to see?! To answer this question, we say that the Holy Book often refers to the works of God in human way for our sake. Saying: *“The Spirit searches all things, yes, even the deep things of God”* (1 Corinthians 2: 10), does not mean that the Spirit needs to search to know the deep things of God; but this is written to exhort us to search the divine secrets by the Holy Spirit of God. The same thing when it is said that *“God looks down from heaven upon the children of men”*, to see that *“they have together become corrupt”*; It does not mean that God was not aware of that; but the goal of using this expression is to proclaim to men their actual status, that they may seek salvation from corruption that has dwelt upon them.

2- A COLLECTIVE CORRUPTION:

“Every one of them has turned aside; they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, No, not one” (3)

The expression *“turned aside”*, means that man was created upright by God; but, through his own choice, has turned aside from uprightness; and made void the authority that was given to him by God, and submitted as a slave to abominable reactions. By preferring evil to good, he made void the sharpness of his insight.

By saying that, as mankind have not enjoyed sonhood to God, *“there is none who does well; No, not one”*, **St. Augustine** believes, that the psalmist prepares everyone to enjoy the divine work. As, if all mankind have become corrupt, God would not hasten to condemn them, but would instead work to set some of them children for Himself.

❖ Before the appearance of Christ, the Word of God, in flesh, the darkness of sin and disobedience was prevailing upon the whole earth; Then, as is written in psalms 13 and 53: *“God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God; ... There is none”* (Psalm 14: 2; 53: 2, 3). By the incarnation of Christ, the Word of God, the Light begotten by the Father, without separation from Him, like the ray from the sun; and gave us the Holy Spirit by baptism; He shed His light on us, brought forth fear into us; and the light of His

promises into our hearts; And we came to believe, to love Him, and to keep His commandments¹.

(St. (Mar.) Ephram the Syrian)

3- “THEY EAT UP MY PEOPLE AS THEY EAT BREAD”

“Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God?” (4)

Here, it is God who speaks; He who provided humanity with all their needs; who created everything on and under earth for the enjoyment of men; And who, above all things, presented to them Himself to satisfy their depths by His exalted love. But man, in his evil, intends to eat his neighbor; and as is written: *“Pour out Your fury on the Gentiles, who do not know You, and on the families who do not call on Your name; for they have eaten up Jacob, devoured him, and consumed him, and made his habitation desolate”* (Jeremiah 10: 25); And: *“Their rejoicing was like feasting on the poor in secret”*(Habakkuk 3: 14); And, *“Who also eat the flesh of My people, flay their skin from them, break their bones”* (Micah 3: 3).

How about the good men who are devoured by the wicked?

According to **St. Augustine**: [Those people who are devoured, who suffer from the wicked, who moan among them; they, instead of being men, they will come to be the children of God! For they have been devoured as men!].

And how about the wicked?

St. Augustine often say the human wolves, while devouring the human lambs, and drinking their blood; will, themselves, sometimes be transformed into meek lambs; as it happened with Saul of Tarsus. ... The wicked, intending to prey upon men, and to devour them, perpetually, and unceasingly, as they daily eat bread, Some of them, while doing that, happen to become children of God, through receiving faith, and enjoying baptism.

❖ Devours this people, who suffers from bad guys, that which sighs and ache amid the bad guys, this gobble up

St. Augustine

When the Assyrians put Jerusalem under siege, despised and reproached God, He sent His angel and terrified them (2 kings 18).

He who calls upon God, yet not for His sake, but for the sake of temporal things, would lose his joy and gladness of salvation; and instead of peace, fear would dwell upon him, for no other reason except for his deprivation of God, the Source of peace.

❖ Some do call; Yet, *“They do not call upon God”* (4). You call upon what you love, you call what you are drawn to. When you call to get wealth, inheritance, or a worldly honor, you are calling to get your heart’s desire, and make God a Helper to realize them, and not to listen to your needs. ... Suppose you ask for something evil, Would He not be merciful to you, if He does not let you have it?! ... Yet, in your sight, He would become nothing to you.... How often you say: I prayed, and prayed, yet He does not listen²!

² On Ps. 86: 7.

¹ تفسير التكوين 1: 5-3.

- ❖ It is befitting of us to call upon God to seek, not His temporal blessings, but seek His Person.

Although they call daily upon God, yet *“They do not call upon God”*.

Let me tell you that we are committed to worship God for free (and not for the sake of His good gifts). We are committed to love Him for His own sake; namely, with purity; Not for expecting that He would give something to us, but to give Himself to us.

(St. Augustine)

“There they are in great fear, where no fear was. For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you; You have put them to shame, because God has despised them” (5)

“You have put them to shame”. If God allows the wicked to afflict His people and believers, yet it would be for some time; But *“He who sits in the heaven shall laugh; The Lord will hold them in derision; Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and despise them in His deep displeasure”* (Psalm 2: 4, 5).

And as God says on the tongue of His prophet Isaiah, concerning Sennacherib, king of Assyria: *“Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom has you raised your voice, and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel By your messengers you have reproached the Lord, and said: ‘By the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains But I know your dwelling place; your going out and your coming in, and your rage against Me, because your rage against Me and your tumult have come up to My ears. Therefore, I will put My hook in your nose, and My bridle in your lips; and I will turn you back by the way which you came”* (2 Kings 19: 22-23, 27-28).

When the Assyrian was feeling secure, terror dwelt upon them, when the angel of the lord went out and killed in their camp one hundred and eighty-five thousand of their soldiers (2 Kings 19: 35).

There was no cause of fear from the Lord Christ, who came down to save the world, and not to set up a temporal kingdom for Himself; And yet Herod got terrified from Him, and plotted to have Him killed; And the Jewish leaderships were also terrified, and sought to have Him crucified.

According to **St. Augustine**, he who calls upon God will never fall into fear, where no fear is; saying: [There is no fear when man loses wealth; and yet men do fear in such conditions! But, in case man loses wisdom, he should rather fear; and yet men have no fear! ... You have fear to give back to God what He has given you; and yet you intend to lose salvation].

He who does not call upon God fears when there is no fear; for he cares how to satisfy his own body, and to please men, and not to please God. But he, who calls upon God will not fear except from God whom he seeks to please. The former, seeking to please men will be destroyed, lose his spiritual temple, and his bones will be scattered.

- ❖ *“God scatters the bones of those who (please) other people” (5)....* Here, he does not mean the bones in the body, but he means the strength of the heart and mind, by which man can practice goodness. These strength of the soul are the zeal that leads to serious persistence, the spiritual maturity, perseverance, and endurance; God scatters these features in those who are keen on pleasing other people¹.

¹ *Comm.. on Luke, hom 70.*

- ❖ “*God scatters the bones of those who (please) other people* (5) ... Because the desire to please other people is always food for the cursed pride, hated by God, as well as by men. It is the head and the roots of pride. He who falls a victim to such lust, would seek honor and commendation, hated by God who abhors the proud, and loves the humble in mind, who does not seek glory; God would show him mercy¹.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- ❖ The believer is committed to give thanks to God, the awesome and the glorified; and not to practice anything with the spirit and conceit and vain glory (Philippians 2: 3); but for the sake of the glory and pleasure of God; As “*God scatters the bones of those who are (pleased with evil)*” (5)².

(St. Basil the Great)

- ❖ The apostle warns us, saying: “*Let us not become conceited*” (Galatians 5: 26). And the Lord rebukes the Pharisees, saying to them: How could you believe, when you receive glory one from another; and the glory from the One God, you do not receive?!. About those, the blessed David also threatens: “*God will scatter the bones of those who flatter other people*” (5)³.

- ❖ A soldier of Christ, who desire to strive in this true spiritual battle, is committed to strive by every way to overcome that distorted, inconsistent, multi-faced (being), he who attacks us from every side; from whom we could be saved by thinking of the saying of David: “*God will scatter the bones of those who flatter the other people*” (5). At the beginning, we should do nothing out of conceit or seeking the vain glory. And if we start to do something good, we should strive to support it with the same amount of care; for fear that the sickness of vain glory would crawl to us, and destroy all the fruit of our labor⁴.

(St. John Cassian)

- ❖ In case you wish that no one would get in your way, supplicate to God in secret, and fast; then no one will harm you. If the demons provoke you to flatter other people, do not listen to them; and remember the saying of the Lord: “*Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them; but your charitable deed may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly*” (Matthew 6: 1-4); And remember the saying of the prophet: “*For God will scatter the bones of those who (flatter) the people; God will put them to shame, for He despises them*” (5). He will not listen to their prayers, but His wrath will rather be on them⁵.

(Pope Abba Theophilos)

- ❖ “*Let your light shine before men, to see your good deeds, and glorify your Father in heaven*”. If He only says: “*Let your light shine before men, to see your good deeds*” His words would seem as though He made the commendation of men a goal in itself; something sought by the heretics, the honor-seekers, and vain glory seekers; on whom Paul the apostle says: “*For If I still please men, I would not be a servant of Christ*” (Galatians 1: 10); and: “*For you have become conceited*” (Galatians 5: 26); and: “*Let*

¹ Comm.. on Luke, hom 110.

² A Discourse on Ascetical Discipline, (Frs. Of the Church, volume 9, p. 35).

³ Deinstitutis caenoborum, Book 11: 12.

⁴ Deinstitutis caenoborum, Book 11: 19.

⁵ رسالة القديس أنبا ثيوفيلس إلى الرهبان، 16 (فردوس الآباء).

each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another” (Galatians 6: 4); And David the prophet says: “You have put them to shame, because God has despised them”; and: “God has scattered the bones of him who pleases men” (Psalm 53: 5) ¹.

(St. Augustine)

4- THE CHURCH REJOICES FOR THE SPIRITUAL FREEDOM:

“Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When God brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad” (6)

If foolishness will let the congregation (and the individual) lose faith in God, and their spiritual behavior, live in corruption, and call upon God, yet not for His sake, but for what is temporal; which would end up in scattering their bones, and in the loss of their peace, and even their being; Salvation would, otherwise, grant the church freedom from the captivity of the devil, to rejoice and be glad.

Father Onesimus believes that the word “Israel” here, means every believer who sees God by his mind; and the word “Jacob” means everyone who wrestles and chases the enemy. The rejoicing church sees her Savior by faith, and strives by God’s grace in her battle against the devil, her enemy.

The expression: “*When God brings back the captivity of His people*” (6), does not refer to the Babylonian captivity; but the return of the people to their prior glory, after being humiliated by the enemy for some time. That was the Holy Book meant who it spoke about the captivity of the righteous “Job” (Job 42: 10), when God restored him to his prior glory before he got into the temptation.

Return from captivity means return to glory and prosperity as it came in (Ezekiel 16: 53; Zephaniah 2: 7; Amos 9: 14; Hosea 6: 11). If sin humiliates man, and brings the soul forth as though into captivity; repentance or the return to God, will grant liberation from captivity, enjoyment of exultation, prosperity, and glory.

¹ *Sermon on Mount, 1: 7: 18.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 53

FRUITFUL SUFFERINGS

- ❖ On the cross, O Savior, You received the sufferings of love;
And You gave birth to us, Your church and Your children;
You granted us to partake of Your sufferings;
So that we, in turn, would give birth to new children;
Who would conform to Your image.
- ❖ You allowed the wicked to eat us as they eat bread;
To be transformed from being the children of men to be the children of God.
They devour us daily, without ceasing;
And the anguish would turn into a fruitful testimony of the truth.
- ❖ The wicked do not call upon You;
Because they do not know You;
They will be deprived of the inner peace
They will fear, when there is no fear;
As for us, we see You;
And strive with Your grace;
To get liberated from the authority of the enemy;
And to enjoy the perpetual rejoicing and the heavenly exultation.

PSALM 54

THE SURE DELIVERANCE

A lamentation or a praise?

In the last psalm, the foolish, thinking that there is no God, come down to devour the righteous, or to eat them as daily bread, and to kill them if possible; Yet God scatters the bones of the wicked, who despises God, boasts of his evil, and seeks to please men. Whereas He grants inner freedom to the righteous, and, out of them, He sets the new Israel, namely, those who see God by the mind; and the true Jacob, who wrestles and overcomes. He grants them the true joy, and the spiritual inner rejoicing.

Then comes psalm 54 to present a living example, and the experience of sure salvation, enjoyed by the prophet David, that he presented in the form of a lamentation, or rather a praise, through which he proclaims the power of God's name for salvation; When David fled from the face of king Saul and his men; when the true shepherd fled before the face of the hired hand, who only cares for his own benefit, even at the expense of his flock of sheep; Or when the meek lamb fled before the face of the wolf.

David took refuge in Ziph, a city in the mountains of Judah (Joshua 15: 55), to hide in its natural strongholds. But the Ziphites, Instead of asking David to depart, they betrayed him. Fearing Saul, they came to him, saying, "*Is David not hiding in our land?!*" (1 King 26: 1). They intended to deliver David into his hands, but God delivered him.

The praise of the cross:

In the beginning of the prayer of the sixth hour, the believer, as well as the whole church, sing this psalm, being the praise of the cross, by which the believer partakes of the sufferings of his crucified Christ. If the Lord has, by His own free will, carried the sins of the whole world, to atone by His blood; the believer, as a member in the body of Christ, not enduring the sin, cries out to God, taking refuge in the precious blood of Christ, to destroy evil, and to tread upon the devil and his hosts under his feet; presenting the sacrifice of praise to the name of the Lord, Savior of the world.

Some churches use this psalm during the rites of the great Friday.

The general frame:

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1- Salvation is in the name of God | 1 - 3 |
| 2- God is my Helper | 4 - 5 |
| 3- The sacrifice of thanksgiving | 6 - 7 |

The title:

Answered prayer for deliverance from adversaries; To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A contemplation of David when the Ziphites went and said to Saul: "Is David not hiding with us?"

The first book of Samuel tells us about two events in which David almost fell into the hands of Saul (1 Samuel 23: 14-29; 26: 1-25). We are not sure in which of those two events has David written this psalm, but most of the scholars believe it to be written in

the first one; Namely, the prophet wrote it in En Gedi after his first deliverance, and not in Gath after being delivered in the the second time¹:

“Then the Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, ‘Is David not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hills of Hachilah which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king’s hand’. And Saul said, ‘Blessed are you of the Lord, for you have compassion on me.... Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds of En Gedi” (1 Samuel 23: 19-21, 29).

This psalm constitutes a lamentation or a cry which expresses trust in the complete deliverance of God for the suffering believers along all generations, particularly in the great tribulation. Some believe that the Speaker here is Christ, the Lord of glory, the Son of David who suffers for our sake.

According to **St. Augustine**, the word ‘Ziph’ means (adorned) or (fraud) or (flowering for a short time). As though those who betrayed David were (fraud), like grass that flowers for a short time, but will soon wither. The Ziphites assumed that they will prosper through their treason of David, yet their plan failed and they perished, whereas David got forth out of all afflictions a conqueror and victorious².

❖ On David, in his hiding place, will apply the saying of the apostle Paul about the members of Christ: *“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”* (Colossians 3: 3).

Those *“hidden in Christ”*, When will they prosper? The apostle answers this question by directly adding: *“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory”* (Colossians 3: 4). And when those *“hidden in Christ”* prosper, the *“Ziphites”* will wither.

Isaiah portrays the glory of those *“Ziphites”* in the following way: *“All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field”* Then their end will be: *“The grass withers, the flower fades”* (Isaiah 40: 6, 7)

How about the end of David? the prophet Isaiah directly adds: *“But the Word of our God stands forever”* (Isaiah 40: 8).

Would you like to be *“Ziphites”*? They prosper in this world, then will wither in the day of judgment, to be cast into the everlasting fire! Would you chose their destiny?!

Your Lord is hidden here, So are all the righteous; For their goodness is inside, and hidden in the heart, where faith, love, and hope are; ...where their treasure is ... All these things are hidden, so is their reward.

(**St. Augustine**)

1- SALVATION IS IN THE NAME OF GOD:

Saul was on one side of the mountain, while David was on the other side; and between them, were many inaccessible rough rocks. Although they could see one another, yet Saul could not reach David except through a long route around. To keep David from getting away, Saul sent a group of warriors from one side, and another group from the other side. But God found a way out for David, when a messenger came to tell Saul: *“Hasten and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land”* (1 Samuel 23: 27). It is said that they have invaded Saul’s personal property³.

¹ W. Plumer: *The Psalms*, p. 574.

² للمؤلف: صموئيل الأول، 1977م، ص 164.

³ للمؤلف: صموئيل الأول، 1988م، ص 166.

Perceiving that his deliverance was realized, not by any human plans, by human capabilities, or through human friendship, but in the name of the Lord of hosts; the prophet David sang:

“Save me God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your strength” (1)

That is David’s experience since his young age. By it, while a boy, he spoke to king Saul, who said to him: *“You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he, a man of war from his youth”* to this David responded by saying: *“The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion, and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine”* (1 Samuel 17: 33, 37).

To Goliath he said: *“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts ...”* (1 Samuel 17: 45).

Perceiving the strength in the name of God, the psalmist says:

“We have trusted in His holy name” (Psalm 33: 21)

“Through Your name we will trample those who rise against us” (Psalm 44: 5)

“I will lift up my hands in Your name; My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness” (Psalm 63: 4, 5)

“Help us, O god of our salvation, For the glory of Your name. And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins” (Psalm 79: 9).

“In Your name they rejoice all day long” (Psalm 89: 16).

In the name of God, the psalmist sees the secret of salvation, In Him he trusts; destroys the devil, the enemy; lifts up his hand, to satisfy his soul; For his sake he enjoys the forgiveness of his sins, and his life would turn into a continuous and unceasing gladness.

It is obvious here that the divine name refers to the “divine presence”, and the enjoyment of the divine work; and not just to a name uttered by the lips. When the wicked said to the Lord Christ: *“Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?!”* To this He answered them: *“I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness”* (Matthew 7: 22, 23).

I wish we do not misuse the name of God, for anything but the salvation of our souls; as it was given to us to find in it the sweetness of salvation. Let us call Him by His name, to hear Him call us by ours. Let us seek in His name to get saved; then He would bear us in His bosom, to sing, saying: *“Save me O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your strength”* (1).

While the Ziphites cared for pleasing Saul; David took refuge in the name of God, delivered everything to Him, being the supreme Mighty One, and the Judge of all. No wonder that the believers in all eras, confront treason even from their own, who may oppose them more than their enemies, something that cause them great sorrow. Yet the sorrow cannot swallow them, when they perceive that they are in the hands of God, the Just, who may allow for them to pass through affliction, yet for a limited time.

According to **St. Augustine**, the church, like David; while the Ziphites practice deception, and plan plots, the persecuted church finds in the name of her crucified and insulted Groom, her salvation; and in the power of His cross, what would set her up on the great day of judgment.

- ❖ As said by the teacher of the Gentiles: “*I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*” (1 Corinthians 2: 2); to let us prefer that name more than the boasting of the Ziphites.

Yet, about Him he says: Although He died in weakness, yet He lives in the power of God. He, therefore, came to die in weakness; And He will come to judge in the power of God. Through the weakness of the cross His name became famous; and he who does not believe in that name that became famous through weakness, will come to be terrified before the Judge when He comes with power.

(St. Augustine)

The name of “Jesus” which means (God is salvation), is the secret of our salvation, and our justification on the Day of Judgment. This same name is, however, terrifying for the wicked, which reject His salvation.

- ❖ The name of God is greatly majestic, and wholly mighty. For the believers it is conquest and help; while for the opponents, it is defeat and devastation ... Up till now, the name of our Lord, if called upon faithfully, will bring forth salvation.

David, as well, seeks salvation in the name of God; and by His power he reigns, and takes revenge against his enemies; without boasting his personal righteousness. Let us also seek the forgiveness of our sins, and our salvation from the tribulations in this world, as well as in the world to come; Yet not by our own works, but in the name of our Lord, by which we are called.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*Vindicate me*”. Depending upon his own righteousness, but upon the grace and the love of God; and trusting in the possibility of His Savior; the believer can confront the devil, saying, together with David: “*Let the Lord be Judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand*” (1 Samuel 24: 15); And say: “*For You have maintained my right and my cause; You sat on the throne judging in righteousness*” (Psalm 9: 4); ad, “*Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an godly nation. Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man*” (Psalm 43: 1).

Perceiving the power of God’s name for salvation, provoked the psalmist’s life to inner prayer, and, as well, to cry out with his lips, trusting in the possibility of God’s response.

“Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth” (2)

- ❖ What is the difference between hearing the prayer and giving ear to the words of the mouth?

The prayer refers to the secret talk of the heart to God, or connecting with Him, even by the language of silence; as God often hears the cries of our hearts which we cannot express by our words.

No weapon is stronger than a prayer, if it is coming with a good intention; for to it God give ear, and if it is supported by good works, He will listen and respond to it.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ A prayer is to talk with a great daring, debating God.

When we whisper without opening our mouth, we talk in silence, yet we cry out inside; And God always give ear to the inner talk¹.

¹ *Stromata* 7: 7.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

According to **St. Augustine**, the secret of God's listening to David's prayers, and giving ear to the words of his mouth, is delivering the things to the hands of God; saying: [If you are ill, let the physician choose the medications to give you. If the teacher of the Gentiles says: "*We do not know what we should pray for as we ought*" (Romans 8: 26); how much more would we be?! I wish that you, as a patient, do not give counsel to the physician. And I wish it be the case in all temporal things].

Opening his heart and mouth in an open talk with God, the psalmist complains against his spiritual enemies, not to seek revenge, but to seek salvation for their souls, lest they would eternally perish. He presents the following three features for his enemies:

- a- Strangers
- b- Ruthless
- c- They have not set God before them.

"For strangers have risen up against me, and oppressors have sought after my life. They have not set God before them" (3)

"Strangers". Although the *"Ziphites"* were of the same tribe as David, namely of the tribe of Judah, yet they had the spirit of strangers.

Someone may be your close relative, of your very family, yet instead of helping you, he stand against you. The Lord Christ came to His own, but His own did not receive Him; and He, Himself says: "*A man's foes will be those of his own household*" Matthew 10: 36). When your most close relative is used by the devil to destroy your spiritual life, and to corrupt your soul, he would bear the spirit of sojourn and animosity.

"Oppressors". Admonishing his friends, the righteous 'Job' cries out, saying: "*Did I ever say, 'Bring something to me? Or offer a bribe for me from your wealth? Or deliver me from the enemy's hand? Or redeem me from the hand of oppressors?'*" (Job 6: 22, 23). And the divine promise came as: "*I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible*" (Jeremiah 15: 21).

"They have not set God before them". They do not fear God, and do not heed His commandments, His word, or His will. And as it is said about the wicked: "*There is no fear of God before his eyes*" (Psalm 36: 1). Counting the Word of God (the Lord of God), as his enemy and adversary, the wicked gives Him his back, and does not set Him before him. Evil corrupts the heart, that he does not endure to see the divine light, nor to look at the crucified Christ.

According to **St. Augustine**: [Loving your sins, you would hate God's commandments; and the incarnate Wisdom of God would become your adversary. But, if you become adversaries of your sins, the Word of God would be your Friend and an Adversary of your evil¹].

- ❖ A sojourner from the church of God would persecute it; And counting himself as strong, and no power can stand against him, he does not set God before him, but trust in his own strength, authority, possessions, and friends.

The *'Ziphites'* were the sojourners; and Saul and his men were the oppressors.

¹ On Ps. 36 (35).

Those who sojourn from God are also called “*strangers*” ... even if they are our fellow citizens, and our own relatives; because they seek the perdition of our souls; having disregarded God’s care, and despised His Might.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ When man does not set God before him, what would be before his eyes other than the world? In other words, he would collect wealth above wealth; cares to increase his herds, and to fill up his storehouses; and would say to his soul: “*Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry*” (Luke 12: 19).
(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Yes, Those who talk the words of God before God, should understand that they have received the words of teaching from God; and should accordingly seek God’s pleasure, and not their own. They should also listen to the words of the Holy Book: “*Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to God*” (Proverbs 16: 5).

It is obvious that when those who seek their own vain glory, by misusing the word of God, they are taking by force the right of God, the Giver; for they do not fear robbing the commendation from those who received the teachings of the holy things.

Let them listen to Solomon’s words to the teachers: “*Drink water from your own cisterns, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for sharing with strangers*” (Proverbs 5: 15-17)¹. When a teacher searches the depth of his heart, and hears his own words, he drinks from his cistern, and drinks running water from his own well; if he gets satisfied by the fountain of the word.

And adding: “*Should your fountains be scattered abroad*”, he means that the teacher should drink first before he quenches the thirst of others by his teachings. And saying, “*streams of water in the streets*”, means distributing the divine word on a multitude of listeners. And as, together with the spread of the divine word to the knowledge of many, vain glory may crawl into the teacher, he adds: “*Let them be for yourself alone, and not for sharing with strangers*”.

In this concern, the Wisdom calls the evil spirits “*the strangers*”; as according to the prophet: “*Strangers have risen up against me, and oppressors have sought after my life*” (3). It is important for the teacher to come out to teach like “*streams of water in the streets*”, yet he should not join forces with the unclean spirits, through arrogance..

We should not let enemies share in ministering the divine word. And we should, as well, not be swayed away by any desire for vain commendation².

(Father Gregory (the Great)

2- GOD IS MY HELPER:

My relatives according to the flesh have become strangers and adversaries. But You, O the heavenly Father, has become a Relative, to support me, and to give me victory.

“Behold, God is my helper; The Lord is with those who uphold my life” (4)

We may say that the previous verses represent a lamentation for the cross; Yet, not a lamentation of sorrow, filled with despair, but a lamentation on humanity, that do not perceive God’s love and His salvation work. Now, through the cross, the lamentation

¹ يستخدم الأب غريغوريوس هذه الصورة الاستعارية للجب والينابيع لتشير للعلاقة ما بين الزوج وزوجته، وهو هنا يطبق هذه الفقرة على تعليم المرشدين.
² Pastoral Care, 3; 24.

turns into a praise of rejoicing in salvation, and a song of the resurrection, the grantor of the exalted new life. *“Behold, God is my helper. The Lord is with those who uphold my life”*; And as said: *“I lay down and slept. I awoke, for the Lord sustained me”* (Psalm 3: 5); And also: *“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation”* (Psalm 51: 12)

“He will repay my enemies for their evil. Cut them off in Your truth” (5)

By *“My enemies”*, he means the devil and his hosts who go around to devour; as according to Hosea: *“So, I will be to them like a lion, like a leopard by the road I will observe them”* (Hosea 13: 7). He seeks from his Savior to destroy the devil, to become no more able to oppress the children of God.

❖ Let them proclaim their sojourn from God, and from me; and let them use all violence against me, disregarding the face of God! I shall have no fear as long as God is on my side; He will let the wicked collect the fruit of their work, and will repay them for their evil. When they seek to cut me off, they will cut themselves off.

How will God help you? *“The Lord will uphold my life”*

Those wicked men may prosper in their faithfulness to the world; yet, they will eventually perish by the power of God. They will not be cut off the way they prosper! For they may prosper for some time, but they will perish forever. They may prosper in vain goods; and they will perish in true sufferings.

(St. Augustine)

3- THE SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING:

The oppression of Saul and his men presented to David a new experience in God’s compassionate and free dealings. That is why he pays love back with love; he presents his heart, and his whole life as a burnt offering; he presents them freely, with joy and gladness, without expecting any temporal reward.

“I will freely sacrifice to You. I will praise Your name, O Lord, for it is good”
(6)

❖ What shall I present, but what You seek: *“Whoever offers praise, glorifies Me”* (Psalm 50: 23).

Why *“freely”*? For I truly love whom I praise. I praise God; and my praising Him I rejoice!

“freely” means, for the sake of God Himself, and not for any reward. For, if you praise God to get any reward, you do not love Him freely!

“I will freely sacrifice to You” Do not do it because you have to. Because if you praise God to get any reward, you are praising Him because you have to!

“I will praise Your name, O Lord, for it is good” ...

I find nothing better than Your name.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Listen to the voice of the prophet, saying: *“I will freely sacrifice to You, O Lord”*. Learn how to endure labor by your own free will. He who discover his slothfulness, accuses himself, and freely endures labor, not a single day will pass without remorse.

Let everyone of you contemplate in the amazing gift of freedom, granted by Christ to His faithful people, through the new birth, the giver of life ... and through the pouring of the Holy Spirit. God would not be ministered with a lukewarm kind of ministry. Even if we present to him every day any honor or gift within our ability, we

shall never fulfill His due... Let us, therefore, set our hearts free of any attachment to evil, so that we can better feed upon the fruits of justice.

“I will freely sacrifice to you” . The prophet did not use this expression haphazardly, without a cause; He perceived that there many, ministering to God through commitment, their hearts are actually against ministry; they promise something by their mouth, and plan something else in their heart. ... Even with the little value of our gifts, they would be great if we give them with pleasure; whereas those given out of commitment, will mostly corrupt the giver of the gift; the way when someone is committed to prepare a banquet; he will keep complaining about how much it costs him.

Present an offering to your Creator every day with joy; Offer a little by your tongue; but offer the sacrifice of praise with words that utter sweetness. Hasten, as well, by the spirit of piety to consummate the ministry you are asked to do. Give heed to the words of the prophet: “The freely presented offerings of my mouth, let them be received by You, O Lord”¹.

(Father Valerian)

“For He has delivered me out of all trouble; and my eye has seen its desire upon my enemies” (7)

Here, the psalmist speak with surety through his past experience of God as His Savior from every affliction; He has seen, as well, the failure of the devil, despite all his endeavor to plan and dedicated his talents to destroy the children of God. It is therefore, not gladness on his part to destroy someone, as much as it is rather to destroy the spiritual hosts of darkness.

¹ Fr. Valerian: Homilies 3.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 54

HOW AMAZING IS YOUR NAME, O LORD!

- ❖ How amazing is Your name, O Lord!
It is my strength to salvation;
“We have trusted in His Holy Name” (Psalm 33: 21);
“How excellent is Your name in all the earth”(Psalm 8: 1, 9);
“Through Your name, we will trample those who rise up against us” (Psalm 44: 5);
“I will up my hands in Your name; my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness” (Psalm 63: 4)
“For Your names sake, You provide atonement for our sins” (Psalm 79: 9).
My life turn into a joyful day;
Into which no spirit of sorrow will enter (Psalm 89: 16)
- ❖ Teach me, O Lord, how to call upon Your name with the spirit of love;
To find in it all my pleasure;
That You, in turn, will call upon my name;
As You did when You called Zacchaeus by his name;
And You enter into my house
And proclaim the dwelling of salvation in it.
- ❖ Your name is sweet in the mouths of Your saints;
In it there is the sweetness of salvation;
In it there is the sign of fellowship with You;
I call upon You, unite with You, and take refuge in You.
- ❖ You, O Heavenly One, became a relative of mine;
You received me as a member in Your body, O heavenly One;
My relatives according to the flesh became strangers;
When they opposed me without a cause;
Except that they did not set You before their faces.
- ❖ Let the wicked do whatever they intend to do to cut me off;
Their work will get back to them, and they will, themselves, be cut off.
They will fall into what they intended to do against me.
- ❖ You are my Helper and Savior;
I praise You, and freely confess Your name;
I wish I can acquire You;
For with You, I shall not seek anything more.

PSALM 55

OH, THAT I HAVE WINGS LIKE A DOVE!

A lamentation or a praise?

This psalm, in truth, is a personal lamentation written by the prophet David with a bitter soul, when he saw his closest friend – Ahitophel – whom he set as a counselor, with whom he ate, and walked to the house of the Lord, when he saw him provoke his son Absalom, and plan for him, not only to take his place on the throne, but even to cut off his head (2 Samuel 15). How difficult it is on the soul to see the intimate friend turn into a violent and deceptive enemy without a cause!. The prophet, however, wrote his lamentation with the spirit of praise and joy; disregarding the treachery of Ahitophel and the rebellion of Absalom, and having his heart and mind go back to God’s dealings with him, he turned his lamentation into a praise.

David or Jeremiah?

According to some scholars, this psalm suits the prophet Jeremiah who desired to escape to the wilderness, saying: “*Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men*” (Jeremiah 9: 2). And the psalmist says: “*Oh, that I had wings like a dove, for then I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness*” (6-7). In both the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “Who will give the wings of a dove?!”

Jeremiah suffered the treachery of his brothers and his father’s household (Jeremiah 12: 6); And he was struck by Pashur the priest, and put in the stocks (Jeremiah 20: 2). And the psalmist says: “*It is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it; Nor is it not one who hates me, who has magnified himself against me, then I could hide from him*” (12).

Anyway, It is not only Jeremiah or David, but most of the prophets have suffered from their relatives, and their fellow citizens. For the wicked always cannot endure the truth. Even the Lord Christ, Himself, the Lord of the prophets, suffered the treachery of His own disciple Judas. And the Lord confirmed that “*a man’s foes will be those of his own household*” (Matthew 10: 36; Micah 7: 6).

Its general frame:

1- A cry out because of anguish	1 - 5
2- “ <i>Oh, that I had wings like a dove</i> ”	6 - 8
3- “ <i>O, Lord, divide their tongues</i> ”	9 - 11
4- “ <i>A man’s foes will be those of his own household</i> ”	12 - 15
5- God’s response	16 - 21
6- Trusting in God	22 - 23

The title:

Trust in God concerning the treachery of friends.

To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A contemplation of David.

According to the Septuagint version, it came as: “An understanding of David, in the end of time, or in the ultimate end, and in praise”

1- **An understanding of David:** The church is in need of the spirit of understanding as a divine gift, by which to perceive that what came in the psalm is a symbol of what occurred in the life of “the Son of David”, who confronted the plot of His own race to have Him killed; and that of His disciple Judas against Him.

2- **In the end of time, or in the ultimate end:** According to St. Augustine, [Let us take heed of the ultimate end – to Christ. Why do we call Him that? Because what we do go back to Him

3- **In praise:** As long as the Lord Christ is our goal or ultimate end, In Him our joy will be consummated, and our life will turn into unceasing praises; he says: [It is befitting of the heart and mouth of the Christian to keep praising God. They should not just glorify in good time, and grumble against Him in the bad time].

1- A CRY OUT BECAUSE OF ANGUISH:

“Give ear to my prayer, O God, and do not hide yourself from my supplication”

(1)

The secret of the believer’s peace in the midst of anguish, is to see God give ear to hear the hidden sighs of his heart in the time of anguish, for in this is the whole comfort for his soul, and the satisfaction of his heart. The psalmist says: *“I have called upon you, for you will hear me, O God. Incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech”* (Psalm 17: 6). *“Let my prayer; Incline Your ear to my cry”* (Psalm 88: 2). And the prophet Daniel says: *“O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name, for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies”* (Daniel 9: 18)

The men of God keep knocking on the doors of God all the time; for they perceive that there are no success nor salvation for them except

When God incline His ear to hear their cries. God is indeed very close to His children, yet He seeks from them to beseech Him, and to trust no one but Him.

In the time of unbearable anguish, God may seem as though He disregards the prayer of His believer; who keeps on saying: *“Do not hide you from my supplication”*.

❖ Of Your features, O God, are jealousy, mercy, and compassion;

My hard heart will bring me down miserable into the depth of the pit;

“Attend to me and hear me” (2); For You are Holy.

Attend to me, for my enemies are stirred up against me, saying:

God has forsaken him; Pursue him and take him, for there is none to deliver him”

(Psalm 71: 11).

“But You, O Lord – How long?” (Psalm 6: 3)

Come back and rescue my life, for the sake of Your mercy.

Have mercy on Your son, to whom You have given life.

St. Augustine

“Attend to me, and hear me; My thoughts trouble me, and I am distraught” (2)

Here, the psalmist confesses that he is greatly disturbed and distraught; like a camel agitated and out of control, and in need of a prompt intervention of his owner.

St Athanasius the apostolic believes that this is the cry of the suffering Lord Christ, who came to the cross to save mankind.

We, as well, counting our sufferings as a fellowship with Christ in his crucifixion, we cry out to God, to find Him listening to our hidden prayers. In the time of anguish, we

enjoy what is greater than being rescued of the anguish, listening to our prayer, and listening to it, and looking down on us; as though there is no one in the world but ourselves. He is like a potter who concentrates his attention on the vessel in the furnace, to decide when he should take it out as a vessel of honor.

“Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked; for they bring down trouble upon me, and in wrath they hate me” (3)

What does the psalmist mean by *“the voice of the enemy, and the oppression of the wicked”* but the false and horrible accusations they direct against him; as though they cry out against him, saying: This miserable person is not worthy of his kingdom; Let all rebel against him, and drive him away from his throne!

It did not stop at mere oral accusations, but entered into the stage of action, through using every way to apply pressure on him by actual rebellion. That was done by Ahitophel, David’s close friend who joined his son in his attempt to remove his father from the throne, justifying his treachery by David’s accusation of him as an evil-doer.

“My heart is severely pained within me, and the terror of death have fallen upon me” (4)

David felt as though he is going around himself in bitterness. Not knowing why His friend Ahitophel betrayed him, he contorted like a woman in labor of birth; Although, while the later contorts out of severe pain, yet she hopes to have a new babe soon. David’s heart, on the other hand, contorts with death before his eyes, with no hope in view, specially with development of events which was not promising, nor expected. In his escape, he was anticipating a massacre for him and his followers.

“Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me” (5)

That portrays what dwelt upon the Lord Christ after He delivered Himself into the hands of His adversaries by His own free will; and entered into vain accusations and trials. What is the disturbing noise of the enemy, but the words of Caiaphas the high priest, saying: *“He has spoken blasphemy; what further need do we have of witnesses?”* (Mathew 26: 65). And who is the sinner who caused him sorrow, but Judas Escariot who betrayed Him?!

Our Christ, the Holy Head of the church came to be in anguish, and unjustly delivered Himself to death. So it is befitting of the body to partake of His passion!

According to **St. Augustine**, David here, symbolizes the Lord Christ, both the Head and the body. By this we live in this world, partaking of His passion. As to why He allows for the existence of the wicked, This, according to **St. Augustine** is not without a goal; namely, to turn their wicked works to our own benefit. He let them go their way with the hope that they may eventually return to Him in repentance; or that the righteous may benefit by getting crowned through their deeds. That is why it is befitting of us not to hate the wicked. We should instead desire their salvation; because, according to **St. Augustine**: [When you feel that you hate an enemy, you may be hating a brother without knowing it].

2- OH, THAT I HAD WINGS LIKE A DOVE!

“And I said, ‘Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest’” (6)

How could he endure the affliction of the enemy without having hated crawling in his heart?! Hence the psalmist seeks the work of the Holy Spirit in him, to become like a dove, fly away and be at rest in the presence of the Father, where he would enjoy love that knows no hate.

Why does David wish to have the wings of a dove, but to fly away to heaven, to rest and settle down in the bosom of God? So have all the men of God desired along the eras, to be carried by the Holy Spirit, from the valley of tears into the divine bosoms; where man would not only find rest from the wars of the enemy, and the troubles of the wicked, but much more to come to know the divine secrets, the joyful and satisfactory to the soul.

Why choosing the dove in particular?

1- Because it symbolizes the Holy Spirit, among whose work is to renew our nature, to become like a cloud, pure, light, and capable of reaching up to heaven. On the words: “*You have dove’s eyes*” (Songs 1: 15) by saying: [Surely, comparing her eyes to the dove’s is because now, she understands the divine Scripture, not literally, but according to the Spirit; and perceive in it spiritual secrets. Being a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3: 16), the spiritual understanding of the law and the prophets is realized by having the eyes of a dove ... The soul so wishes to have dove’s eyes (Psalm 68: 14), to have the ability to fly high in her understanding the spiritual secrets; and to lie down in the courts of wisdom].

2- The dove refers to simplicity, as well as to peace; when it returned to Noah’s ark carrying a branch of olive tree, as a reference that the great flood came to an end, and the return of life to the new land.

3- The dove is known of having no sense of hatred, even against those who take away her young.

4- According to **St. Augustine**, the doves, even after picking on one another with their beaks for some time, they go back to feed together and to fly together in harmony.

5- The dove symbolizes purity, as it bears no odor of corruption, and do not feed upon trash like crows and other birds.

In a letter sent by **St. Jerome** to ‘Salfina’ of the imperial court, consoling her for the death of her husband ‘Nebridius’, he wrote about him, saying: [From him we learned how it is possible for a camel to pass through the hole of a needle; and how an animal with a hump on its back, while laden with heavy burden, could take for itself the wings of a dove, and lie in the shade of a tree that grew from a mustard seed (Matthew 13: 31-32)]¹.

And in a letter he wrote to ‘Rusticus’, who consented together with his wife to live a life of virginity, then failed, yet his wife tried to convince him to fulfill his promise. He wrote: [Wandering among the beautiful fields of the Holy book, I picked for myself some of its beautiful flowers to weave for the brows of your eyes a crown of remorse; for you eyes’ goal is to fly away with the wings of a dove, to find rest, and to enter into peace with the God of mercy²].

❖ All God-fearing people, in the (catholic) church, are obviously pure and simple, who could say together with the psalmist: “*Oh, that I had wings like a dove, for then I*

¹ St. Jerome, letter 79: 3.

² Letter to 122 Rusticus, 4.r.

would fly away and be at rest” (6); and, “*Even the swallow has found a nest for herself, where she may lay her young*” (Psalm 84: 3). While the body-bound people, are drawn downwards because of the heavy weight of the iniquity shackles, the spirituals are lifted up high by the wings of diverse virtues, as though by two wings; namely, by the two commandments: love of God, and love of the neighbor; by which they are lifted up to heaven. They can say, together with the apostles: “*Our citizenship is in heaven*” (Philippians 3: 20). In the liturgy, the priest cries out, saying: : [Where are your hearts?], to which the congregation answer with piety and surety, that they have raised them to heaven. Anyway, very few, and even rare, those in the church, who could say so with surety and truth¹!

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- ❖ Why “*like a dove?*” Because the grace of getting washed necessitates the simplicity, in order to become as innocent as the doves. The grace of getting washed necessitates peace; as initially demonstrated by the dove that returned to Noah’s ark, that was the only thing saved from the devastation of the great flood (Genesis 8: 10-11). The Holy Spirit who is symbolized as a dove, comes down like a dove, teaching us that in that branch of olive, and in that ark, the portrait of peace, and that of the church was found. Amid the floods of this world, the Holy Spirit brings forth the good news of His peace to His church. That, as well, David teaches us, he who perceived the secret of baptism, saying by the spirit of prophecy: “*Oh, that I had wings like a dove!*” (6)².
- ❖ David prays to God, saying: “*As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?*” (Psalm 42: 1-3). The saint got troubled, and could not help himself; because the pain of the soul are worse than those of any flesh. Yet, being sure of the reward, he longs to set forth from the earth to heaven; as he says somewhere else: “*Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then I would fly away and be at rest*” (6).

The traps here, (of sorrow and anxiety), even if the righteous does not fall in them, or become entangled in them, are in the way of his progress; But there, where grace is, will be joy.

Here, Paul eagerly longs to break the shackles of the body, to rid himself of all their connections, to stand free before God (Philippians 1: 23). That is why David’s soul thirsts to see God, not through faith, but face to face (1 Corinthians 13: 12); not only to sojourn from the body (2 Corinthians 5: 8), but also to be liberated from it; he thirsts to “*depart and be with Christ, which is far better*” (Philippians 1: 23). . For the righteous, “*to die is gain*” (Philippians 1: 21). It is indeed a great gain to be without sin, and not to be stirred up by the lusts of evil; Because, who is free from defilement, even if his life is just one day on earth? Because no one can be without the contagiousness of evil doing, we lose our innocence (or our wisdom) through life; while we gain an end to our iniquities by death. By temporal life, the expenses of sin increase, as though we are indebted by a repulsive accumulative bill!. The soul suffers a true thirst if it hastens to the fountain, not that of water, but that of the eternal life, about which the prophet David says in a previous text: “*For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light*” (Psalm

¹ Sermon 82: 2.

² Exposition of Luke, 2: 92.

36: 9). He therefore was right to hasten “*to come and appear before God*” (Psalm 42: 2), “*The true light who gives Light to every man who comes into this world*” (John 1: 9)¹
(St. Ambrose)

❖ It is better for us to be cleansed of anything that draws us downward, to be drawn instead toward the things exalted above the senses. For then, we shall not cease to admire the beauty of heaven, and the splendor of the heavenly lights. Yet, the beauty reflected on all these things, leads us to the absolute Beauty; namely God, whom “*heaven declare His glory, and the firmament shows His handwork*” (Psalm 19: 1).

It is befitting of the soul that rises up, to forsake everything it has got through falling into its lusts; because only then, it can perceive the greatness that is more exalted than the stars of heaven.

Yet, how could we reach that level while still desiring the earthly things?

How could we fly up to heaven without heavenly wings, while still not light, borne in the air by higher heavenly life?

Actually, no one could be qualified by the secrets of the gospel, if he does not perceive that man has only one chariot, that can carry him up to heaven; He has to acquire the wings of the descending dove (the Holy Spirit), as David desired for himself (6). By such a way, the Holy Book demonstrates in a symbolic way, the power of the Spirit, using the dove as a symbol; which, according to those who know, does not endure the odor of deterioration.

So will he who avoid every bitterness and every lust of the body, to fly high with the wings of the dove (the Spirit) above all the conflicts of the world, and discover what, alone, could be worthy to be desired. He, himself, would become beautiful, by getting close to the divine beauty ; namely to God; becoming enlightened, through having the fellowship with the true Light².

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

❖ Persecution got more and more, and the anguish got stronger, that the psalmist despaired of life. Notice how fear and trembling dwelt upon him, and how he was covered with darkness, as it came in the psalm: “*Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me. And I said, ‘Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly and be at rest’*” (5, 6).

It is the voice of the body of Christ, of the members of His body. In case you wish to recognize your own voice there, Be members of Christ.

When the psalmist wished to fly up to Christ, he got perplexed somehow, because of the heaviness and corruption of his body, and on account of the troubles waiting for him along the way, albeit they do not completely block the way. He was troubled by his life, but not by the eternal life, about which the apostle says, “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Philippians 1: 21)³

St. Augustine⁴

¹ Prayer of David 4: 2: 6.

² On Virginity PG 46: 364 A 369 B.

³ Sermons 305 A: 5.

⁴ Sermons 305 A: 5.

❖ Let us seek from God to grace us with wings, and to take the evil wind away from our souls and bodies, which is the sin dwelling in our members. No One but the Holy Spirit who can do that¹.

❖ Like when man sees a bird flying up in air, longs to fly as well, but he cannot because he has no wings; Man also longs to be pure without defilement; to have a nature without malice; and to be perpetually with God. Yet he could not achieve all that. Despite his longing to fly in the divine atmosphere in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, yet he cannot, unless he is given wings.

Let us therefore beseech from God to grant us the wings of a dove (6); namely, the Holy Spirit, to fly up to Him. Let us beseech from Him to take away from us the evil spirit, to cut it utterly off our souls and bodies; namely, the sin dwelling in us; For He alone is able to do that; For *“He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1: 29)².

❖ The longer the soul lives in the fire of the Holy Spirit, and in the divine light, no harm will ever come on it from the evil spirits; for once they approach it they will be consumed by the fire of the heavenly Spirit.

Like when a bird soars high in air, it does not care for the hunters or the preying beasts, nor has any fear of them, as it would be secure up there; So is the soul when it acquires the wings of the Spirit (6), flies up to the high heavens. It despises those below, for it is higher above all.

❖ Every soul, not purified by the Holy Spirit, nor salted by the heavenly salt; namely, the power of God, will instantly corrupt, and become filled by the repulsive odor of the evil thoughts, which makes the face of God turns away from the defiled odor of the thoughts of the darkness, and of the lusts dwelling deep in the soul, and the evil and cursed worms; namely the evil spirits and the hosts of darkness that wander in it, to look for a pasture and acceptance, as according to the psalm: *“My wounds are foul and festering”*, (Psalm 38: 5)³.

(St. Maccari the Great)

❖ It is obvious that he who dies while in sin, does not truly believe in Christ; even if he claims he is.

He who believes in the work of Christ, will never do injustice; And he who believes in His wisdom, will never walk in foolishness, nor talk it.

When Moses lifted up his hands, Amalek was defeated. Lifting the hands up is lifting our works to God, keeping away from the lowly deeds, and practicing all the works, lifted up to heaven, that please God. He who lays up for himself a treasure in heaven, will lift up his hands to where his treasure is (see Mathew 6: 20, 31); and so will do he who says: *“Let the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice”* (Psalm 141: 2); and he will lift up his eyes as well. If we then, lift up our works, and do not leave them on earth, we shall condemn Amalek.

But we should take into consideration that we shall have to be tried before the divine justice; not just on our faith, as though we are not responsible for our works (see

¹ عظة 2 : 3.
² عظة 2 : 3.
³ عظة 30 : 6، 1 : 5.

James 2: 24); And not just on our works , as though our faith is not the subject of investigation.

I wish you give heed to what you hear; not just in the church, but practice them at home, and to meditate in them day and night (Psalm 1: 2). ... From such an “olive”, let us extract the oil of our works, by which we can light the lamp for the Lord, and not walk in the darkness (see John 2: 11)... That is all I can say, concerning the lamps and their oil (Leviticus 1: 24).

The bird of the sky could spiritually dwell among the branches of faith of such great magnitude.

scholar Origen

“Indeed I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness” (7)

Fleeing away from his enemies, David went to dwell in the wilderness, beyond the land (2 Samuel 17: 22-23)

“**the wilderness**” according to the holy Book is an uninhabited place, where wild beasts take refuge. They are not necessarily forests, but mostly desert and rocky domain. The psalmist, feeling that he no longer feels secure among men, he sought seclusion from all. In the uninhabitable places, he found a better place than to have contact with anyone.

If the anguish produce such a way of thinking, there are, on another aspect, other believers who, because their Spirit was flared by the divine love, set forth to the wilderness, not fleeing from men, but out of a desire to attach to God, and to keep away from being overwhelmed by human preoccupations. They, according to **St. John Cassian**, turned the wilderness into a paradise.

❖ We are committed to seek diligently to mend our ways, and deal with our shortcomings; because if we manage to do that, we will, no doubt, have peace, not only with men, but even with wild beasts. We shall fear no kind of trouble from outside, and not disturbed by any chance of falling down, for “*Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble*” (Psalm 119: 165)¹.

(St. John Cassian)

❖ We have before our eyes the exalting joy that came to our kinsmen who have chosen to withdraw to the wilderness, and to go deep inside the desert².

❖ It is far better for us to perpetually hold fast to our goal, acquiring a moderate gain in the wilderness, where there are no worldly worries, cares that distract our attention, pride, or vain glory; and where the care for the daily necessities are far less ... That will be, for us, better than to seek great profit through getting preoccupied in the requirement of normal life; As, according to the wise Solomon: “*Better is a handful with quietness than both hands full together with toil and grasping for the wind*” (Ecclesiastes 4: 6)³.

(Father Ibrahim)

❖ Man should not be puffed up because of what he has realized in his life, but should be always humble, and go deep in the wilderness, in case he finds out that he is inclined

¹ *De institutes caenoborum* 9: 8.

² *Cassian: Conferences* 24: 1.

³ *Cassian: Conferences* 24: 13.

toward pride; for living close to the cities often did harm to the perfect. That is why the prophet David sings, saying: *“Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and the tempest”* (7, 8). Many of our brethren have experienced similar situations, but, because of arrogance, they failed to reach their goal.

(St. John of Assuit)

Writing to ‘Lucianus’, who made a mutual consent with his wife to lead a virgin life(although he could not persist on his vow), **St. Jerome** said: [You have forsaken behind you the salty currents, and the crumbled mountains, and despised Leviathan that reigned in the waters (Psalm 104: 26); with a goal to head to the wilderness together with Jesus Christ, and to sing together with the prophet, saying: *“My soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You, in a dry and thirsty land, where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory”* (Psalm 63: 2-3)]¹.

“I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and the tempest” (8)

David’s escape to the wilderness needed no much thinking nor hesitation; for he was like a dove that hastened to resort to its nest, escaping from a windy storm. Absalom, Ahitophel, and those who were with them, moving very quickly like a tempest, made David and his men hasten toward the wilderness to avoid being killed by them.

3- O LORD, DIVIDE THEIR TONGUES:

“Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues, for I have seen violence and strife in the city” (9)

The word “*destroy*” originally came as (devour). If Absalom intended to devour his father, supported by Ahitophel, David’s personal friend and counselor, By doing such horrible treachery of friendship and fatherhood, made themselves worthy of being devoured; as *“Whatever a man sows, that he will reap”* (Galatians 6: 7).

His prayer to divide their tongues, reminds us of what happened when men intended to build a tower with its top in the heavens, in an attempt to oppose God, who confused their tongues, and scattered them over the face of all earth (Genesis 11: 1-9).

By his sweetened tongue, Absalom, with the support of Ahitophel, plotted to take by force his father’s throne, and to cut off his head, and did not perceive that the fruit of evil is confusion, complete failure, and perdition.

As to the oppression and strife that dwelt upon Jerusalem; the oppression was done without cause by the adversaries of David; while the strife occurred among the leaderships and the people; when many of them felt that what Absalom and his followers have done was utter oppression and injustice; although no one of them dared publicly to challenge Absalom.

The Lord Christ saw iniquity and strife in the city of Jerusalem, when they unjustly delivered Him to trial. Strife occurred among them, because some said that He could not be from God, with a false claim that He broke the Sabbath; while others said that no sinner could perform such great miracles as Jesus did! Iniquity surrounded its walls day and night; when the leaders started to try Him by night against the law, and crucified Him the next day. Instead of being walls that keep the law, and proclaim the prophecies concerning Him, they adopted iniquity, and used bribe and deception to

¹ Letter 71 to Lucinius., 1.

crucify Him. Judas receive thirty pieces of silver as a price for the Righteous, as though he received the most horrible kind of usury!

That was the portrait of the iniquitous city that delivered its Lord, which the psalmist seeks its destruction and the division of its tongues. ... As for you, dear brother, , having become the city of God that knows the righteousness, and received the King of kings, the Son of David within you, you know how to talk with the language of the Spirit understood by the heavenly creatures, to which all believers in the whole world will respond; and became the city of God, for which the Lord would be its fiery wall, and inner glory, that knows no love of silver, but giving, together with faithfulness and truth.

Be, beloved brother, the new Jerusalem, the joyful city, in harmony with God, as though it is coming down from heaven. And do not be the new Babel, filled with confusion, usury, and deception, that plans plots to get rid of the Son of David. By that your inner tongue will not be confused.

“Day and night they go around it on its walls. Iniquity and trouble are also in the midst of it” (10)

Here, the psalmist portrays the conditions that prevailed in Jerusalem, after Absalom and his followers carried out the movement of armed rebellion. The leaders were preoccupied with nothing but the continuous planning for the sake of the success of their movement, and reaching their goal. They did not have rest day and night, supervising the guards on the walls to their account. The city got filled with iniquity, where they sowed division, and slandered David and his court with false and vain accusations. The city was filled with acts of violence inside and all around its walls.

It was a portrait painful to the soul, to which it was befitting to be the spiritual Jerusalem, the holy city of God, where Christ, the Son of David reigns. But, having rejected His kingdom in it, it got filled with violence instead of peace; lies instead of truth; plots instead of peace, and work to the account of the kingdom of God; That is how iniquity reigns instead of righteousness.

“Destruction is in its midst; Deceit and guile do not depart from its streets” (11)

The disobedient, and the rebels, often claim that they are reformers of the society; Nevertheless rebellion, and mutiny always sow corruption of the soul of individuals, as well as of the congregation as a whole. The soul usually turns into a nucleus of corruption; its streets become like those of desolation.

He who listens to the divine commandment with the spirit of obedience, the righteousness of God dwells in him, and would become an ambassador of truth, and a witness of the work of God; drawing others together with him to salvation, and the eternal glory.

Let us then listen and obey the commandment; so that deceit would not crawl into our depths.

❖ ***“Deceit (usury) and guile do not depart from its streets” (11)*** ... Deceit and guile are not done in secret, but openly.

But there is a kind of usury worse than that concerning money; when you do not forgive someone indebted to you. And still you pray and say: *“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”* (Matthew 6: 12). What would you do when you reach this phrase in

your prayer? What would you do when you hear a word of revile, and intend to take revenge? ... What an evil kind of usury!

St. Augustine

4- “A MAN’S FOES WILL BE THOSE OF HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD”:

King David was indeed confined in bitter situation. On one aspect, seeing his own son and his intimate friend join forces to kill him; and on another aspect, seeing his beloved city become a center of violence, deceit, and evil plots inside it and all around its walls; he wished for his soul to set forth like a dove to heaven, so as to have rest and comfort in the bosom of the Lord. ... So it is with the believer, when he sees the closest things to him, his body, emotions, and feelings, rebel against his soul, attempting to take the kingdom of God away from it.... No worse enemy for man than himself. If he does not seek from God to destroy the kingdom of the devil inside him, and his authority within himself, he will never enjoy the peace of Christ, and His inner glory.

Let us, therefore, flee from ourselves, and get attached to Him, who can give us back our original image, so that the spirit would be in harmony with the body, and all the energies work together for edification.

Let us complain to the lord against our inner (household) to destroy the evil in them, and to turn the spirit of animosity into a spirit of true love. The Lord Christ has experienced a similar situation; not concerning His body, emotions, and feelings, but concerning His kinsmen – the Jews – who delivered Him to death. But those who returned to Him in faith, have become workers to his account.

“For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it, nor it is one who hates me who has magnified himself against me, then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance” (12, 13)

In a letter he sent to Paulinus, bishop of Dola, **St. Jerome** referred to this phrase, asking him not to deal with faith by (weight); namely by the number of years he lived in faith; as the apostle Paul, who chronologically came the last of the apostles, became the foremost among them. While Judas, who lived several years with Christ, ate together with Him, and enjoyed His company, has betrayed Him. He wrote:

[Daniel, as a young man, condemned the chastity of the elders (the story of Susanna).... Do not think of me as a better person, on account of that I came under the banner of Christ, few years before you did. As Paul, the chosen vessel changed from a violent persecutor, and then the last of the apostolic system, to become the first; although being the last, yet *“he labored more abundantly than they all”* (1 Corinthians 15: 10). And Judas, to whom the Lord said: *“You were my equal and My companion; We walked to the house of God in the throng”* 13); the Lord then accused him of treachery against his friend and Savior] ¹.

“We took counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng” (14)

It is easier for man to endure the evil coming from an enemy, than that coming from an intimate friend. As man usually is cautious before a known enemy; but he is shocked by an unexpected slap coming from a friend. Ahitophel, the source of trouble to David, has been the closest to the king, his counselor, and companion (1 Chronicles 27:

¹ Letter 58 to Paulinus of Nola, 1.

33); he made him his equal, had sweet conversations, ate together on one table, the king's table, exchanged thoughts, and used to walk to the house of God in the throng.

The same way, the Lord Christ chose Judas Escariot as one of His disciples, a friend, ate together with Him up till the last supper, and He even entrusted him with the treasury box; yet after all that, he sold His Master and lord for thirty pieces of silver. He perished, by hanging himself, and his soul went down to Hell, for evil has taken hold of his depths.

❖ The harm coming from him who is adorned with friendship hurts the heart more than that coming from an obvious animosity.

Those words by the psalmist were an obvious prophecy about Judas Escariot, a long time before it actually happened. It is as though the Lord, rebuking him says: When I talked to the scribes and the Pharisees, the enemies and haters of the truth, and rebuked them on their love of silver, they used to admonish Me, and magnify themselves against Me; and I used to endure them because their animosity was apparent and obvious. But you, Judas, on whom I had compassion, together with My other disciples; whom I entrusted with other responsibilities, gave the authority to drive out demons, and to heal ailments, and perform signs and wonders; walked together in the throng to the house of God in Zion; where we had our last supper.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

“Let death seize them, let them go down alive into hell, for wickedness is in their dwellings and among them” (15)

This is also a prophecy about Judas, who “*went down alive into hell*”, having committed suicide by hanging himself, in a vain attempt to comfort his conscience. ... Every soul that betrays its Master brings itself by itself down to the hell of sin, corruption, and love of earthly lusts.

❖ I hear about living people, who are swallowed by the pit of earth; namely, swallowed by the greed of the earthly covetousness.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The Truth says: “*That servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; ... For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required*” (Luke 12: 47, 48). And the psalmist says: “***Let them go down alive into hell***” (15)¹. It is obvious, that by “*alive*”, he means those who perceive what happens to them, and feel it. For the dead feel nothing whatsoever. Those who are ignorant of the evil they are doing, will go down dead into hell; While those who perceive and know the evil, will go down alive into the pit of hell, completely conscious, taken up by the curse².

(Father Gregory the Great)

Heavens will open before those suffering, to enter to the throne of the Mighty God, to perceive that the affairs of men do not go haphazardly,

but by an amazing divine ordinance. God the Almighty cares for everything that touch the life of man. That is the secret of our comfort amid the affliction, to say: “*In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comfort delights my soul*” (Psalm 94: 19); For

¹ تشير كلمة "أحياء" إلى السرعة والمفاجأة التي تحل بها اللعنة.

² Pastoral Care, 3: 31.

“As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ” (2 Corinthians 1: 5).

❖ As it is so mentioned in the four gospels that “*they will not taste death*” (Matthew 16: 28); while some other writers say different things concerning death; it will not be out of order to look through some verses that dealt with (tasting death):

“*What man can live and not see death?*” (Psalm 89: 48)

“*Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell*” (15)

“*He will swallow up death forever*” (Isaiah 25: 8)

“*Death and Hades followed with him*” (Revelation 6: 8)

In these verses it so seems that tasting death is different from seeing death¹.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ About St. John the Evangelist, the Lord said: “*If I will that he remains till I come...*” (John 21: 22).

I do not believe that that only meant John alone, but it is generally meant for many; The Lord did not exclude the death of the body, but the death of the Spirit; For there are dead people who live, and there are living people who died. As an example, *the woman who lives in pleasure, who is dead while she lives*” (1 Timothy 5: 6); and as is written: “*Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell*” (15); as there are those who go down alive into hell; as, by sin they go down into hell, and dwell where death is.

There are rather those whose life did not end by the death of the body, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who we know they are alive, according to the authority of the divine word; as “*God is not God of the dead, but of the living*” (Matthew 22: 32)

St. Ambrose

5- GOD’S RESPONSE:

“*As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me*” (16)

Having reached to bitterness, and called upon God in prayer, the psalmist’s tune of talk, because in God he found the real Helper who is able to save him; and discovered the craftiness and deception of the devil who utters words as soft as oil, while they are like swords drawn out for battle.

❖ As the devil was still not ready to depart, but he, arrogantly magnifies himself on us; and through flattering us, he would manage to terrify us and then to devour us; we should not show any weakness, nor cowardly collapse before him

We should rather be strong against him, using every possible means to resist him, and keep him away from us, “*offering up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears to Him who is able to save us from him*” (see Hebrew 5: 7); Calling upon Him to help us to drive him away in shame, with his head struck with spiritual rocks utter forth from our mouths².

(Father Martyrus the Syrian – Sahdona)³

“*Evening and morning and at noon, I will pray and cry aloud; and He shall hear my voice*” (17)

¹ Commentary on Matthew, Book 12: 35 (Cf. ANF)

² The Book of Perfection.

³ مرتيريوس أو Sahdona (الاسم السرياني) ولد على مقربة من كركوك في العراق الحديثة، بالقرب مننهاية القرن السادس.

David was a fugitive, with bitter soul, and unceasing sighs; Why would he limit his cries to certain times: “*evening, morning, and at noon*” ?

(1) This expression bears the meaning of continuity without ceasing; even while working by day, and sleeping by night.

(2) David’s psalms, as well as the life of the men of God in both the Old and the New testaments, reveal two integral aspects of worship: the first is consistent worship, unlimited by time; And the second aspect is that, together with the unceasing cries of the heart, and the perpetual praises of the soul, the men of God used to designate special times for worship day and night. Each of the two aspects of worship supports, and integrates one another.

As David’s life was a continuous series of troubles and afflictions; his prayers turned into perpetual cries from the heart day and night, beside his prayers in fixed times.

It is obvious that the prophet David used to pray three times a day: “*morning, evening, and at noon*” (17); As did the prophet Daniel

(Daniel 6: 1); and all the men of God, who designated fixed times for prayers, beside the unceasing cries of their hearts.

The fathers believe that the psalmist experienced the Lord’s response to his prayers in the evening, the time he was hanged on the cross; In the morning, when He resurrected from the dead, as the sun of Righteousness shining on us; And at noon, when He ascended up to heaven, granting us the perfection of the light of His knowledge.

❖ In the evening, he told about his passion in the time of His death; In the morning, he told about His life in the resurrection; And at noon, he prayed to Him to incline His ear to him, while sitting at the right hand of the father, to make intercession for us (see Romans 8: 34).

St. Augustine

The fathers distinguish between worship, on one side, and study, contemplation, on another side. Worship, although it has certain hours and time, as we saw, yet it loses its activity, and even its being, if the heart is not unceasingly preoccupied with God. Concerning study, contemplation, even in the Holy Bible, It is befitting of man, whatever his spiritual stature is, to perceive the fitting limits, whether for him, or for those around him.

St. Gregory the Nezianden, and st. Basil the Great, warns us against the exaggeration, even in the good things, and in particular in the theologies. It is befitting of man to act according to his abilities, talents, possibilities, and experiences, with no exaggeration.

❖ I do not mean that we should not think of God all the time; and there is no need for my adversaries to use this to attack me; ... We should remember God more than we breathe; I may even say, we should do nothing but this. I am a strong advocate of the principle of: “*meditating in His law day and night*” (Psalm 1: 2); of telling about the Lord “*evening, morning, and at noon*” (17); for “*blessing the Lord at all times*” (Psalm 34: 1); or, according to the prophet Moses: “*when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up*” (Deuteronomy 6: 70). By doing that we become pious.

I am not against the continuous remembrance of God; but I am against continuously debating theology. I am not opposing theology, but I oppose debating it in improper time. I am not against teaching theology, except when it is beyond the limit of

logic; according to the wise proverb: “*Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit*” (Proverb 25: 16). Everything has its proper time. Winter is not the time for flowers; Men’s attire is different from women’s; It is bad manners to laugh in mourning; nor to cry in a merry gathering. Likewise, it is very important to choose the proper time to debate theology¹.

St. Gregory the Nezianzen

❖ Although the time for praying should cover the whole life, yet, when it has to be accompanied with kneeling (Metonia), or singing praises, the saints have designated special hours for that, which we should keep. David says: “*At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgment*” (Psalm 119: 62); and “*Evening, morning, and at noon*” (17). Paul and Silas, following his example, praised God at midnight while in prison (Acts 16: 25).

Moreover, the Holy Spirit dwelt on the disciples at the third hour; And when the Pharisees scoffed at them speaking tongues, Peter proclaimed that they are not drunk, for it is only the third hour (Acts 2: 15).

And the ninth hour reminds us of the passion of the Lord, which happened for us to live (Matthew 27: 45; Mark 15: 33-34).

But as David says: “*Seven times a day I praise you, because of Your righteous judgment*” (Psalm 119: 164); and the times of prayers referred to, do not cover those seven divisions; we have to divide the midnight prayer into two divisions: one before the moon disappear, and another after it does².

- ❖ At the sixth hour, as well, we should pray, according to what is written: “*Evening, morning, and at noon, I will pray and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice*” (17)
- ❖ Concerning prayer and praise, all times are proper ...; During work, we can consummate our duties to pray³.
- ❖ We are committed not to be slorhful to keep the hours designated for prayers by the saintly fathers⁴.

(St. Basil the Great)

❖ St. Gregory the Nezianzen, the blessed Theologian, teaches us the same thing, by saying: [We should remember God more than we breathe; Or rather, we should do nothing else. I am a great advocate of the principle that exhorts us to “*meditate in His law day and night*” (Psalm 1: 2); We should mention God’s, blessing it all the time, “*evening, morning, and at noon*” (17); and, together with the prophet Moses, we should say: “*when we sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up*” (Deuteronomy 6: 7). ... Let us attach ourselves to purity when we remember Him; ... Let us look into ourselves, and imagine the beauty of the Deity in us; ... Let us meditate in thses divine things; ... Let us tal the words of the Spirit; ... As it is good to attach to God through remembering the divine things⁵.

(Martyrus – Sahdona)

¹ العظة اللاهوتية الأولى: عظة رقم 27 عظة تمهيدية ضد أتباع يونيموس، 4.

² *An Ascetical Discourse, (Frs. Of the Church, volume 9, p. 212-213).*

³ *Rog Fus. 37: 2.*

⁴ *Rog Fus. 37: 2.*

⁵ كتاب الكمال، 60.

“He has redeemed my soul in peace, from the battle which was against me; for there were many against me” (18)

What saddened most the heart of the fugitive David is that he has for a long time put his trust in many who were around him like Ahitophel; whom he assumed to be his right hand, truly love him, and support him; to discover suddenly that they are hypocrites and treacherous. It is actually difficult for man to judge those around him, even if they were ministers in the church; for there are many whom you consider wheat, when they are tares in truth.

The wicked accompany the righteous; yet not all the way; like the heretics who refer themselves to the One Christ, and to one Bible, etc.;

Yet, they differ from the church in the one faith.

- ❖ They were with me as chaff, and not as wheat; although the chaff is bound in some way with the wheat ... they grow in the same field, watered by the same rain; cropped by the same cropper; threshed together; winnowed together; but are not stored in same storehouse.

St. Augustine

“God who is enthroned from the old will hear and afflict them. Because they never change their ways, and do not fear God” (19)

Here, the prophet David refers to those who bear the image of lambs, when they are truly fierce wolves, mingled between the lambs in the church. Those, if they do not change by repentance, and receiving the Holy Spirit in them, they will utterly perish. Although they may manage to have their ways for some time, but their perdition will be eternal, for they do not fear God.

St. Augustine believes that in this verse, God’s promise to Abraham was realized; As through his seed, the nations that received the new covenant have been blessed; while the Jews defiled that covenant by their rejection of faith, and by not enjoying the godly fear.

- ❖ When we hear the blessed David say: *“enthroned from the old”* (19), he does not mean to say that God exists before the latter times, but for Him is eternal existence, preceding any time intervention. And when Paul says: *“through whom the world is made”* (Hebrew 1: 2), he does not mean that God is the Creator of the late eras, but He is eternal, and is the cause of all the eras that have a beginning¹.

(Father Theodor, bishop of Mesisa)

“He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him. He has broken his covenant” (20)

Some believe that the talk here is about God, who, although has long-suffered the disobedient and the rebellious, with the hope that they may return to the truth and love through repentance; yet, as the cup of their evil is full to the rim, He puts forth His hands on them, and they will perish. As on whom will God put forth His hand, the psalmist refers to the following:

- 1- Ahitophel who betrayed his covenant of friendship with David.

¹ *Fragments on Hebrews, 1: 2: 3.*

2- The Jews who rejected the Savior who offered them a new covenant that realizes the perfection of the old covenant with their fathers. Yet they rejected the new covenant, and despised the prophecies.

3-Judas who betrayed the covenant with his Lord.

- ❖ The Jews, counting the new covenant defiled, they rejected it, and crucified Christ who is mentioned in the old covenant.

They have actually defiled the covenant; for God has ordained the old covenant to consummate by it a sensed work for a certain time, after which the sensed things are voided, and replaced by spiritual work. But the Jews, when the designated time came, remained holding fast to the sensed thing concerning the covenant; holding fast to the shadow and image, and rejected the Origin and the Truth. They defiled the covenant, for, having honored God with their lips, while their hearts were far away from Him, God scattered them by His wrath, to make them approach him with their hearts.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

“The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, But war was in his heart”

(21)

- ❖ They approached to tempt Him, (asking if they should pay taxes to Caesar), ; but they concealed their deceptive goal. They used smooth words, while they were like fierce beasts in the attire of lambs. Those are whom the psalmist addressed by his words (21)¹.

St. Cyril the Great

- ❖ Their word were as smooth as oil, those who addressed the Savior, saying: *“Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth, nor do you care about anyone, for you do not regard the person of me. Tell us, therefore: Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”* (Mathew 22: 15); and many sayings like this; when they were in truth like sharp swords, by which they wound and kill.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

- ❖ False perseverance, and harmful silence, often stir up anger more than reviling words; And the wounds of enemies may be more easily endured than the flattering of the scoffers, filled with concealed craftiness; about which the wise Solomon says: *“The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body”* (Proverb 26: 22); and, *“A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet”* (Proverb 29: 5). This also conforms to the saying: *“Their tongue is an arrow shot out; It speaks deceit; One speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, but in his heart he lies in wait”* (Jeremiah 9: 8).

Finally, when a multitude with swords and sticks drew near to arrest the Lord; not one of them was more cruel on Him, the Grantor of life, than he, who approached Him with respect full of deception and corruption, offering Him a kiss of deceptive love; he, whom the Lord addressed, saying: *“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”* (Luke 22: 48)².

(Father Joseph)

¹ *Commentary on Luke, ho,ily 135.*

² *Cassian: Conferences, 16. 18.*

6- TRUSTING IN GOD:

“Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved” (22)

Having, like many other pious men, found bitterness from the most friendly, because of their deceit, the psalmist resorted to God, who alone, is capable to remove his burdens, ordain things for his benefit, and grants him peace; leaving those deceptive, who persist on not repenting in his hands.

Having found his life filled with grief; or come to be like a heavy burden which he cannot carry; he cast it on the Lord, who sustained him. He does not say that the Lord shall remove the burden from him, or shall carry it instead of him, but says; *“he shall sustain him”*. Meaning that

He shall give him the possibility to endure with joy, and the ability to work. With His love for man, God does not intend to let him lose the blessing of working by and with God; but offers himself to him as “strength”, as a Leader, and a Helper. How beautiful indeed is the expression said by the apostle Paul: *“We are God’s fellow workers”* (1 Corinthians 3: 9); and, *“My fellow workers in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 16: 3); meaning, we work with God in and by Christ Jesus.

❖ It would not be fitting of the soldiers of the kingdom (2 Corinthians 10: 3) to worry about food; For the King knows how to feed His own household, be preoccupied by them, and to clothe them; Hence the psalmist says: *“Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you” (22)*¹.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ If you believe that God can sustain you, why then would you worry and be confused by the temporary things, and the needs of the body? ... ***“Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you” (22)***. You will never be terrified by any thing that comes on you².

❖ Through your trust in God, you should endure the deprivation from your bodily needs; for you will soon be satisfied. Let your longing be to get your needs through hope in God; do not expect salvation from others; nor comfort from anyone³.

❖ It is befitting of us to trust in God, and not in ourselves⁴.

(St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)

❖ If you long for the security you enjoyed before while being with your late husband, the protection of your possessions, and yourself from those who are fond of harming others, ***“Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you” (22)***. It is also written: *“Think of the old generations; Have anyone trusted in God, and was disappointed ... or called on Him, and He did not head His voice?!”* (Wisdom of Joshua 2: 11-12). God who allowed for such an unendurable catastrophe, and gave you such comfort, is also capable of protecting you against the evils that could come over you; so that you would not let yourself fall under a stroke more severe than what you endure now (by not trusting in Him).

¹ Exposition of Luke 8: 28-30.

² Ascetical Homilies, 5.

³ Ascetical Homilies, 5: 31.

⁴ Beautiful Consideration concerning the Life of Men.

By enduring the present afflictions with courage, while having no experience, God will grant you the possibility to endure any thing that – God forbids -- would probably happen against your will.

Therefore, if you seek heaven, and what concern the life to come, nothing would ever harm you. Even the hosts of darkness (the devils) themselves, would never be able to harm us, unless we harm ourselves by ourselves; even though our body be torn to pieces, that would mean nothing to us, as long as our Spirit is sound¹.

St. John Chrysostom

(In a message of condolence to a young widow)

- ❖ In case you chose to bear the burden without God’s help, it would turn to be undurable; but if God partakes of bearing it together with you; He will sustain you.

St. Basil the Great

- ❖ God wants us not to worry about anything in this life; and to be preoccupied with one work; that of the angels; namely, unceasingly glorifying the Creator; and having joy in contemplating in Him².
- ❖ Do not put your hope on anyone in this world, for anything in this life, to stay free; but, “*Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you*” (22).
- ❖ By son, care for your heart, guard your mouth; Be meek and amiable toward people; Be without worry, and “*Cast your burden on God*”. (22).

(St. Steven of Thebes)

“But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; But I will trust in You” (23)

It is as though the psalmist, having sought from God for himself two wings of a dove to fly up to the bosom of the Father, sees the bloodthirsty and the deceitful brought down to the pit of destruction; lose both their temporal and their eternal life. What preoccupies the psalmist is that his soul set forth toward God who intends for us to be together with him, partaking of the heavenly joyful, and worry-free life.

- ❖ “*Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days*” (23); Being in the darkness of sin, because they do not consummate the works of virtue, and they do not strive to reform their faults by remorse; they are brought down to the lower world, and shall not live out half their days³.

(St. Jerome)

² *The Orthodox Faith*, 2: 11.

³ *Commentary on Isaiah 11: 38: 12-13.*

¹ رسالة تعزية إلى أرملة شابة.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 55

GRANT ME, O LORD, THE TWO WINGS OF THE SPIRIT

- ❖ To You, I cry out, O God of my salvation;
For they are many who make me sad;
They have grudge against me;
And they sought my soul to destroy.
- ❖ Grant me the two wings of the Spirit, like a dove;
To fly up to You;
And in Your bosom I would find rest and comfort.
- ❖ Grant me to fly to the inner wilderness of my heart;
There, I would live alone with You;
Talk to You, and You talk to me;
Them my wilderness would turn into a heavenly paradise;
And instead of draught, You set in me a river of water that waters my depths.
- ❖ Let me fly up to Your bosom;
Instead of my lowly self, You would grant me the spirit of strength;
And instead of the tempests of the world, You would let me enjoy the peace of heaven;
- ❖ Let me fly up to You;
Not to be confused by the city of iniquity;
Nor be preoccupied by its walls surrounded by iniquity;
Nor by its streets full of deceit and usury.
- ❖ Let me fly up to You;
Not to be confused by the opposition of the enemies;
Nor be disturbed by the treachery of friends;
Nor be preoccupied with the words, sweeter than soft oil, yet they were drawn swords.
My encounter with You, lifts me up above any animosity;
And my contemplation in Your love, brings joy into my heart
- ❖ In You I trust;
You work in and by me;
And support me to fly up, and encounter You.

PSALM 56

PRAISE OF THE SILENT DOVE

Its occasion:

This is the psalm of the silent (or mute) dove; namely, concerns the believer who stands, utterly helpless, before the temptations and afflictions; as though, shocked in the depths of his soul, his tongue would stop talking, and his heart would moan and cries out. When God responds to the moans of his heart, and performs wonders; the believer's heart, mind, and all his feelings, would open up, together with his tongue, to praise God, and to offer Him sacrifices of thanksgiving, well received by God.

The silent (or mute) dove is the suffering church in every era, and in every generation; as well as the true believer, the living member in the church of the crucified Christ.

These cries by the prophet David, come out from the hearts of man, when he feels that all those around him intend to swallow, and devour him, even when they utter smooth words, or show apparent compassion.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, of God's blessings, is that He did not grant man the fangs of lions, the swift movements of wild beasts, or the huge body of elephants. Because those animals, although wild and vicious, yet they mostly never harm those of their own race. Whereas man often tend to harm to his fellow human, even though he did him no harm. If man possess those possibilities of wild animals, humanity would certainly disappear from the face of the earth.

Father **Onesimus of Jerusalem** believes that the prophet David – the silent dove – talks about the enemies; namely, the demons who stir up men to bear animosity against the children of God; to trample on them by their feet. By the enemies, he might, as well, mean Saul, the evil king; and Antiochus Epiphanus, who oppressed the people of God in the time of the Maccabees, and defiled the temple by offering a swine on the altar; and the Babylonians who captivated the people of God.

This psalm is probably a popular praise offered on the occasion of a national celebration, in which the people present thanksgiving to God in the city of Jerusalem. It could be one of the fall celebrations, when the believers look forward to a new year, full of blessings, during which they practice certain rites, seeking the blessings of God to dwell upon them.

Some believe that this praise was sung by the people in a spring celebration, during which they offer the firstfruit in the feast of the Passover; when the pastures are green with fertility. While others believe it to be sung following a famine, after which granted rain that restored the fertility to the land; and gave plenty of fruition instead of the famine.

Anyway, it is a psalm of thanksgiving to God the Beneficent, the Giver of blessings, and the Grantor of gladness by His Holy Spirit.

This psalm reveals a very important fact that the more we become close to God, the more our depths pour praise to Him, and accept His will that perpetually work for our growth and continuous progress.

The church tradition binds this psalm (verse 4 in particular) to the liturgy of funerals; when the believers imagine the departed, who used to live praising God in the

house of the Lord, singing and shouting loud on the hills in the eternal valleys; when they see him set forth to praise together with the heavenly creatures forever.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1- Praising God in the house of the Lord | 1 -4 |
| 2- Praising God in the midst of the universe | 5 - 8 |
| 3- Praising God for His gifts | 9 – 13 |

The title:

Prayer for relief from tormentors.

To the Chief Musician. Set to “The silent dove in distant lands”. A Michtam of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.

In the Syrian version it came as: A thanksgiving by the righteous for the sake of his salvation from his enemy, from the hand of Saul; And concerning, as well, the Jews and Christ.

David fled from Saul, and went to ‘Gath’ twice. The first time he went alone, and when they caught him, as an enemy, and intended to kill him, he pretended to be out of his mind. So they let him go. In the second time, when he resorted to Gath, together with 500 men, they welcomed him, and let them dwell in the city of ‘Ziklag’ (1 Samuel 27).

Who is the silent dove but David?! Yet being so helpless to defend himself, even by talk, like a dove; he attached himself to God, who alone could defend His believers.

Seeing that the title starts (in some versions) by the word “at the ultimate end”; As it is befitting of us to recognize the address where we are heading; we should know that the address is “at the ultimate end” refers to the Lord Christ, being “*the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes*” (Romans 10: 4). That is why, therefore, when we hear the words “at the ultimate end”, we are committed to concentrate our attention on Christ; lest we may linger on the way and never reach the end.

The Septuagint version, as well as the Volgata, used to translate the word “Phylistines” as (Allophili), which, according to St. Augustine, means (strangers); namely those strangers or far away from the saints. If God used to call His holy people “His vineyard”, He called the non-believers “wild vine” (Jeremiah 2: 21).

As to the word “Gath”, according to **St. Augustine**, it means “a winepress”, by which it refers to the church.

- ❖ By being taken to “Gath”, the Lord Christ (the Son of David) was taken to a winepress in His body; namely, the church. In a winepress, there is (pressure), by which it would be fruitful. The grapes on the vine, away from pressure, although it may look utterly intact, yet it produces nothing. But once it is cast into the winepress, treaded upon under pressure, although it may look harmed, yet it becomes productive; otherwise it remains barren and unproductive.

St. Augustine

1- PRAISING GOD IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:

Entering into the house of the Lord, the believer cast his sins at the feet of God, His Savior, who, alone, can atone for them, to make him enjoy the reconciliation with the Heavenly Father. Feeling that he is in his father’s house, capable of satisfying all his needs with the marrow and fatness of His love, the believer comes close to God, seek to unite with Him, and wishes not to depart from the Holy House.

“Be gracious to me, O God, for man would swallow me up; fighting all day to oppress me” (1)

The word “*swallow me up*”, meaning (pursue me”, thirsty for my blood; came in some versions as “trample on me” or “crush me”.

King Saul, with all his possibilities pursued David to kill him. But David, not fearing the king; knowing that he is nothing but a mortal man; corrupt salt that will be trampled by men, he did not say: “for the king would swallow me up”, but said: “*for man would swallow me up*”.

However the wicked think of themselves as of authority, and capable of trampling on us with their feet, or swallow us up, God has mercy on us, and lifts us up; As for them, they would, by their wickedness, would be trampled under feet.

While David is compared to a silent dove, helpless to open its mouth to defend itself; the mout of the enemy opens up, not only to utter lies and slanders, but even to swallow up David himself.

David was attacked by his fellow citizens, and even by his own household, and his friends. Now, coming to be among his enemies the Philistines, he expected nothing less than to be swallowed up by them alive. As war was continuous against him from his own, as well as from his friends, he had no salvation but by God the Almighty, the fountain of all mercy! Having no man to trust in him, he had no secure refuge but the Lord his God.

The psalmist cries out to God to be gracious to him and have mercy upon him; as man, generally, and without designating certain names or groups, have put in their hearts to swallow him up; namely, to pursue him, thirsty for his blood, like a vicious wild beast.

The psalmist did not have a moment of comfort; the opposition against him was continuous; “*all day long*”. The Christian, with his exalted love for his brethren in humanity, feels that the real enemy who unceasingly opposes him id the devil with his spiritual hosts of darkness.

❖ I wish the saints who are under pressure from those strangers from the saints, take heed of this psalm ... Let us take into consideration two enemies: one whom we can see, and another whom we cannot see. We can see men, but we cannot see the devil. So let us love men, and beware of the devil. Let us pray for the sake of men, and against the devil. Let us say to him: “*Be gracious to me, O God, for man would swallow me up*” (1)... Don’t fear that man would trample on you; for the first cluster of grapes who was pressed in the winepress has been Christ (Isaiah 53: 3) ... whose body (the church) would say, looking up at the Head: “*Be gracious to me, O God, for man would trample on me*”.

St. Augustine

“My enemies trample on me all day long, for many fight against me” (2)

In all the eras, the wicked bear a kind of animosity against the righteous, not because of some evil done by the righteous against them, but because of their pride. Satan and his angels got haughty against God, and here they are, in their pride, intend to crush every believer. Yet their high hands will soon be destroyed, and their wickedness will get back to them (Psalm 54: 5).

❖ The prophet, by so saying, confirms what the apostle Paul will say in the future: “*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in*

the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6: 12). It is the devils who stir up people like king Saul, Antichus, and the Babylonians; provoke them to practice oppression against the innocent men; and against nations, to lead them to worship idols, and practice evil pleasures. They still fight us to let us be trampled by the earthly lusts. Yet he who rises up to the height of virtues, and does not slide down into longing for the earthlies, would become too high for them to trample him.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

- ❖ “*All day long*”; namely, all the time. Let no one say; Yes, there were troubles in the old, against our fathers, but not in our days. If you so think, that there are no troubles that afflict you, you would not be a Christian; about whom the apostle says: “*All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Timothy 3: 12). If you have never been persecuted for the sake of Christ, beware, lest you may have not still started to live by godly in Christ. ... Enter into the winepress, and prepare to be pressed; Do not be too dry to produce juice when pressed!

St. Augustine

“*The day I am afraid, I will trust in You*” (3)

David does not deny that he suffered sometimes from fear; Yet he never despaired, but always said: “*I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in His words I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning*” (Psalm 130: 5, 6). Although he was courageous, yet he, sometimes, suffered from fear, as he did the day he fled from his people, and had to resort to the enemies; and for fear that they may discover that he was the one who killed their hero – Goliath – and the cause of their defeat; he pretended to be out of his mind before the king of Gath, to escape from his hand.

Whenever David felt fear because of an affliction that dwelt upon him, he trusted in God, for his soul to find comfort, and, and for fear to be taken away from him. In the moments fear dwelt upon him, he did not lose hope in the Lord, ... The righteous, indeed, are not immune from fear in some moments, but their fear would provoke them to cry out to the Lord, and to trust in Him even more; and their fear would not then, be counted as a fall, but would rather justify them.... He who does not lean on the chest of God when fear comes over him, would be counted as a denier of the existence of God, and of the divine care.

Some believe that the word “*day*” (3), means (day light). Whenever the soul of the believer is enlightened by the light of God, fear would not be able to dwell on it; as it leans upon God, and puts all its hope in Him who enlightens it by His eternal joy.

In the interpretation by father Onesimus of Jerusalem, it came as: “*In the height of the day, I would not fear; for in You I trust*” (3).

- ❖ Saying: “*From the height of the day*”, means that my enemies fight against me from the old to defeat me; since the day when the Pharaoh and his followers were having us in bondage in the land of Egypt. But I will not fear, for in You I trust.

Others say “*For many are they who fight me from the heights*”, referring to the angels of the devil who fell from high up.

Adding: “*In the day light I do not fear*”, means that he who is enlightened by the light of faith, is as though, walking in the beauty of the day light, as is written by the apostle to the Romans. That is how it is with him who leans upon God and does not fear.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

❖ Now, righteousness comes from faith; it is the beginning granted to us by the Spirit, when we start to recognize our evil doings; when we no more justify our sins. But it only reaches perfection, when death is swallowed to conquest.

While we are still in the middle of the battle, fighting and become wounded, we would ask ourselves: “Who is the conqueror?” ... Brethren, the conqueror is he who trusts in God, while fighting, and does not trust in his own strength. As the devil has his experience in war; yet if God is on our side, we shall overcome. The devil fights by himself; If we do the same, he will be the conqueror!. ... As the devil is a mighty warrior, let us then call upon God to confront him. If you let Him dwell in you, who is unconquerable, you will conquer him, who usually conquers. For he conquers only those whose hearts are void of God.

Love is the perfection of the law of God, and the goal of His commandments. We did not get the kind of law that threatens us from outside; but the law of righteousness in our hearts¹.

St. Augustine

“In God whose word I praise, In God I trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?” (4)

The main line in this praise is the trust of the psalmist on God, for then he would not fear any opposition, particularly that coming from flesh.

Holding fast to the divine promises, or the attachment to the word of God, would turn our fears, from being lamentations, to become praises of thanksgiving to God our Savior. That is *what led the psalmist, in the midst of his fears, to sing, saying: “In God whose word I praise”*. For

God’s word is the truth, capable of lifting us up to the divine presence, and bringing us forth to the divine light; that darkness would no more have authority over us.

“What can flesh do to me?” The word here came to mean (the body of dust), that is helpless, and cannot stand against God; being written

“they were but flesh, a breath that passes away, and does not come again” (Psalm 78: 39); and: *“My Spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh”* (Genesis 6: 3).; and, *“All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades; because the breath of the Lord blows upon it”* (Isaiah 40: 6-7).

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, the word *“flesh”* here, means (carnal), as the apostle says: *“For you are still carnal; for where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal, and behaving like mere men?”* (1 Corinthians 3: 3); And his saying:

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8: 6). The spiritual man, trusting in God, will not fear the mortal carnal man; For the former bears in himself the eternal life, and the peace of God; while the later bears the eternal death.

❖ Saying: *“In God whose word I praise, ... I will not fear”*. Means: I said, and did not fear; yet I do not boast my own strength, but praise God. And also means: In the time of my anguish, I utter praises beautified by the name of God; And also means: If God

¹ Com. On 1 John, 4: 3.

helps me to cry out to Him, men will commend the truth of my sayings; And also means: As my sayings include the knowledge of God, and trusting in Him, they are, accordingly, commended. For he who trusts in God, being a spiritual man, does not fear a mortal man, for the mortal, in the Holy Book, is called (flesh).

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

St. Augustine binds between the psalmist's lack of fear, and his trust in God, saying that he does not refer his lack of fear to himself, but to his hope in God in whom he trusts. In this, the psalmist differs from the wicked who do not fear the others, not out of fear of God, but because of their violent nature, and the hardness of their hearts.

St. Augustine does not wonder that the psalmist who was moaning, because men were trampling upon him, and fighting all day long to oppress him(1); now says: "*I will not fear. What can flesh do to me*"(4). He was before "grapes"; but after men trampled on him with their feet, he produced wine. By trusting in God, we would never fear flesh; For God turns the affliction in our life into a flood of spiritual wine, namely, of inner joy.

2- PRAISING GOD IN THE MIDST OF THE UNIVERSE:

If e, in the house of the Lord feel that we are back to our Father's house, to settle down in His bosom; In the universe with all its beauty and possibilities, we would testify to the might of the Lord our Father, who created the world for the sake of happiness and gladness of man.

"All day they twist my words; all their thoughts are against me for evil" (5)

The prophet David is amazed for what the wicked around king Saul are doing; twisting his words and deeds; about which David said to Saul:

"Why do you listen to the words of men who say: 'Indeed David seeks your harm'?" (1 Samuel 24: 9). The wicked have joined forces to think evil against David to do him harm. *"All who hate me whisper together against me; Against me they devise my hurt"* (Psalm 41: 9).

If the prophet David feels pride in God's words and His true and faithful promises; he complains of the words and hidden thoughts of the wicked, which are diverse and twisted; who set nets to catch and devour the righteous.

When the believer utters the words of truth, what would he expect from the wicked who hate the truth? *"All day they twist my words"*. They oppose the Truth uttered by the true believer, and their thoughts turn to devise to hurt him.

❖ They twist our words. Yet be consistent on speaking the truth; Preach the truth; Proclaim Christ to the heathens; Proclaim the church to the heretics; Proclaim the salvation to all men. ... When they twist my words; who do they oppose but Him whose words I praise? ... When they reject the words, when they hate them; What would they do to him who utters them? ... If they hate the bread itself, What would they do to the basket that contain the bread? ... If they became against God Himself; I wish the body does not exclude what happened with the Head! ... They despised Your Lord; Do you expect to be honored by those who became strangers from the saints?... Do not seek for yourself what Christ did not seek before you! For "*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household?*" (Matthew 10: 24-25).

St. Augustine

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the psalmist here, refers to the Jews who twisted the words of our Lord Jesus to catch Him by a word, and to deliver Him to the ruler. And after His ascension they used the same way with the apostles and the disciples. That is what we

notice in the epistle of the apostle Paul in his last days, saying to the leaders of the Jews, when he arrived in Rome: *“Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people, or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans”* (Acts 28: 17).

- ❖ God is abundant in mercy to all who call upon Him; *“His tender mercies are over all His works”* (Psalm 145: 9). If you meditate in the world, you will see this apparent everywhere. Search in the Holy Book, to see Adam and Eve, naked and in fear; and to see how God’s mercy and love, calls on them like a compassionate Father, to clothe them, and to give them peace.

St. John Chrysostom

“They gather together, they hide, they mark my steps, when they lie in wait for my life” (6)

It did not stop at devising evil against him, but the thoughts of the wicked turned to gather together in secret to plan plots to harm him. They marked his steps; they lied in wait for his life (Psalm 59: 3); namely they sought getting rid of him, and even killing him: *“Please go and find out for sure, and see the place where his hideout is; ... take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with certainty”* (1 Samuel 22-23).

Nothing would please the wicked more than the death and perdition of the righteous.

- ❖ In the translation by Simachus, it came that they gathered together in secret, marked his steps, lied in wait for the perdition of his soul.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

“Repay them for their iniquity; In wrath, cast down the people, O God” (7)

In the Hebrew origin it came as: *“Shall they escape by iniquity?”*

The wicked, assuming that evil bear strength, they do not fear death, nor are disturbed by hell: *“Because you have said, ‘We have made a covenant with death; and with Sheol we are in agreement’* (Isaiah 28: 15). But the psalmist perceives their inability to stand before the wrath of God; he says: *“But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days”* (Psalm 55: 23).

The wicked may prosper and succeed, yet their success will not be sustained; their depths will not find comfort; and they will never taste the inner peace of God in their hearts.

“You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?” (8)

While the wicked mark the steps of the righteous, to plan to harm him, God, on His part, watch the righteous during his wanderings, and collects his tears as a deposit of glory prepared for him. ... While the wicked care for getting rid of the righteous, God, on

His part, cares for his salvation. *“Does He not see my ways? And count all my steps?”* (Job 31: 4). *“The very hairs of your head are all numbered”* (Matthew 10: 30).

God records the troubles and tears of His believers in His book, as events that preoccupy His heart; For He cherishes and rewards His believers for their tears that proclaim their faithfulness and love, He treasures their tears as though in a bottle.

The apostle Paul, following the example of His Lord, wrote to his very beloved disciple Timothy, saying: *“Greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy”* (2 Timothy 1: 4).

It was an old custom that man collects his tears in the time of anguish and distress in a bottle of delicate glass of 3 to 6 inches, seals it, and keeps it to be buried together with him when he dies. When David said: *“My sin is ever before me”* (Psalm 51: 3), he probably had in mind the bottles containing the tears of his repentance, by which he drenched his couch every night (Psalm 6: 6) ¹.

❖ Strive to walk the narrow road to enter the city of peace, Jerusalem, prepared like a bride for her Groom. Yet the way to it needs tears shed day and night:

“All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears” (Psalm 6: 6).

“My tears have been my food day and night” (Psalm 42: 3).

“For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping” (Psalm 102: 9).

“O Lord, and give ear to my cry, for I am a stranger with You” (Psalm 39: 12) ².

St. Maccari the Great

❖ You see my tears, O Lord, as though they are before Your eyes. You, who knows the hidden things, and who fulfilled Your promise, saying: *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”* (Matthew 5: 4).

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

❖ The tears which are truly shed in intense grief, a depressed heart, together with a knowledge of the truth, and a burning inside, are food for the soul, that comes to it from the Heavenly Bread, of which Mary has partaken when she sat at the feet of the Lord, and shed her tears, according to the testimony of the Savior Himself, saying: *“Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her”* (Luke 10: 42). How precious are the pearls that come down together with the shedding of the blessed tears?

St. Maccari the Great

3- PRAISING GOD FOR HIS GIFTS:

What preoccupies the believer's mind is the water of the Holy Spirit flowing from under the threshold of the temple of the Lord (Ezekiel 48). Instead of the draught prevailing on the world, God pours His Spirit, to set out of the barren and dry soul, a heavenly paradise.

Pouring the water during the celebrations of the feast of the Passover by the high priest, from a golden flask, was a vital part of the rite.

If the believer is exulted by the love of God who pours the gift of His Holy Spirit in the depths of the soul, to set out of the inner man, a living icon of the Heavenly

¹ Boyd's Bible Handbook, p. 239.

² عظة :8 :25

Groom; The psalmist meditates in nature to see the valleys clothed with green pastures, and the hills girded with the gird of gladness; to see the whole nature dance and sing for the Creator, amazing in His gifts and divine care.

“When I cry out to You, Then my enemies will turn back. This I know, because God is for me” (9)

While the righteous calls upon God to hide in Him, as though in a secure refuge and stronghold; the wicked, on the other hand, will turn back greatly terrified; *“When my enemies turn back, they shall fall and perish at Your presence”* (Psalm 9: 3). ... That is what the psalmist knew, that God is his Savior from all his enemies; To Him he resorts, and in Him he finds refuge.

❖ Once You receive my prayer, my enemies flee away, and my knowledge that You are my Support is realized.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

The psalmist presents to us as an example, when the apostle Peter rebuked the Lord for talking about His coming crucifixion; to which the Lord responded by saying to Peter: *“Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for You are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men”* (Matthew 16: 23). By that the saying: *“Then my enemies will turn back”* (9) is realized. Yet, the Lord did not mean for Peter to remain back, but meant for him to turn back from his faulty reaction, to what he used to be. [For such a goal, temptations are stirred up, to empty the vessel of evil, and fill it again with grace].

❖ What a great knowledge. He does not say: “I knew that You are God”, but says” *I knew that You are my God”* (9)... He is yours when He helps you.... He is yours when you are no more a stranger to Him; ... When it is said: *“Happy are the people whose God is the Lord”* (Psalm 144: 15). ... Now, To whom is He? And To whom He is not? ... Above anything else, God is for those who love Him, and hold fast to Him ... those who worship Him, as though they belong to His household; ... to His great household, who are saved by the blood of His great only begotten Son. ... what a great thing granted to us, to become His own, And He to be Our Own.

St. Augustine

“In God, whose word I praise; In the Lord whose word I praise” (10)

What preoccupies the heart of the psalmist amid his fears, are not the affliction of which he wishes to get rid, But the word of God and His promises that bring the soul forth into the divine presence, to be filled with joy and exultation.

While the wicked despises the word of God, The righteous praises it: *“He who despises the word will be destroyed; but he who fears the commandment will be rewarded”* (Proverb 13: 13).

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the talk her concerns the sure and perfect knowledge of God. He who knows Him will trust in Him; and will not fear a mortal man.

Here we notice that the psalmist (in the Hebrew version) uses both the two names: God, the (Elohim), and the Lord (Jehovah). The former expresses the divine Might; and the later expresses God’s dwelling among His people. It is as though the psalmist praises God for His Might, as well as for His compassion on His people.

“In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid, What can man do to me?” (11)

- ❖ I remember, O Lord, my vow You; I shall not forget, And I care to fulfill it; as it is a debt on me, to offer sacrifices of praise.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

- ❖ Why does He say to us: “*Rejoice*”, but because He conquered for our sake, and fought for our sake?!

When did He fight? ... He fought by taking our nature upon Himself;
He conquered for our sake; We to whom He proclaimed His resurrection;
Attach yourself, O man to God; He who created you a man;
Attach yourself very close to Him; Put your trust in Him;
Call upon Him to be your strength. Say to Him: “*In You, O God, is my strength*”;
Then you would sing when threatened by people. As to what you would sing, the Lord Himself will let you know, saying: “*In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid, What can man do to me?*” (11) ¹.

St. Augustine

- ❖ In case some people approach you, with the devil among them; talked evil about you, and reviled you; Listen to what the prophet says: “*It is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I would bear it. Nor is it one who hates me, who has magnified himself against me; then I could hide from him*” (Psalm 55: 12 – Septuagint). ... Do not get out of your cell, but stay there and keep silent... If they present a false testimony against you; Receive it, and say: [It is as you say].... Do not revile them back, but keep silent.... The Lord Himself kept silent in a similar situation.... Just say to them: [Let me repent}. God will see your humility, and will save you from such a temptation by great wonders.... In case the devil leads you astray, do not say in your heart: [there is no more place for repentance], but you should rather moan and cry until the building of your life gets renewed, the way it was before².

St. Theophilus, the Pope The garden of monks

- ❖ When your mind and all your being is commended in the God, there will not be a cause for the loss of commendation; For God never fails; You should, therefore cross over, even on the commendation addressed to you³.

Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle

“Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises to You”
(12)

What was the vow that the psalmist had to fulfill? And what were the sacrifices which he was to offer to the divine presence? The vow to fulfill was to receive the will of God with joy, and to exult in His works; trusting in His divine mercy, and His exalted love for him. The sacrifices were “the perpetual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God”.

- ❖ Out of the storehouse of the heart, the incense of thanksgiving is offered; and out of the good conscience, the sacrifice of faith is offered. All what you offer should be

¹ Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67: 4.

² رسالة القديس أنبا ثيوفيلس إلى الرهبان، 18 (فردوس الآباء).

³ Sermon 137: 2.

flared with love. Let your vows inside you, you offer as a praise to God. Why praising Him? For what He granted you; ***“For You have delivered my soul from death”*** (13).

St. Augustine

“For You have delivered my soul from death; Have You not delivered mt feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?” (13)

As the believer take refuge in God, the Grantor of life, death will not be able to crawl into his soul; nor his feet would slide or deviate to the way of evil. But he would walk blamelessly before the Lord; the darkness of the tomb would not be able to keep him from setting forth to god, the true Light. Together with our father Abraham, he would listen to the divine voice, saying: *“I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless”* (Genesis 17: 1).

❖ The church clarifies how she can please the Lord *“in the light of the living”* (13); namely, in the splendor of the saints; For by them, the church would be glorious, without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5: 27). Everything dwelling on them will shine on her face; like when man is in good health, his face would look more beautiful; *“A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance”* (Proverb 15: 13). So will the beauty of the holy church become more apparent with more worthiness of the blessed¹.

Father Cassidorus

❖ By myself, I was dead; But by You, I shall be alive.

St. Augustine

¹ Cassidorus: *Exposition of Ps. 5: 13.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 56

LET MY MOUTH BE SILENT; AND YOU SPEAK INSTEAD!

- ❖ My depths stand in awe;
And my mouth becomes mute;
Anguish as all around me;
All men turned into strangers!
Even those I used to count as my household;
For, behold, man intends to swallow me up!
- ❖ I resort to Your divine mercies, O You who gives me bountifully!
When You transfigure before me, my heart becomes filled with peace toward all men!
No enemy opposes me, except the devil;
All day long he sets for me the nets of sin;
He even stirs up my brethren against me;
But with You I can overcome him;
My heart flares with love;
When toward my opponents;
For one enemy intends to devour all;
You are the Grantor of conquest, O my Savior!
- ❖ Behold, the hosts of darkness mark my steps;
To set for me nets to catch and to kill me;
But You, O my God, are marking my steps;
To turn evil into good for me;
You care even for the number of the hair of my head;
How amazing is Your love for me, O my God;
And how amazing is Your exalted care.
- ❖ In You I hide; for You are my refuge, and the stronghold of my life;
My thirst is quenched with Your words; and my hunger is satisfied with Your love.
Your presence grants me life;
And satisfies all my being;
Your presence terrifies the enemy;
He turn back in shame and disgrace.
- ❖ How can I pay You back for Your exalted love?
I vow to You to be wholly Yours;
To offer You the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving;
I shall enter to Your presence in peace;
For You are the true Light.
Who scatter every darkness of the enemy.
I offer You my thanks, O my Good Savior.

PSALM 57

AMONG LIONS OR THE PSALMIST REJOICES IN THE MESSIAH, HIS SAVIOR

Its occasion:

David sang this psalm, as it came in the title, when he was hiding in a cave; whether it is the cave of 'Adullam' (1 Samuel 22: 1-5), or the cave of 'En Gedi' (1 Samuel 24: 1-22); and when Saul, his pursuer, fell into his hands, and he refrained from killing him. This psalm may represent the whole life of David in general, for he kept taking refuge in the caves of his land.

David was escaping from the face of saul; as though consummating what the Lord said; "*When they persecute you in this city, flee to another*" (Matthew 10: 23). David kept fleeing from the face of Saul, so as not to stir up his wrath by his presence before him.

This psalm reveals the extent of danger that dwelt upon him, expressing it as: "*There is but a step between me and death*" (1 Samuel 20: 3);

It reveals, as well, the extent of God's care for him in the midst of all dangers.

The key of this psalm is the verse: "*Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth*" (5, 11). In the midst of troubles, God, who dwells in heaven, is glorified, the High by His appearance, and His transfiguration in our life in the midst of suffering. Even if we, on the earth, among the lions, yet our joy is unceasing, for the sake of Him, who saves our souls from the lions, and cast the evil enemy into the the same pit which he prepared for us.

What preoccupies the heart of David, amid his anguish, in his relationship with God Himself. He begins by crying out to Him, seeking His divine mercies, together with testifying by his great trust in God, who hears the prayers and the cries of the heart (1). If he portrays his enemies as vicious lions (4); Yet he gives God thanks beforehand, as though his salvation has been already realized (5). At the same time, what occupies him was that the day will come when he would praise God together with his people (6 – 10).

A Messianic psalm:

As verse 9 was quoted in the New Testament; many scholars believe that this psalm is Messianic. If David was victorious and conqueror, It would be the Son of David who would rather be as such, having conquered to our account. And if David has submitted all his enemies; the Lord Christ has rather more done by His cross and His resurrection for our sake¹.

Many fathers believe that David, hiding in the cave, and the conqueror of king Saul and his men by his humility, has been filled with joy and exultation; not for the sake of his conquest over Saul, but on account of that, by the eye of prophecy, he saw the Messiah, coming hidden in Manhood, to proclaim conquest over the devil and his hosts.

The prophecies that came concerning the Son of David in this psalm:

¹ Cf. W. Plumer. *The Psalms*, p. 598.

a- In the title of this psalm, the cause of crucifying the Lord Christ, was proclaimed.

b- In the title of this psalm, as well, it was referred to the conquest of the crucified Christ, by destroying the devil “up to the end”.

c- The title of this psalm referred to the incarnation of the Word, together with hiding His Divinity as though in a cave.

d- The crucifixion of Christ proclaims the flow of the divine mercies (1).

e- The encounter of the divine mercy and Truth on the cross (3)

f- The opposition of the wicked against the Savior (4).

g- The ascension of Christ (5).

h- By the cross, the devil was destroyed (6)

i- By the cross, we enjoy the Spirit of God, the Grantor of abidance and praise (7).

j- By the cross, the Gentiles came to believe, and to be among those who praise (9).

k- By the cross, the believers became like clouds rising up to heaven (10).

1- The cross, and the flow of divine mercy	1 - 2
2- The encounter of mercy and truth	3
3- The opposition of the Jews against the Messiah	4
4- The ascension of Christ	5
5- The destruction of the devil by the cross	6
6- The cross, the grantor of strength, joy, and glory	7 - 8
7- By the cross, the door of faith was opened before the Gentiles	9
8- By the cross we became like clouds	10 - 11

The title:

Prayer for safety from enemies

To the Chief Musicians. Set to “Do not destroy”

A Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave.

Or:

“Up to the end”, “Do not destroy” (*Al. taschith*)

A Michtam of David

When he fled from Saul into the cave.

1- We have already dealt with almost all what came in this title when we taled about the titles of the previous psalms. Yet, it is the first time we encounter. the term *Al, taschith*, which, although almost unanimously agreed that it means “Do not destroy), yet it is differently interpreted:

a- Some believe that it refers to a musical instrument of nine strings,

b- Some others believe that it refers to the tune or the music used in singing this psalm.

c- Some others believe that the saying “Do not destroy” refers to Saul; As though its goal is to sing this psalm in this memorial occasion.

Either because God has put in the heart of David, not to stretch his hand to God’s anointed, or that David has kept his men from killing Saul.

d- This expression bears a little prayer coming forth from the believer’s heart, who does not seek the destruction of his enemies, but their salvation. He rather seeks the destruction of their animosity, evil, wicked deeds, plots, and not their souls.

e- According to **St. Augustine**, this title is a prophecy that is completely realized in the title put on the cross, as a reason for the death of Christ “The King of the Jews”. Although they sought His death by crucifixion, Yet, on the contrary, by the cross, His kingdom was realized on the New Israel.

- ❖ What Pilate wrote, he did not change, according to the request of the non-believers (John 19: 22), as it was previously been prophesied; when it came in the psalms: “Do not destroy” as a title. The Gentiles came to believe in Jesus Christ the King of the Jews; He reigned on the Gentiles as well¹.

(St. Augustine)

2- In the title it came: “**Up to the end**”, a reference to the Lord Christ, who came in the fullness of time, and consummated the work of salvation “up to the end”.

- ❖ As this psalm came to praise the passion of the Lord; Look at its title: “Up to the end”. The “End” is Christ. Why was He so called?

It is not because He comes to an end, or that He is consumed, but because it is He who consumes.

(St. Augustine)

3- “*He fled from Saul into the cave*”. Many scholars, including **the scholar Origen, and St. Augustine**, believe that David, hiding in a cave, refers to the hiding of the Word of God in the Manhood; as “*He emptied Himself*” (Ephesians 2: 7), and hid His glory by His incarnation.

- ❖ What does hiding in a cave means? A hiding in the earth.

He who hides in a cave is (covered) by the cave, not to be seen. Christ, on the other hand, carried the earth, namely, the body He took from the earth, in which He hid Himself, so that the Jews would not recognize Him as God, “*Had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*” (1 Corinthians 2: 8). They could not recognize Him because He hid Himself in a (cave); namely, He revealed to them the weakness of the body; while the majesty of Divinity has been as though hidden in a secret place – in a (cave), namely, clothed by the body. ... The cave could be understood as the lower reaches of the earth.

(St. Augustine)

1- THE CROSS AND THE FLOW OD DIVINE MERCIES:

“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings, I will make my refuge; until these calamities have passed by” (1)

The repetition of the expression “*Be merciful to me*” in the beginning of this psalm, probably refers to the need of both the Jews and the Gentiles for the divine mercies, which was realized by the cross... As according to the apostle: “*Since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith, and the uncircumcised through faith*” (Romans 3: 30).

The psalmist David was in great danger; but God’s mercies were greater and mightier. That is why he repeats his request “*Be merciful to me*”; as there will be no salvation for him, except through hiding under the wings of God; namely, by putting his life in His hands.

¹ Sermon 218: 7; see sermon 201: 2.

In His love for man, and in his humility, God is like a bird that puts her little ones underneath her wings to protect them from danger.

“Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings” (Psalm 17: 8).

“How precious is Your loving kindness, O God; The children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings” (Psalm 36: 7)

“I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings” (Psalm 61: 4).

“Because You have been my help; Therefore, in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice” (63: 7)

“He shall cover you with His feathers; and under His wings you shall take refuge” (Psalm 91: 4)

“The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wing you came for refuge” (Ruth 2: 12)

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing” (Luke 13: 34).

❖ The repetition of the expression “Be merciful to me”, refers to our need for the mercy of God in the two times: the present time, and the time to come, I also refers to the abundance of God’s mercy.

“The shadow of the wings of God” is His Power that cares for the world, about which He talked in the gospel of St. Mathew, saying: *“How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing”* (Matthew 23: 37). In the present world we take refuge in the shadow of God’s wings; whereas in the one to come, we take refuge in what is greater than a shadow.

It is said that God’s wings, here, are our faith in Him, and our thoughts lifted up, through which our minds are lifted up. The righteous who is supported by such thoughts trust in God, trusts in the shadow of god’s wings, until the iniquities have passed by; because iniquities do not last, but pass by.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

According to **the scholar Origen**, the prophet desired to enjoy the shadow of the divine wings; namely, the law and the prophecies. Whereas the believers of the New Covenant seek what is greater, they seek the two wings themselves; namely, to be lifted up by the Holy Spirit, and to enjoy the Truth Himself, and not just His shadow.

❖ By these words, the (bride) shows that the time has come when all the shadows disappear, and the Truth Himself abides¹.

(The scholar Origen)

According to **St. Augustine**, by this phrase, the Lord Christ Himself cries out praying, to teach the believers how to cry out, and how to seek in the midst of anguish, until the calamities pass by, and they come to enjoy the hope for resurrection.

❖ For it is for this goal He prayed, to teach us how to pray; And for this goal he suffered, to teach us to suffer; and for this goal He resurrected, to teach us how to hope for the resurrection.

¹ *Commentary on Songs, 3: 5.*

(St. Augustine)

If the psalmist David cries out seeking the divine mercies, the whole world, with all its peoples are in need of those mercies.

St Jacob El-Serougi meditates in the birthday celebration of the Lord Christ, who came to offer Himself a sacrifice on behalf of the whole world, to liberate it from the bondage of the devil. He was crucified to let the nations that were enslaved to the devil for so long, that the time has come to be liberated through the crucifixion of the divine savior. By the cross He proclaims that He is the Mighty Liberator; the Artist, capable of reforming the distorted human image; the Architect to reconstruct the falling house; the Shepherd to bring back the prodigal sheep; the Physician to heal the soul, together with the bodies, to bandage the wounds and fractures, and to grant strength to the weak.

How great are the mercies of God, the crucified Almighty, and the amazing in His love.

❖ On that day, freedom was issued for the enslaved, who was bound for the service of atheism.

On that day, the bound for so long was loosed ; for the Mighty One resurrected and broke the shackles of her prison.

On that day, the Great lord has overcome the nation of the devils, and taken back his own.

On that day, the imprisoned came out of the darkness; for the Light shone, and broke down the gate of the darkness.

On that day, the Great Architect reconstructed the fallen building; And in order to keep it from falling again, He brought into it the support of the Divinity.

On that day, the Lord reconciled with Adam; For the Son who shone, brought up peace in between the two parties.

On that day, the Shepherd found the prodigal sheep, put it over His shoulders, and brought it forth into paradise.

On that day, the flock of nations came back, for the hidden wolf was destroyed by the Shepherd of all.

On that day, those on the outside came inside; and those of the household came out of the King's house angry.

On that day, the Mighty One came over the rebel, held him tight, the great Warrior came tied him up, and devastated his house.

On that day, the great Warrior came to the land of captivity, tied the captor tight, and took back His own from him.

On that day, came the healer of the broken, to strengthen the weak, to bandage, to cure, and to satisfy by His care¹.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

“I will cry out to God Most High, to God who performs all things for me” (2)

The psalmist David felt his weakness compared to the power of his adversary; Yet, at the same time he was sure that God remains above all, not to be scorned; and that He is capable to perform what seems impossible to protect him, and to grant him the abundance of His peace and joy.

¹ Mamer 201 on Nativity of our Lord (see Dr. Behnam Sony).

It is as though the psalmist looked forward to the Son of David who accepted to be tried, and be hanged on the cross, to redeem him by His precious blood, and to bring him forth up to the High dwelling places.

The leaderships, together with the people cried out seeking His crucifixion, and bringing Him down to the pit, to get rid of Him forever. Whereas the psalmist, on the other hand, cried in his depths by the language of the Spirit, recognizing in the Crucified, the “Almighty God”, the Judge, who intercedes for the psalmist to bring him up high.

- ❖ When the Righteous cries out to God, it would not be by loud voice, as much as by the abidance and strong activity of the soul; about which the apostle says in his epistle to the Romans: “*The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us, with groaning which cannot be uttered*” (Romans 8: 26). As to saying, “*God Most High*”, it refers to the fact that, as iniquity is lowly and mean, the need is for Him who is up High.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

The Fearsome Judge came to be an Intercessor on my behalf, by his blood shed as atonement for my sins; whom St. John described Him as being like “*A Lamb as though it had been slain*” (Revelation 5: 6). His wounds remain visible in His body, in a way that surpasses our minds; and His blood remains interceding for us. “*He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them*” (Hebrew 7: 25).

To put our souls at ease, St. John the beloved says: “My children these things I write to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we

have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous. He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world” (1 John 2: 1, 2).

The Judge became an Intercessor on behalf of the accused, who received Him, believed in Him, attached themselves to Him, and lived by His Spirit dwelling in them. Hence we anticipate the day of Judgment with joy, saying: “*Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercessions for us*” (Romans 8: 33, 34).

So, I fear the day of judgment no more, nor is terrified of my sin, however heavy and evil; yet it is helpless to deny me the love of my Lord Jesus Christ, or to preoccupy my mind away from Him; as long as I come forth to Him, attached to the cross with a contrite heart. For, at the cross, the powers and defilements of sin are broken, and hope will remain working in me.

The cross will remain a sign of God’s love for us; draws our hearts to Him; however sad our iniquitous hearts, and however much we feel our disobedience and transgressions on God’s commandments.

- ❖ Through the role of the cross, the deceit brought forth by the old serpent was exposed (Revelation 12: 9).

The lust of the riches and the authority, that came through eating from the tree of knowledge, was loosed by the fruit that appeared from the Tree of Life (The Crucified Christ).

The guard of paradise (Genesis 3: 14) was dismissed, and the keys of paradise was given to the robber who became worthy of standing on the right side of God (Matthew 17: 31).

He took over the spear of the cherub who was guarding the tree of life (Genesis 3: 24), He opened up the way to paradise, stabbed its corruptor with the spear, and opened up the paradise to let in the heirs who were cast away¹.

He let the robber in, and opened the gate of hope before the household of Adam.

The mercies were opened up for the sinners.

The gates of the pit were closed shut, after being wide open.

He brought forth gladness to paradise, by opening up its closed gates.

The evil times that were for the household of Adam passed away.

And on came the good times, for those who were cast away to inherit.

He cancelled the great bill signed by eve, our mother, and written by the serpent.

He accepted to fulfill every debt on Adam our father.

For this goal He came down, became one of us, and bore our death, for he made us of him.

He became like us when He condescended, came to be beside us; and made us like Him before His Father.

He granted health, and bore the pains of the sick.

He visited the sick, and endured the pains on the hands of His crucifiers.

He killed the dragon who devoured Adam, the dust.

He gave Eve back the attire of glory by which she was clothed, and which was robbed from her by the serpent in paradise.

From Adam he took away the miserable cover made of tree leaves, and gave him instead the attire of glory, from which he was bared.

Behold, He is Emanuel, our God, as He was preached; With Him we live by His life. Glory be to Him forever.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

The cries of the Lord Christ, being a Representative of humanity, proclaim our need to cry out to God, to seek His mercies; trusting that He will always work for our edification and our good; "Does good for us and protects us".

❖ If He is the Most High, how come that we hear Him cry out? Trust is realized through experience, saying: "*To God who performs all things for me*" (3)

If He, even before I search for Him, has performed all things for me, Will He not listen to me when I cry out to Him? ... God the Father did good by delivering our Savior Jesus Christ to die for our offenses, and to be raised because of our justification (Romans 4: 25). For what kind of men did He accept to die ? For the sinners!

Yet, although the sinners did not seek God, God sought them. That is why, being the Most High, our groaning are not far from Him; as "*The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart*" (Psalm 34: 18). "*God performs all things for me*".

(St. Augustine)

❖ Among all those who are clothed with a body, He is the only Righteous; Jesus Christ; as He testifies to Himself, saying: "*I have overcome the world*" (John 16: 33); and to Him the apostle Peter testified (quoting the prophet Isaiah), saying: "*He committed no sin, nor was guile in His mouth*" (1 Peter 2: 22).; and the apostle, saying: "*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us*" (2 Corinthians 5: 21).

How did He make Him a sin?

¹ الرسالة الأولى (د. بهنام سوني).

He bore the sin without committing it, and nailed it to the cross (Colossians 2: 14). About which the apostle also says: *“Those who run in a race, all run, but one receives the prize”* (1 Corinthians 9: 24).

Besides, No one among men, who went down to the battle, and was not wounded or struck; For sin prevailed since Adam transgressed against the commandment (Romans 5: 14). It struck many, wounded many, and killed many; and no one of those many was able to kill it, until our Savior came on His cross. It had a thorn that prickled many, until the end came, and its thorn was broken when You were nailed on the cross¹.

(St. Aphrahat)

2- THE ENCOUNTER OF MERCY AND TRUTH:

“He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. God shall send forth His mercy and His truth” (3)

The two terms “mercy” and “Truth” came personalized; referring to the Person of the Savior who says: *“I am the Truth”*, He is also “Mercy” and “love”. If *“He sends His angels to encamp all around those who fear Him”* (Psalm 34: 7); He, Himself, the Lord of angels, comes down to make us enjoy the divine love, and the joyful evangelic truth.

Considering this psalm as Messianic, the way he does for most of the psalms, St. Augustine sees in it the image of the Lord Christ in His passion, that grants the conquest. In the name of all mankind, whom the incarnate Word of God represents, and whose sins He bears, the Lord Christ cries out to the Father to send from heaven, and save Him. He obeyed even to death – death on the cross, And has the authority to rise; yet presenting to the Father His saving passions, He seeks from Him to raise Him up and glorify Him; so that, in Him, we would rise and be glorified, in and with Him, as the Head of the whole church.

By the resurrection of Christ, what came in this psalm was realized; which the Lord Christ proclaimed by saying to the Jews: *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will rise it up”* (John 2: 19); on which St. John the Evangelist comments, saying: *“He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them, and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said”* (John 2: 21, 22).

❖ We find that Christ Himself is Mercy and Truth. He is ‘Mercy’ in His suffering for our sake; And He is ‘Truth’ in judging us.

(St. Augustine)

❖ This saying concerns the human nature, that, after the disobedience of our father Adam, was taken over by death, sin, and the devil.

Those three enemies have trodden on her, and she was among them as though fallen asleep among the young lions; namely, unconscious, and not moving.. Then God the Father sent His only begotten Son; Namely He was pleased and satisfied to send Him to the world; He who descended from heaven, yet not location-wise, nor through any change in essence (the Godhead); nor from the physically seen heaven; but, by saying: *“He descended from heaven”*, we mean that He condescended and accepted to become a completer man, and to come to earth incarnate.

¹ *Demonstrations, 7: 1.*

He received human humility, while still a Mighty God, with His Divinity and Majesty. He is the “Truth”, for He is the True God from the True God.

And He is the “Mercy” as well, for His mercy let Him be compassionate upon His creation, and by His passion, He saved them from the mentioned young lions, wakened them up from their sleep, took away their disturbance, kept them from perdition, and turned their humiliation and shame back to their enemies who trampled upon them.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Like men who do not wish to live a weak life in their old age, so are the believers, who wish to live in the truth and all righteousness, up to the day when they stand before God, who will judge everyone according to his works in justice and truth. For our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sake, to resurrect from the dead, in the last day, not only by the body, but to resurrect now, as well, from the death of sin.

Those who died in sin, after living for long in evil, wasting their life in defilement, will rise up by the command of Him who died for our sake and resurrected. And while some will continue in repentance, glorifying God for His salvation and His blessing; others will continue to be ignorant, not recognizing who has done them good!

What an honor, bestowed by our Lord Jesus Christ on those who honored Him in their true sufferings; granting them the eternal life; and not letting them die again in sin, but live in justice, and rise up in the body, to live forever.

And how greatly despised will the others be, as they are once again delivered to their defilements, and delivered to Hades, because of their sins, up to the Day of Judgment.

(St. Abba Shenouda – the Archimandrite)

❖ “Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)

He alone, showed this mercy to those who believed in Him among humans, and were redeemed from sin; Such un-expressible salvation will come over those who patiently wait for the Lord, seek Him, and trust in Him (Psalm 40: 1-3).

(St. Maccari the Great)

3- THE OPPOSITION OF THE JEWS AGAINST THE MESSIAH:

“My soul is among lions, I lie among the sons of men, who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword” (4)

The psalmist David sees his enemies like fierce beasts; lions who bear the thoughts of the devil, who “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5: 8). He is an enemy set on fire to burn and scatter. The words of the enemies come out from between their teeth that gnash with malice and hate; as though deadly arrows; and their tongue as sharp as the sword.

It is a serious portrait of the situation of those leaders who persisted on crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ.

❖ By saying “teeth”, the prophet means their words coming out from their mouth and teeth of the wicked against the righteous, to stab them like arrows aimed from afar, and like sharp swords; the way the Jews did against our Lord, in His presence, and absence.

(Father Onesimos of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Such kind of people, who slander their brethren, do not look at them, nor mix with them; “*Do not incline your heart to the evil words*” (Psalm 141: 4 – Vulgate); lest the psalmist will say to you: “*You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother’s son*” (Psalm 41: 20); Lest you become “*like the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword*” (4); or become like him whose words are “*softer than oil, yet they are drawn swords*” (Psalm 55: 21); and properly expressed by the words: “*A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; a babbler is no different*” (Ecclesiastes 10: 11) ¹.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ The household of ‘Caiaphas’, the company of all evil; and those of ‘Annas’, who bore the sword against our Savior; Judas preceding them, like a leader of a bloodthirsty gang;

Like patients, out of their minds, who bore the sticks and swords against their physician, to strike the one who healed them.

Threats, hate, insolent words, insults, ridicule, and gnashing of teeth against the Victorious.

Men of dust, out of their mind, threatened, and came out against the waves; and the thorns and thistles, came out against the fire.

The chaff hastened to fight against the fire; and the dust against the wind that could wipe out the mountains.

Clouds came out to threaten the daylight; and the shadows to face the Sun;

When He asked them: “Whom do you seek?”, they fell back; as the chaff has no power against the wind;

The rays of the sun scattered the shadows, and found no place to go to!

When He answered: “*Here I am*”, the wicked fell back; for the whole world could not stand before His might;

His sea of fire could consume them; and His mercies could quench His fire to keep them safe;

His power could bring them down; but His mercy supported them and set them up².

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

- ❖ Those did not bite with their teeth; and I wish they would have, and not stabbed by the spears of hate, which are more deadly.

Who would suffer from a worse pain? He who is struck once, and got healed or he who is continuously eaten by the teeth of need? Need could be worse than a furnace or fierce beasts³!

(St. John Chrysostom)

In his interpretation of the verse of the song, saying: “*I am wounded with love*” (Songs 2: 5), **the scholar Origen** says: [The Lord Christ is the divine arrow that pierces the heart, not to tear it apart by a deadly wound, but He grants the sweet wounds of love]. From him St. Augustine quoted, and, comparing the wounds caused by the arrows of the wicked to those by the Lord Christ, he says: [the former seeks the killing and perdition,

¹ Letter 125 to Rusticus, 19.

² Mamer 53 on Eve Holy Thursday (see Dr. Behnam Sony).

³ On Matthew, homily 81.

crying out: “*Crucify Him, crucify Him*”; while the arrow by the Lord Christ wounds the heart with love, and seek fellowship with God, and love for humanity].

- ❖ Do not think of the unarmed hands, but of the armed mout, as from it came out a sword by which Christ was killed. In the same way a sword will come out of the mouth of Christ, to kill (the denial of faith) of the Jews. This sword is sharpened twice (Revelation 1: 16); by it He sets up those whom He strikes; and separate from them those whom He intends as believers in Him. They are an evil sword; But He is a good sword. They are evil arrows, and He is a good arrow; from whom good words come out, when He stabs the heart of the believer to love!

(St. Augustine)

4- THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST:

“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth”

(5)

If the enemy intended to bring the psalmist David down to the pit; God, on the other hand, carried him in His bosom, to bring Him forth, not to earthly glories, but to heaven itself. Likewise, the killers of the Lord Christ thought that they have sealed the tomb on Him; Yet, was risen, and ascended to heaven, to raise us up together with Him, to raise our hearts up to His heavens. In the midst of His passion, our Lord Jesus cried out to the Father: “*Glorify Your Son that Your Son also may glorify You*” (John 17: 1).

- ❖ About this saying, **St. Athanasius** the apostolic says: [That saying concerns the ascension of our Lord to heaven, and the filling of the whole world of His knowledge and faith in Him].

(Father onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Our nature, in the Person of the incarnate God, rose up above heaven; exalted above the angels, above the archangels, and the cherubim, and soared above the seraphim, and all the heavenly hosts; and settled down in the true divine throne.

You can see how heaven exalts above the earth; But let us rather start by looking downward. Don’t you see how far is Hades from the earth? Earth from heaven? And heaven above us from the heaven of heavens?!

Look at how our nature has gone down, then rose up! ... There would never be a going down more than what man has gone! And, there would never be an ascension higher than what Christ has ascended! To clarify this, the apostle Paul says: “*He who descended is the One who ascended*”... *Where did he descend? Into the lower parts of the earth, and ascended far above all the heavens*” (Ephesians 4: 9-10) ¹.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ After His resurrection, He remained forty days on earth, before ascending to His Father.

He did not intend to ascend directly from the tomb to His Father, before confirming His resurrection.

He gathered together the church for whose sake He died, on the Mount of Olives, to watch Him ascending to His Father.

¹ *In Ascensione PG 50.*

The great Savior walked His walk, consummated His mission, and went out to go, and to send the riches to the bride whom He chose.

He chose the poor, the needy, and the suffering; and promise to send to her the treasures of His Father.

She came back naked from captivity; ... He ascended and sent down the Holy Spirit, the Giver of clothes to all those who are naked.

He brought the captives forth, who got nothing; And ascended to send them treasures and riches.

He came and died in our place; then ascended to the place of His Father; to give, by His death, life to the world, which was not living¹.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

5- THE DESTRUCTION OF THE DEVIL BY THE CROSS:

“They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down; They have dug a pit before me; Into the midst of it they themselves have fallen” (6)

While the enemy prepares nets to bow the believer’s soul down to earth, and digs a pit to let him fall in it, never to stand aright, or to keep his heart from rising up to heaven; Behold, the enemy himself falls in the net which he prepared, and into the pit he dug. Whereas the believer, on the other hand, will enjoy the Holy Spirit who renews the depths and the mind forever; His heart will be lifted up to heaven; and his inner man will turn into a harp on which the Spirit of God plays a symphony of love, praise, and thanksgiving to God.

Although the wicked use their evil means to charge against us, Yet it is not befitting of us to defend ourselves by similar ways; We should not use nets before their nets; nor pit before their pit. Let us believe that what they prepare and dig is for their destruction; for in them they will certainly fall.

A Greek proverb says: [The evil counsel will mostly be for the perdition of the wicked counselor].

And a Roman proverb says: [There is no law more just than the death of him who condemn man to death, by the same way he invented to destroy the life of others. ‘Guillotine’ who invented the instrument which bears his name ‘the guillotine’, was condemned to death by the guillotine². And the wicked ‘Haman’ was crucified on the gallows which he prepared for ‘Mordecai’ (Esther 7: 10).

❖ ***“They have prepared a net for my steps; My soul is bowed down; They have dug a pit before me, into the midst of which they themselves have fallen” (6)***. He who is fond of the temporal things, his soul would bow down to earth; as was the woman whom Satan has bound, and bent over for eighteen years, whom the Lord loosed of her infirmity (Luke 13).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ The whole race of mankind is like that woman (Luke 13: 11), who was bowed down to earth, bound by Satan. Against such enemy, the psalmist cries out, saying: ***“They caused my soul to bow down” (6)***. The devil and his hosts bow the souls of men and

¹ Mamer 204 on Ascension of our Lord Jesus (see Dr. Behnam Sony).

² Plmer, P 597-598.

women down to earth, to let them seek the earthly temporal things, and to keep them from seeking the high things¹.

- ❖ If Christ was not put to death, death would not have been put to death. Satan was defeated by his own conquest; For he rejoiced when he deceived the first Adam, and delivered him to death; Yet, by killing the second (Adam), he lost the first one he caught in his nets².

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The crowd of Jews, together with their leaders stood against Christ, struggled against the Lord of all; but they could not perceive that what they did has been against themselves, preparing a net for themselves, and digging a net for their own perdition (Psalm 9: 15). ... For the Savior, the Lord of all; although His right hand and might could destroy the corruption, and put death to death, yet He submitted by His own free will; for He became man to taste death for the sake of all, to make corruption to no avail, to take sin away from the world, and to save those who are under the hand of the tyrant enemy³.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- ❖ *“Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped”* (Psalm 124: 6, 7). The psalmist did not dare to say “I broke the snare“, but says: *“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth”* (Psalm 124: 8); prophesying about Him who will come to destroy the snares prepared by the devil.

Yet, the best way to destroy such a snare is to put a bait for the devil; so that, once he charge against his victim, he would get caught by the net;... Then I can say: *“They have prepared a net for my steps, in which they themselves have fallen”* (6).

What was that bait? He had to take on Himself our humble and weak body, to crucify that humility and weakness. Because if He chose to take for Himself a spiritual body, He would not say: *“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26: 41).

Liste, therefore to the voice of both: the voice of the weak body, and that of the willing spirit.

“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Mathew 26: 39).

He condescended and took on Himself our body; condescended and bore our misery and weakness. Definitely, His Divinity did not suffer by that; And even His Manhood despised those pains.

Let us therefore follow Christ; As, according to the Scripture: *“You shall walk after the Lord your God, fear Him, ... and hold fast to Him”* Deuteronomy 13: 4). To whom shall I hold fast, if not to Christ?!; as, according to the apostle Paul: *“He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him”* (1 Corinthians 6: 17).

By following the steps of the Lord, we shall return from the wilderness to paradise

(St. Ambrose)

¹ Sermon 162 B.

² The Ascension, 263.

³ In Luc. Sermon 1: 40.

- ❖ Who are those wicked adversaries, other than those said by the prophet to “*prepare net for my steps*” (7), by which they catch the souls for sin? Those God will destroy, until there would be no more of them to catch anyone who peacefully “*sits under his vine, and under his fig tree*” (Micah 4: 4)¹.

6- THE CROSS, THE GRANTOR OF STRENGTH, JOY, AND GLORY:

The five last verses came conforming to psalm 108: 1 – 5; despite the difference in the occasions of the two psalms. The psalmist often used to begin his psalm by crying out to seek the divine help, and ends it by giving praise and thanksgiving to God his Savior.

“My heart is steadfast, O Lord, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise” (7)

Concentrating his eyes on his Savior, and putting trust in Him, He who is capable of lifting him from the pit up to heaven, the psalmist’s heart become steadfast; so that the enemy – whatever his strength is – would not be able to lead him astray from his goal.

The psalmist was ready to endure all temptations that might come upon him, as long as God, his Savior, supported him.

- ❖ According to St. Athanasius the apostolic, the prophet says: [I am ready, and well prepared to receive the Holy Spirit, promised by the only begotten Son, who inspires giving praise and singing for the sake of God’s great works.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Man should not glory in his own temporal honors; but should prepare his heart to endure all things; so as to be able to sing with joy, together with the prophet, saying: “*My heart is steadfast, O Lord, my heart is steadfast*” (7)².

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ What does “*My heart is steadfast*”, but (My will is strong)³?

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- ❖ While I am preparing my heart, the adversary enemy prepares a pit for me. Should I not prepare my heart to endure? ... He prepares a pit to catch me! Should I not prepare myself to endure? ... That is why he will fall in it, while I sing...

Let us listen to the heart prepared by the apostle, following the lead of his Lord, saying: “*We also glory in tribulations; knowing that tribulations produces perseverance; and perseverance character; and character hope. Now, hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the holy Spirit who was given to us*” (Romans 5: 3-5). Although the apostle was under pressure, in chains, and in prison, yet he says, “*I also glory in tribulations*”. When? When his heart is prepared – steadfast!

(St. Augustine)

“Awake, my glory! Awake, lute and harp! I will awaken the dawn” (8)

According to the Syrian version, the word “glory” came as (harp).

¹ On Joshua, homily 16: 4.

² Sermon on Mount, 1: 19: 58.

³ Sermon 226: 1.

And according to the Jewish tradition, the psalmist David used to take his lute or harp, wherever he goes, even while fleeing away before the faces of his enemies. He could not sleep before playing one or two psalms; and could not start work early in the morning before practicing the same. He knew how to praise God, even in the moments of tribulation and anguish.

❖ Help me, O Lord, You are my glory; for You glorify me by Your help. Come now to my help; as I am ready to praise You, and to give You thanks by my lute and harp.

The prophet calls the coming of the spiritual hosts together with the physical senses, “*lute and harp*”. Whereas **St. Athanasius the apostolic**, on the other hand, calls the grace of sonhood, as glory; and calls his soul and his body “*lute and harp*”; as he gets up to praise God with his (soul and body). As to saying: “*I will awaken the dawn*”, it means, that because of my enlightenment by the spirit of sonhood, I will praise You, not only now, but also with the shining of faith in You in the whole world, in the anticipated daylight, which is that of Your divine incarnation.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

According to **St. Jerome**, It is the Lord Christ talking here, He who hid the glory of His Divinity by His incarnation. In the midst of his passion, He seeks the proclamation of His hidden glory.

❖ “*Awake, my glory, Awake*”. Let this be our thought. The reference here, is to the glory of the Savior, that the apostles have perceived in the humility of His body (the body of Christ); and saw by keen eyes, not what is visible, but what is hidden in the body¹.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Let the saying: “*Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it*”(psalm 81: 10) be realized in us. ; “*The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it*” (Psalm 68: 11). I am utterly sure that your prayers are like mine, concerning our struggle to realize the conquest of the truth. You seek the glory of Christ, not your own glory. If you are conquerors, I, as well acquire the conquest, if I discover my sin².

(St. Augustine)

Many fathers present symbolic concepts of the “lute and harp”, as referring to the believer’s body, talents, and energies, that awake to praise and glorify God. Seeing this psalm as Messianic, **St. Augustine** believes that the “lute and harp” are the work of the Lord Christ, whether according to His Divinity, like performing miracles, or according to His Manhood, like feeling hunger and thirst, and falling asleep, etc.

❖ The “lute” is the body that practices the divinities; while the “harp” is the body that endures the sufferings. Let the lute play; let the blind see; the deaf hear; the paralyzed be filled with strength; the lame walk; the sick heals; and the dead gets up alive. That is the voice of the “lute”. ... And let (Christ) be hungry, thirsty, asleep; Let him be scourged, scoffed, crucified, and buried. That is the voice of the “harp”! ... When you see in that body things that give voice from above and from below; it is in one and the same body, that both “the lute and the harp” play together. These two kinds have been realized in the gospel, and preached in the nations: the miracles and passion of Christ.

(St. Augustine)

¹ *The Fathers of the Church, vol. 57, on Ps. 15 (16).*

² *Letter 75: 2.*

7- BY THE CROSS, THE DOOR OF FAITH WAS OPENED BEFORE THE GENTILES:

“I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations” (9)

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, the prophet David, by the spirit of prophecy, saw the heathen nations receive faith in Jesus

Christ; Seeing them praise and sing, he put himself as their partner in giving praise and thanksgiving to God. How exultant the psalmist’s heart became, to see, before a thousand years, the heathen nations perceive the concepts of his psalms, and come to use them to praise God.

❖ The church of the peoples, the betrothed of the Sun of Righteousness, has, together with the daughter of the Jewish people, a joint song to praise her Lord. Come forth, O those with upright heart. Sit and listen to both of them!

Let us see who of them is the bride of the divine household! And who of them is the one who holds the ring of the Groom, and keep His treasures!

Let us search and see where the truth is between the two of them! She, who say the facts will be glorified!

Debate stirred up in the church. Let us silence her, and let her works enter without noise.

Light shone on me, for I was before in darkness. Jesus the Light opened up my eyes, for I was blind.

The prophet cried out, and said to me: *“Forget your people, and your father’s household”*. So I forgot them for the sake of the Groom whom I love.

How beautiful you are; How beautiful you are, O daughter of Aram; Your words are sweeter than honey.

You look like light; Your words are life and pleasure. The Groom is your beauty; and His blood is like a necklace around your neck.

His forgiving cross is a glorious crown put on your head; and His body is in your mouth, an endless medication for life.

He is portrayed upon your lips like a scarlet thread; and the color of His blood drives the wicked away from you.

You have all the treasures of God’s household. Blessed is Christ, through whom His Father gave you riches¹.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

8- BY THE CROSS WE BECAME LIKE CLOUDS:

“For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens; and Your truth unto the clouds” (10)

The psalmist perceived that God’s mercies are great and high. As much as heaven soars above the earth, God’s mercies soar above the thoughts and plans of men; No one could oppose, or keep from the men of God.

The evangelic truth is like clouds; Who can destroy them, or take away from the men of God?!

¹ Mamer 212 Against the Jews 6 (see Dr. Behnam Sony).

- ❖ Your compassion on humans, made the angels in heaven glorify You; for You lifted the fallen man up to heaven. You have realized what You proclaimed to Your prophets. Like the clouds that go up high from the earth, take up the strength of rain, water the earth; So are the prophets and the apostles, who rose up above the earthlies by their virtues; and took up from God a grace to water the souls of the earthly creatures, out from what they have got of God's proclamations; hence they are called "clouds".

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ In heaven, the angels praise God. Seeing the form itself of the Truth, without any darkness in vision; and without any mixing with fantasies, they see, live, and praise without any worries. There, is the Truth; while here, it is our misery; for which mercy is given. There, there is no need for mercy, as there is no miserable being The "cloud" is understood as being the preachers of the truth. God shines upon those people who bear the body in a dark way, by the glimpses of miracles; and thunders on them by the thunder of the commandments¹.

(St. Augustine)

"Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth"

(11)

The psalmist ends the psalm by asking the Savior to come to set up His suffering church, and to lift her up as though to heaven; to bear the fellowship of His exalted glories.

- ❖ When the truth appeared through the preaching of the prophets and the messengers, People knew that You are the High God, Creator of heaven and earth, and all creation.

(Father onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ What is Your glory, above all the earth? It is Your church, your bride, above all the earth².
- ❖ To whom this was said? Is "*Be exalted*" said to the Father who did not empty Himself? ... No, but is said, "*Be exalted*", to You who came down to the womb of a woman³.

(St. Augustine)

¹ Sermon 363: 4.

² Sermon 147 A. 4.

³ Sermon 262: 4.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 57

LET ME, TOGETHER WITH THE PSALMIST, CROSS OVER TO YOUR CROSS

- ❖ Let me, together with David enter into the cave;
To forget Saul and all his evil plots;
But to set forth together with my father David to Your cross.
- ❖ I see You, O my Lord, have accepted the cave of our nature;
You who exalt above heaven and earth;
You became man to hide the majesty of Your Divinity.
- ❖ For my sake You were hanged on the cross;
How amazing to see Pilate write the cause of Your crucifixion: “The King of the Jews”;
Did that Gentile perceive the secret of Your cross?
Did he perceive that You are the King of kings?
Did he perceive that, by Your cross, You destroy the devil and all his hosts forever?
- ❖ Your cross is an unceasing flood of mercies!
Your cross is a heavenly cave, in which I hide from the evil one;
Your cross is two heavenly wings under which I find shade;
Could the arrows of the enemy reach me, while I hide in the cross of Your exalted love?
- ❖ On the cross Your mercy will encounter Your righteousness.
By Your righteousness You glorify me in You, O the divine Truth.
I will not fear the great day of judgment.
As You are the Judge who covers all my being.
- ❖ Why do I see all stirred up against You?
They became like young lions who intend to devour You;
Their evil tongues turned into sharp swords;
They aimed their arrows toward You, O Giver of life.
They fell into the net they hid;
And slid into the pit they dug;
As for You, You carried Your believers in Yourself;
And ascended, together with them to Your heavens;
To grant them all the fellowship of Your glories.
- ❖ Your cross became a unique fountain;
That sets in my depths strength, steadfastness, and an unceasing joy.
Your cross turned my life into a harp;
On which Your Holy Spirit plays;
Plays praises that no human musical instrument can express.
- ❖ Your cross opened the doors of hope before all the peoples;
lifted humanity up from corruption;
And out of them, You set a heavenly cloud of witnesses.
Glory be to You, O who is crucified for the sake of humanity.

PSALM 58

THE EVIL FLATTERING COUNSELS

One of the lamentation pieces because of the oppression prevailing on the world.

It is difficult to say whether the psalmist refers to the wicked leadership of Israel, or to strangers. The psalm warns those of authority, who abuse their positions against the poor and those helpless to defend themselves.

The psalmist proclaims his complete trust in God, who brings forth evil upon the wicked who oppose the work of God¹.

And he looks at the enemies and the counselors who walk with the spirit of deception to catch those who fear the Lord. The psalmist David has long suffered from the deception of king Saul who has put in his heart to kill him however much it would take of effort or time. It might often seem as though Saul has got back to reason, seeking David's friendship; yet it would be just to look for another chance to kill him. David also suffered from the deception of his friend and counselor, Ahitophel, who was close to him, even in the house of the Lord, and eating with him on one table, then turned against him, helping his son Absalom to get rid of him.

This psalm came to call upon the wicked to forsake the malice in their hearts; as, although the righteous may seem helpless and weak before their deception, yet the wicked will end up to certain perdition. Whereas the righteous look up to their god, and glorify him for His righteousness and exalted care for those who fear Him.

The wicked judges:

The psalmist presents the following analogies to express the destiny of the wicked judges and those of authority:

- a- The mute, silent before talking the truth, while his works testify to his evil (1-2).
- b- The wicked who are estranged from the womb, who go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies (3)
- c- The deaf cobra that stops its ear, which will not heed the voice of charmers (4-5).
- d- The lion or the young lion whose fangs the Lord will break (6)
- e- The water of rain that dries up and disappears (7).
- f- The bow whose arrows are not sharp (7)
- g- The snail that, although moving slowly, yet it produces mucus that soon disappears (8),
- h- The stillborn child of a woman that may not see the sun (8).
- i- The thorns under the pot taken away by the whirlwind (9).

Its divisions:

1- Rebuking the deceptive wicked	- 5
2- The perdition of the wicked	6 - 9
3- The righteous glorifying God, their Savior	10 - 11

The title:

The just judgment of the wicked.

¹ *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, p. 767.

To the Chief Musician. Set to “Do not destroy”. A Michtam of David.

See the last psalm concerning the interpretation of “Do not destroy”.

1- REBUKING THE DECEPTIVE WICKED:

“Do you indeed speak righteousness, you silent ones/ Do you judge uprightly, you sons of men?” (1)

This apply to the counselors of Absalom, the son of David, particularly Ahitophel, those who planned for him to appear before the people as though more capable than his father to judge uprightly, and more compassionate and humble than him.

“Absalom would rise early, and stand beside the way to the gate. So it was, whenever anyone who had a lawsuit came to the king for a decision, that Absalom would call to him, and say: ... ‘Look your case is good and right, but there is no deputy of the king to hear you’. Moreover Absalom would say: ‘Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any lawsuit or cause would come to me, then I would give him justice’. ... So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (2 Samuel 15: 2-6).

That was how that prodigal son plotted rebellion against his father, by the counsel of his wicked counselors, by pretending to holdfast to the truth, and to care for the oppressed.

The Ahitophel counseled Absalom to choose 12,000 men, and to go after his father, who escaped before his face, to strike him that same night while still tired and exhausted.

Some see that what came in this psalm of David’s desire for the perdition of the wicked opponents, contradict with his compassionate feelings toward his son Absalom; as it is written: “The king had commanded, Joab, Abishai, and ittai, saying, ‘Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom” (2 Samuel 18: 5). And when the king heard of the death of his son, “The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept, saying, ‘O my son Absalom – my son, my son Absalom, if only I have dies in your place! O, Absalom – my son, my son!” (2 Samuel 18: 33).

David, probably feeling that the rebellion of his son was motivated by a group of wicked counselors, what he sought of judgment against the wicked (6-11), he did not mean his son Absalom himself, but those who were behind him; interpreting what he said as “Do you judge uprightly, you counselors?!”.

And some believe that king Saul, having failed to kill David, and the later fled to the wilderness before his face, the king called upon his counselors to hold a meeting to study and look for ways to protect the throne against David, whom he accused of rebellion, treason, and the desire to take by force the throne of Israel. David was crying out, rebuking Saul and his men, saying: “Do you seek justice, and judge uprightly, while planning to kill the innocent?! ... The psalmist calls them “*the sons of men*” either to remind them of their weakness, and that they are not above the law, but will be called to account because of their deeds; Or that they do not enjoy sonhood to God, but are the sons of men¹.

❖ Saul vowed to forsake his animosity toward David, and end his persecution against him; yet he has often broken his vow, and waited upon him to have him killed. ... It was the same way with Antiochus (Epiphanus), and his followers, when the Maccabees defeated them, they flatterly pretended to love them!, ... Many peoples

¹ Plumer, Ps. 58.

planned to harm the Jews; to whose deception and malice this psalm refers; the psalmist says: “Men, take into consideration that you are only sons of men; (namely, mortal); Compare your words with your deeds; Look and judge uprightly, whether you utter the truth!”.

This psalmist is, as well, a prophecy about the Jews who pretended to keep the law, and opposed our Lord Jesus because He performed miracles of healing on the Sabbath!

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

- ❖ I wish you have, not only the righteousness of the lips, but also that of works ... You teach contradictory to what you utter, You utter uprightness, while you judge evil.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Guile does not leave a place of simplicity, not subject to gods in the hearts ... But if the Lord saw the purity of heart assign to work greatness, any gift that the great high-spilling in the hearts of the righteous.¹

St. Ambrose

What brought sadness to the heart of the psalmist, is that the judges who were supposed to utter the truth, kept silent before the evil and wicked deeds of oppression against him².

“No, in heart you work wickedness; You weigh out the violence of your hands in the earth” (2)

It did not stop at not proclaiming the truth; but, together with the silence of their tongues; their hearts, minds, and works, testify more to the evil working in them. They might keep silent. Or utter sweet words, but their works testify to their evil. What they think in their hearts and minds are exposed by their deeds, when they publicly practice oppression; according to the words of the prophet Micah: “*Woe to those who devise iniquity; and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it; because it is in the power of their hands*” (Micah 2: 1).

The psalms asks them to weigh their hearts and works with the balance of truth; for what their hearts bore of malice and evil, was translated by their tongues, even though they pretend to be advocates of the truth. There is nothing in their hearts but malice; They claim to hold the balance of justice, when their hands move toward violence and oppression.

- ❖ This means that, although your words may sound good, yet their source; namely, your mind, is full of every iniquity; by your hands you practice oppression; and your thoughts and wicked deeds contradict your words.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

Some argue that the Hebrew word corresponding to commit adultery, "Paw-las" that exceeded the mean (the road). In the opinion of **St. Augustine** that the Psalmist here criticizes the bad guys because they accurately sin.

- ❖ Accurately your hands jointly in sin if you. So long as you work jointly (in sin) , associate sin to be sin.

St. Augustine

¹ *In Luc 9:57-62.*

² *In Luc 9: 57-62.*

“The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies” (3)

It is as though the psalmist says to them: I am not astonished to see what you practice of evil and oppression; for your works are in harmony with your nature, even from the womb. You are evil, the seed of evil, born to evil fathers.

We, as well, partake of their corruption that dwell on all mankind; if it is not for the grace of God that embrace us to Him, and grants us sonhood to Him; which is not for any favor on our part.... The psalmist says: *“speaking lies”*; as, according to **St. Augustine**, ‘they utter lies, for they bear evil, hidden in their hearts’.

Committing sin, and plunging in wickedness, is an estrangement from God and His law. As, according to the apostle, *“You, who once were alienated, and enemies in your minds by wicked works...”* (Colossians 1: 21).

According to **the scholar Origen**, this phrase is not to be literally interpreted; for no one can speak once he is born, nor be estranged to evil from the womb. But it is to be understood that, as much as there are firstfruit for the Lord, who dedicate their life t Him; there are, as well, firstfruits for the devil, who dedicate all their energy to oppose the divine truth¹.

Some heretics quoted this phrase; as well as the saying of the apostle, that *“God has separated him from his mother’s womb, and called him through His grace”* (Galatians 1: 15), to refer evil nature to the wicked, and good nature to the righteous, before their birth; To this, **the scholar Origen** responds by saying: [We say that Paul was not chosen by chance, nor because he had a unique nature; but, according to him, choosing him was by Him who knows every thing, even before it happens; ... as God foreknew that Paul would strive abundantly more than others in the gospel; ... that is why He separated him from his mother’s womb to minister the gospel. ... If, according to the heretics, he was chosen haphazardly, or on account that he had a different nature, he would not say that he has fear of being condemned, if he happens to fail to preach the gospel².

❖ Uttering oppression, they are uttering vanity; for oppression is deceptive. And even if they utter justice, they are also uttering vanity; for they utter what is not in their heart.

St. Augustine

❖ Before birth, the fetus does no good or evil; but it is after he is born, and become mature, that he so does. As to saying *“from the womb”*, it means that the wicked, being born from wicked parents, who do not know God, nor that He cares for the world; they did what estrange them from justice, practiced oppression spoke lies, from their birth.

It also means that God, with his foreknowledge, knows those who would become righteous, according to His words to the prophet Jeremiah: *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you”* (Jeremiah 1: 5). With this same meaning, God said to Pharaoh: *“For this goal, I set you, to show My might in you”*. Yet the foreknowledge of God was not the reason why Jeremiah became a saint; nor why Pharaoh became evil!

¹ Cf. *homilies on Numbers, homily 3.*

² *Commentary on Rom. (1: 1).*

The font of baptism is, as well a womb; for baptism gives forth to spiritual birth. While the sinners, and those who estranged themselves from the truth of faith, alienated themselves from it through the vanity of their dogmas, and the forgery of their words; They got lost, on account of that they preferred lies to the truth.

St. Gregory o Nyssa says that the church is a womb, because it gives birth to Christians, and bring them forth to the divine light, and the eternal life. The heretics, on the other hand, were estranged and alienated from it, Man, if he, in his youth, practiced virtue or iniquity; he is said to be so made from the womb; as, according to the righteous 'Job': "... *Or eaten my morsel by myself; so that the fatherless would not eat of it (but from my youth I reared them as a father); and from my mother's womb I guided the widow ...*" (Job 31: 17, 18).

So is also the corrupt teaching is a womb to those who were raised in it; those who receive it are estranged from God, and were alienated from Him, from their mother's womb; who is alien to Him.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

❖ According to the prophetic word, as men are estranged from the womb, the grantor of life, in which they were conformed; "they utter vanity instead of the truth" (3). That is why the Intermediary, took upon Himself the Firstfruit of our nature, sanctified it through His soul and body, without mixing, and with no leaning toward evil; keeping it in Himself; in order to ascend, bringing it up to the Father on non-corruption; And the whole race would go together with it because of the mutual nature; so that the Father would grant those who are denied the inheritance, and "let them receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4: 15; Ephesians 1: 5), as sons to those who desert the inheritance; and to let the enemies of God partake of the Divinity (the holy life) ¹.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

According to **St. Augustine**, the expression: those "*who were estranged from the womb*" refer to them, who after being born in the church, got estranged from it, bore the spirit of animosity against it, and were alienated from the truth.

❖ From what were there estranged? From the truth. And from where were they estranged? From the blessed city! From the blessed life!

There are those who are born from the womb of the church ... which is good! That is how and where they were conformed, and were not aborted, because they kept in themselves, the teaching of the truth, until they were completely conformed. Otherwise their mother would have to abort them, though in pain; Yet, their loss would be greater than hers.

That is why they were estranged from their mother's womb, for they uttered vain things; and because the truth dwells in the womb of the church.

St. Augustine

"Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; They are like the deaf cobra that stops its ears" (4)

In the old, some people used a kind of charming or magic to protect themselves and others from the bite of serpents. It came in the book of Ecclesiastes: "*A serpent may bite when it is not charmed*" (Ecclesiastes 10: 11); and in the book of Jeremiah: "*For*

¹ *On Perfection.*

behold, I will send serpents among you, vipers which cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 8: 17).

According to ‘Plumer’, there are still charmers of serpents in India and in Egypt; although they have no authority over the ‘cobra’, on account of, according to them, it is deaf, and does not hear the voice of charmers. And, according to G.S. Cansdale, there is a common belief that the cobra could be charmed, not by the sound of the lute, but by its movement¹.

Carrying a wicked will, man turn as though into a poisonous serpent; as he accepts the sonhood to the devil, and practices his evil works. However, God’s mercy anticipates the repentance of everyone, unless he stops his ears to the voice of the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of the reproach of sin.

They, not only seek to harm the righteous, but intend to kill him, as though by the poison of a serpent; as though there is no cure for the righteous from their deadly evil.

The psalmist likens those deceptive enemies to the serpent and the deaf adder; for their danger lies in their fangs and mouth. So it is with the wicked; they use their mouths to utter deadly and poisonous counsels.

The wicked became like the ancient serpent that introduced a deadly poison to mankind.

The became like the deaf serpent that does not hear the voice of charmers. They do no care for the begging of the oppressed, and do not listen to the words of God and His commandments. There is no more deaf than him who stops his ears to His brethren and to the divine commandment.

❖ It as though the Spirit of God talks to some people who do not hear the word of God; and would even refuse to listen to it, so as not to work according to it.

St. Augustine

❖ We became like the serpents, because the anger of men is like the poison of a serpent (5); and because “*the poison of asps is under their lips*” (Psalm 140 5)².

❖ Let us the beware not to be described as having the ears of a deaf cobra. Tell me if there is any difference between man of this kind and this kind of animal! How could he be so irrational like an animal, he does not care when God speaks?!³

St. John Chrysostom

“Which will not heed the voice of charmers, charming ever so skillfully” (5)

According to St. Athanasius the apostolic, the soul of an angry man is like the serpent that appeared in paradise, pretending to be wise before our old parents, Adam and Eve; and to bear the spirit of friendship toward them; yet it condemned itself to death. So was king Saul who pretended to bear the spirit of friendship toward David, when he intended to kill him; and so did the company of Antiochs Epiphanus; and so did the scribes and the Pharisees, to our Lord Jesus Christ, when they addressed Him politely as “Rabbi”, and “Teacher”, when they intended to kill Him. By that they came to liken the ancient serpent in evil, and refused to hear the sayings of the sent prophets who brought them the wise teachings. By their own choice, they stopped their ears so as not to hear;

¹ *Animals of Bible Lands, Paternoster, 1970, p. 206.*

² الأب الياس، ص 330.

³ *Homilies on St. John, 2L 11.*

that to them apply the words of the prophet Isaiah: “*Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed*” (Isaiah 6: 10).

- ❖ They are not deaf, but they so made themselves.
- ❖ They chose not to be in peace, but in anger; hence they refused to hear. If they heard, their anger would probably come to an end.

St. Augustine

- ❖ God called them “A generation of vipers”. On account of that, like these animals, walk with malice and harm the others¹.

The scholar Tertullian

2- THE PERDITION OF THE WICKED:

“Break their teeth in their mouth, O God; Break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord” (6)

The Holy Book often uses the mouth, teeth, and tips, to refer to the strength of the enemies. On one aspect, the fierce animals use their fangs to attack the prey; and on another aspect, the heretics and atheists, use their mouths to blaspheme God, and to lead the believers astray from the truth. The psalmist says: “*Arise, O Lord, Save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly*” (Psalm 3: 7). And the wise Solomon says: “*There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and whose fangs are like knives, to devour the poor from the earth, and the needy from among men*” (Proverb 30: 14).

Remembering how he killed a lion and a bear to rescue his father’s sheep (1 Samuel 17: 36), the prophet David says: “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion, and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me” (1 Samuel 17: 37). Now, however the enemies think that, like young lions, they could devour by their fangs, God can break out their fangs.

He sometimes likens them to serpents that inject its poison in its prey by its fangs; and other times to bloodthirsty young lions, that tear the prey with their fangs.

- ❖ The teeth of the wicked are their sayings; as like the poison of the serpent is in its teeth, so are the wicked. The harm is in their sayings that come out of their mouth and teeth. As for the fangs of the lions, they refer to their great strength, by which they tear apart the prey. But God will break them out, to rescue the oppressed from their harm.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

According to **St. Augustine**, those who came to tempt the Lord Christ, asking Him if they should pay the tax to Caesar, are like poisonous serpents. By His answer He broke their teeth inside their mouths. As to those who cried out “*Crucify Him, crucify Him*” , they roared like fierce lions and young lions; whose fangs He broke out completely.

- ❖ By saying “*in their mouth*”, He made their mouths testify against them; they are committed to the same sentence that their mouths have uttered.
- ❖ The teeth of the sinners could also mean their leaders who use their authority to lead men astray from the upright way, and to let them join the evildoers. ... Compared to

¹ *Adv. Haer. 4: 41: 2.*

their teeth, we also have the teeth of the church, by which the believers are cut off from the faults of atheism, and the heretic teachings, to lead them back to the church, the body of Christ. By such teeth, the apostle Peter was commanded by god to eat the beasts he slew; namely, to kill the atheism of the Gentiles, and to change them to be members of the body of Christ¹.

St. Augustine

❖ Let us them cry on them, not one day, or two days, but all along our life².

St. John Chrysostom

“Let them flow away as waters which run continually; And when he bends his bow, let his arrows be as if cut in pieces” (7)

The Lord Christ, having destroyed the devil and death by His resurrection, The devil became like a fierce beast whose fangs are broke, helpless even before children.

The psalmist looks at his wicked enemies, to see them like waters of the rain that come down on the desert, that is dried out by the hot rays of the sun; or seep in between the sand to disappear without trace. But when God, on the other hand, aims His arrows toward the wicked, they are torn apart to pieces.

Some believe that the talk here is about the wicked who aims his arrows to the righteous to kill him; but they miss their goal, and do the righteous no harm.

“Let them be like a snail which melts away as it goes; like a stillborn child of a woman, that they may not see the sun” (8)

The snail is a soft animal that lives inside a shell.

While working with all their strength and speed to catch the righteous in their hands, they are only likened to a snail, that moves very slowly Along, inside its shell, helpless to resist anyone who intends to carry it away. And while moving slowly, it secretes a slimy bright mucous on the ground, which soon disappear as it goes.

The wicked are likened to snail that, in the time of danger, changes its color from bright red to pale white, as though dead, and hides inside its shell³.

He also likens them to a stillborn child of a woman that did not complete its growth, born dead, and everyone seeks to get rid of it. Not see in the sun refers to that they are not counted among the living, for they have lost both the sight and the insight.

“Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of the burning thorns, whether green or ablaze, may He sweep them away as with a whirlwind, as in his living and burning wrath” (9)

Again, he likens them to the thorns that could not endure the fire of God’s wrath, Once the whirlwind blows on the thorns ablaze with fire, it turns into ashes that scatter everywhere. This analogy to the thorns that burn under the pot is often used (Psalm 118: 15; Ecclesiastes 7: 6).

The wicked are likened to a pot with food to be cooked on a fire burning by thorns gathered from the wilderness. But a whirlwind would blow all of a sudden, to sweep away the pot and the thorns underneath, whether green or ablaze. The wicked are preoccupied with making plots against the children of God, as though they burn fire in

¹ On Ps. 3.

² In Epis. Phil. 3: 4.

³ Cf. Barnes, vote 5.

thorns; but a whirlwind would suddenly blow to scatter their plans. According to **the scholar Origen**:

[Man's heart is like a furnace. But whether that heart is burning by iniquities ignited by the devil; it does not cook or bake, but burns. But if it ignited by Him who said: "*I came to send fire on the earth*" (Luke 12: 49) ; the bread of the divine Scripture and the words of God, which I receive in my heart, these I do not burn to destruction, but I bake to offer as a sacrifice¹].

- ❖ They cannot stand before you; they cannot endure, for they are going to perish by the fire of their lusts. ... The evil lusts are like fire and burning; as when the Holy Book speaks about adultery, it says: "*Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?*" (Proverb 6: 27). .. And the apostle says: "*God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts*" (Romans 1: 24).
- ❖ Upon them will dwell the fire of pride, the fire of lust, the fire of wrath. How dangerous are this fire; he on whom it falls will never see the sun; hence it is said: "*Do not let the sun go down on your wrath*" (Ephesians 4: 26). That is why, brethren, the fire of evil will terrify you, if you melt like wax, and perish before the face of God; when that kind of fire comes down on you, and let you see the sun no more.

St. Augustine

3- THE RIGHTEOUS GLORIFYING GOD, THEIR SAVIOR:

"The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked" (10)

Seeing the evil scatters, and the devil perishes, the righteous rejoices for the sake of the conquest of light over darkness, and righteousness over evil. All what the righteous longs for is to see the destruction of evil and the hosts of darkness, and the salvation of the wicked from their evils.

It was the custom in the old battles, that the victor washes his feet or hands in the blood of the slain enemies. It is as though the psalmist proclaim that the victory over evil is complete and final (Psalm 68: 23; Isaiah 63: 3)². The righteous washes his feet or hands (as it came in the Septuagint version) in the blood of the sinner. Even though the blood does not wash but defiles; nevertheless the righteous, seeing what dwelt upon the sinner, he gets terrified from the sin, and would fear that the same thing would dwell upon him, if he deviates to evil.

The righteous does not kill the wicked, but the wicked kill themselves by themselves through their evil; Then the righteous, passing through the land of battle, would wash his feet with their blood.

What makes the heart of the righteous rejoice is not the perdition of the wicked; but, seeing the perdition of the wicked, his heart would flare with obedience of the divine commandment, with great joy and purity; perceiving that he is justified by the divine grace, and is liberated from what the disobedient wicked has gone through.'

The secret of the joy of the righteous when he sees God's vengeance on the wicked, , is not gloating in the wicked, as much as it is thanksgiving to God for His justice.

¹ *Origin: Homilies on Leviticus, 5: 2.*

² *Plimer, Ps. 58.*

- ❖ Listen to the prophet say: *“The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked”* (10). The righteous does not rejoice in the vengeance; Far from it! But, fearing that what dwelt upon the wicked could dwell upon him, he would make his life more pure; hence this is a sign of God’s exalted care.

Yes, you may say that God could have threatened, rather than punish. But, if He does, and then punishes, Would you not say: He is only threatening; and you would become more slothful¹?!

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ When the righteous sees the punishment of the wicked, he himself would grow. As the death of one is the life of another.
- ❖ Take heed that the wicked perishes. Purify yourselves, therefore from sins.

You become, therefore, as though you, somehow, wash your feet or hands with the blood of the wicked.

St. Augustine

When the righteous, whom the wicked persecute with all their energies, sees that, after being like serpents, with their deadly poison, or like fierce lions; Once God intervenes to the account of those who fear Him, the following will happen to them:

- a- God will break out their teeth, as He saved David from the lion and the bear.
- b- They would become like waters in the desert, dried by the heat of the sun, or seep in between the sand of the desert.
- c- They would become like the snails inside their shells, helpless to defend themselves before anyone who intend to take anywhere.
- d- They would become like a stillborn child of a woman, lifeless, and would never see the sunlight.
- e- They would become like thorns burned by the fire of the wrath of God, turn into ashes, scattered by the whirlwind, and disappear.

These diverse portraits of how the wicked would become, if they persist on opposing the divine truth, and on persecuting those who fear God; would give peace to the righteous; for his life is in the hands of God, and not in those of men.

“So that men will say: ‘Surely, there is a reward for the righteous; surely He is God who judges in the earth” (11)

The righteous would sing, when God proclaims His judgment on evil; and present His blessings on the suffering righteous.

The righteous would learn a lesson by the chastisement of the wicked; perceiving that God is just; and that there is joyful fruit for righteousness.

- ❖ What fruit for righteousness? ... *“We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character hope. Now, hope does not disappoint, because the love of god has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us”* (Romans 5: 3-5). ... In love, there is fruit for the righteous.

St. Augustine

¹*Homilies on Philemon, 3.*

- ❖ It is the treasure that was given to them in this life to possess inside their souls, “*who became for us wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption*” 1 Corinthians 1: 30). He who found the treasure of the heavenly Spirit, and possessed it, will, by it, easily, and without effort, consummate every righteousness of the commandment. And all virtues, with purity and without blame.

That is why, we supplicate to God, beseech, and seek from Him, with the feeling of need, to grace us with the treasure of His Spirit, so as to able to walk in all His commandments, with purity, and without blame; and consummate all the righteousness of the Spirit, with purity and perfection, through the heavenly treasure, namely Christ¹.

St. Maccari the Great

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 58

CAN THE HOSTS OF DARKNESS STAND IN YOUR WAY?

- ❖ My soul groans because of the opposition of the wicked;
That, sometimes, I feel a condition of despair;
Together with violence, they use craftiness and deception;
They carry the spirit of their master, the killer, and the deceiver.
- ❖ The wicked, like their father the devil, think that they have authority;
And count all the world to be under their hands;
They crawl like serpents, to inject their poison by their fangs;
They would not be satisfied with less than the destruction of the righteous;
They do not endure seeing them, nor hearing their voice;
Nor would they receive their meekness and love;
They are like darkness that would not endure the light.
- ❖ They are like the young lions, that go around to devour their preys;
They count that no righteous can escape their fangs,
- ❖ But God will never let the stick of the wicked fall on those who fear Him!
He will break out the fangs of the serpents and young lions, to turn helpless as toys;
He may let them aim their evil arrows;
Yet they will never reach their goal, nor touch a righteous;
The wicked would become like snails, hiding in weak shells;
That are unable to move fast;
They would be stillborn without life;
They would not see the Sun of Righteousness;
Nor perceive the secrets of the divine love.
Yes, indeed, they are like dry thorns;
But, can the thorns stand before the fire of God’s wrath?
They would burn underneath the pots, and turn to ashes;
And would be scattered everywhere by the whirlwind;
- ❖ The righteous raise their hearts with thanksgiving;
When they see the oppression scatter before the righteousness of God;
And the darkness disappear before the divine light;
They praise the Righteous God with their whole being;

¹ *Sermon 18: 1,2.*

They rejoice and exult for the destruction of evil;
They long for the repentance of the wicked, and for the growth of the righteous;
They seek the salvation of the whole world.

PSALM 59

YOU ARE MY REFUGE AGAINST THOSE WHO LIE IN WAIT FOR MY LIFE

This psalm represents a personal lamentation by a righteous man who enters into an affliction cause by friends and fellow countrymen; who give false testimonies against him. But the lamentation turn into a praise of thanksgiving to god who save him from his affliction.

The prophet David wrote this psalm when king Saul sent men, and they watched the house to kill him; but Michal – David’s wife, and the daughter of saul – rescued him by letting him down through a window (1 Samuel 19: 12); (the same way the apostle Paul escaped in Damascus (Acts 9: 25); and said to the men sent by her father, that David is ill in bed. They stood guard at the door all night long, waiting for him to wake up; and in the morning they discovered the trick of Michal.

Some see in that event a prophecy about what was going to happen to the Lord Christ, when the guards were all around his tomb, which was sealed shut, And at the dawn of Sunday, they found the tomb empty, for Jesus was risen from the dead, as though from sleep, by the power of His divinity.

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The title:

**The assured judgment of the wicked
To the Chief Musician. Se to “Do not destroy”**

A mitcham of David when sent men and they watched the house in order to kill him

The psalmist raise this prayer, or this cry, to God to save him; as the animosity of Saul against him was at its beginning. The more Saul’s hatred exploded, the more David’s grief and bitterness grew. Yet he was steady in his belief that the only way od salvation was to take refuge in God by prayer and fellowship with Him, and giving Him praise.

The title, according to the Septuagint version came as: “By David for pillar inscription”; which **St. Augustine** believes to refer to looking at the cross to see the inscription with the cause of His crucifixion written in three languages, to be read by the whole world, to perceive that He is the reigning King.

As to the saying: “Do not destroy”, the psalmist refers to the Jews who protested this inscription to Pilate, who refused to change it, saying: “*What I have written, I have written*” (John 19: 22). **St. Augustine** ends his commentary, saying: [Let us, as well, perceive the passion of the Lord; and let Christ – the Head and the body, talk to us]. He sees in the title of this psalm a talk directed to us, concerning the Son of David, the crucified King; and also concerns the church, the suffering queen, being the body of Christ.

1- DAVID SEEKS SALVATION FROM THE WICKED:

“Deliver me from my enemies, O my God. Defend me from those who rise up against me” (1)

If it was Michal the daughter of Saul who rescued her man David from the hands of her father; David, on his side, perceived that the salvation could never be realized without the intervention of the divine care. God alone could lift him up above the hate of Saul and his evil plans

Saul devised a perfect plot to kill David, as he goes out of his house in the early morning. He sent a sufficient number of strong men whom David could not overcome, to surround the house on all sides; But God used Michal, the faithful wife of David, and the daughter of Saul to let David down from a window (1 Samuel 11: 12). By that, David’s supplication in the psalm was realized; as he felt that God has lifted him up to a high tower, where no hand could reach him: *“Lord, my God, In you I put my trust; Save me from all who persecute me, and deliver me”* (Psalm 7: 1). The Hebrew word for “deliver me”, means (Lift me up). If the enemy ‘Satan’ who fell down from heaven, exerts all his energy to bring humanity down with him to the pit; yet the heavenly Savior saves His believers through lifting them up to heaven.

St. Jerome likens the true believer to a bird flying up high, that the serpent crawling on earth down below cannot jump and swallow him.

Some, like Adam Clark, believe that this psalm suits the events of the construction of the walls of Jerusalem on the hands of Nehemiah under the oppression of adversaries like Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem,

What preoccupies the heart of the believer, is not to be saved from the nets that the enemy hides in the dust on earth, but rather with being lifted up by the Spirit of God, to soar as though up to heaven. And that his affliction would become a new chance for his depths to set forth to heaven: *“May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; May the name of the God of Jacob defend you”* (Psalm 20: 1); and, *“Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore, I will deliver him”* (Psalm 91: 14). In the midst of affliction, the soul sets forth to gain new knowledge in the name of the Lord, and a new experience of fellowship with Him.

Some interpret the Hebrew text: “Lift me up high”, that, if the enemies have arrogantly come upon him, as though from up high to kill him, assuming that he would never escape from their hands; the psalmist seeks from the One in the highest to lift him up as though to a heavenly tower, where no enemy can reach him, for God Himself is his Tower, Refuge, and the Stronghold of his life.

“Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloodthirsty men”
(2)

We often complain, and we sometimes protest against the oppression that dwells upon us. Here, David comments, that these oppression are but natural, for the wicked, by their nature which they corrupted, became bloodthirsty; longing to confiscate the rights of others, and to unjustly accuse them: *“The bloodthirsty hate the blameless, but the just seeks his well being”* (Proverb 29: 10).

The “Workers of iniquity” are king Saul and his counselors, who, flattered him by presenting the plan to kill David. And the “bloodthirsty” are those who find pleasure in torturing the innocent and the righteous, and shedding their blood.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the psalmist's enemies here, are Saul and his men; together with the principalities and authorities of the darkness of the devil and his hosts, who persecute the men of God. He also believes that the talk here is a call upon the Son of God, Savior of the world to come. And he also believes that it is a talk by the Lord Christ Himself, praying to the Father on behalf of the congregation of believers, being His body.

If God allows the devil and his hosts to persecute us, and seek our souls; It is to let us spend our whole life crying out to God; through which we would enjoy uniting with him, and enjoy the conquest; For there is no weapon to support us to get the conquest like praying and crying out to God.

According to **St. Augustine**, this phrase is the cry out of the persecuted church, and of every believer, presented to the father in heaven, through Christ, Head of the church.

- ❖ That same thing which happened to the body of Christ, is being realized in us as well. As long as we live on earth, our enemies; namely Satan and his angels, will not cease to persecute us on a daily basis, enjoying our weakness and helplessness, before their deceptive schemes, and temptations, and by the nets they keep setting up to catch us. But our voice is raised up to God, and cries in the bodies of Christ, through the Head who is in heaven, saying: *“Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloodthirsty men”* (2).

(**St. Augustine**)

- ❖ Saying “Deliver me”, or “Redeem me”, he asks for the coming of the Son of Man, who made Himself a ransom for the world. It is, as well, directed from our Lord Himself, seeking from God, His Father, salvation for the congregation of believers, His body, from the seen enemies, the workers of iniquity, and the bloodthirsty, who persist on killing Him, His apostles after Him, and all those who follow them. Yet His supplication to the Father is not out of weakness, nor of having less authority than that of the Father; Far from it! But it is meant to proclaim the perfection of His Manhood; and to teach us to cry out to God in the time of affliction.

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

- ❖ They were indeed bloodthirsty; those who killed the Righteous, in whom they found no iniquity. They were bloodthirsty when the foreign ruler (Pilate) washed his hands, and intended to release Christ, they cried out: *“Crucify Him, crucify Him”*. They were bloodthirsty, who cried out *“His blood be on us and on our children”* (Matthew 27: 25). And they were bloodthirsty when they kept fighting against His body; For, even after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, they kept persecuting the church, which started from the Jewish people, from whom our Head Himself came.

(**St. Augustine**)

“For look, they lie in wait for my life; the mighty gather against me; not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O Lord” (3)

Whenever the wicked gather against us, and lie in wait for our souls; let us remember what happened to the prophet David; and let us follow his lead. Let us remember how God saved him from the hands of the mighty who were gathered against him.

The wicked gather together for evil, exult together for oppression; and bear animosity against the righteous, not for some harm they did against them, but because the life of these righteous testifies against them.

Although David confesses his sin to God; yet what those wicked people did to him was not for any sin he committed, nor a chastisement by God, but because they find pleasure in killing the righteous men of God.

Who are the “mighty” who lie in wait for the soul of the righteous, and gather together against him, not for any sin or transgression he committed? They are the hosts of darkness that cannot endure the light. The devil and his hosts keep perpetually on working to destroy those who fear the Lord, not for anything other than their being referred to God their father; the true Life, and the holy One without sin.

Those “mighty” are also those of authority along the eras, who use their authorities to oppose the righteous

They are, as well, the leaderships who were stirred up against our Lord to crucify Him, to get rid of Him.

And the “mighty” are also the sins that use every possible chance to bring man down to corruption. The sin is described as “the reproach of peoples”, that sets out of man a slave, helpless to act on his own, and does, not what he likes, but what the sin that dwells in him likes. Its fruit is death; If it has a place inside me, it lives, and I die. It is deceptive and deadly; its law fights the law of my mind, that I behave unconsciously. Resisting it, though, needs striving even to blood. Finally, he who practices it is the devil. That is the sin as portrayed by the Holy Book.

- ❖ The first of the “mighty” (or strong) is the devil himself; as he is called by the Lord, saying: “*No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house*” (Mark 3: 27). He binds the “mighty” by the chains of His authority; take his goods outside his house, and make them the goods of Christ; as all the wicked were goods (or vessels) of the devil.
- ❖ The “mighty” (strong, or most excellent) as they are often called, are Saul, Antiochus Epiphanus and others among the kings, as well as the leaders of the Jews, who diligently tried to catch our Lord to have Him killed; and also the sin that, by its harm catch the soul of man to kill it.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“They run and prepare themselves through no fault of mine. Awake to help me, and behold ...” (4)

The righteous sometimes suffer affliction in his soul because the wicked gather together around him, and persist on lying in wait for his life, as though they are mighty, playing with a weak prey, helpless to defend itself. Here, the “mighty” seem as though they never sleep to realize their goal; whereas God seem as falling asleep, not aware of the oppressed poor; hence the psalmist cries out: “*Awake to help me, and behold*” (4).

They run like warrior going into a battle (Psalm 18: 29). They prepare themselves; they do not run haphazardly, but according to a plan, like troops charging against a city (Job30: 14). They did not leave a stone unturned to ruin me completely.

Being a matter of life or death for the psalmist; and feeling as though God is asleep concerning his safety; and not aware of the violence of the wicked against him, he calls upon Him to awake to encounter him, and give him help.

Some may wonder how would the psalmist David seek from God to encounter him, in order to behold that he walks without iniquity, and run without sin. Is God in need to encounter him to know how he is? According to an interpretation by **St. Augustine**, the psalmist means that, once God encounters him, He would proclaim to us what He beholds in Him.

❖ We can accept the interpretation of the expression “*Awake and encounter me*”, meaning (Awake and help me); as to the addition “*and behold*”, we should understand it as such: (Behold, I am running to become an object to be seen as walking without iniquity nor sin). According to the same interpretation, it was said to Abraham “*Now, I know that you fear God*” (Genesis 20: 6), “Now, I know” means (I let you know).

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ He who runs fast, his feet may seem as not touching the ground, as though he has wings; according to the words of the righteous ‘job’: “*My days are swifter than a runner*” (Job 9: 25); “ It may not seem as touching the ground, yet “*I run not with uncertainty*” (see 1 Corinthians 9: 25. The righteous, intending to reach the line of arrival, keep on running, even among hurdles; as David says that he runs without iniquity, and keeps on running steadily forward¹.

(**St. Dedymus the blind**)

“You therefore, O g Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to punish all the nations; do not be merciful to any wicked transgressor” (5)

If the wicked assumed that they are “mighty”; and in his weakness, the righteous counts them as such; yet, looking up to his God, he perceives that no creation could stand before Him; For He is “*the Lord of hosts*”, and at th same time “*God of Israel*”; namely, God who loves His people and believers; “*The Almighty*”, *who protect His beloved children from all the wicked nations.*

The two expressions: “*The Lord of hosts*”, and “*God of Israel*”, are often used whenever the believer (or the people) see that they are surrounded by adversary armies, and became in danger; Then they seek help from God, the Lord of the heavenly hosts, before which all the armies of the world cannot stand.

“*God of Israel*”, or (God of the Hebrew people, the descendents of Jacob or Israel), God the defender of His people; “Awake and save me”; for I am one of Your people with whom You entered into a covenant, and presented to them promises to protect them. He seeks from Him to visit all the nations with punishment or chastisement, probably counting his wicked opponents, full of violence, like theheathen nations. This expression was often used by the prophet David.

There is nothing hidden from God; Yet He, with His longsuffering, He chastises all the nations, being the Judge of the whole world; and lets the wicked fall into non-mercy, having not practiced mercy, nor knew it. He who does not hve mercy on his neighbor would not enjoy the divine mercy.

Some fathers believe that the phrase here does not imply avenging all the nations, as much as calling upon the nations to the faith, rejected by Israel, or the Jews in the day of Christ.

¹

The prophet David often spoke of the multitude of enemies opposing him (Psalm 27: 3; 118: 10-12). Here, he puts God before his eyes as a Judge of all the heathen nations; proclaiming that he will no more be disturbed, because of their great number, nor of their might, as long as God will intervene to come to his help.

❖ *“Do not be merciful to any wicked transgressor”* (4). Although it is a sound saying, that should not be disregarded in any way, as being haphazardly said; Yet He was merciful to Paul, who, for long, has committed iniquity as Saul. For what good work he has done, to be worthy of mercy?! ... Did he not hate His saints even to death? Did he not carry messages from the high priest, authorizing him to persecute and punish any Christian he may encounter on his way?! Has he not been a killer, *“breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord”* (Acts 9: 1)?! Did not he hear a voice from heaven calling him, cast him to the ground, then sets him up, blinds him, then give him enlightenment; kill him, then give him life; destroy him, then reform him?! For what worthiness did all that happen? Do not say anything; but listen to him say: *“I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief”* (1 Timothy 1: 13). *“Do not be merciful to any wicked transgressor”* (5) could certainly be interpreted in one of two ways: That truly there is no sin without punishment (as long as man did not repent it); Or that there is a kind of iniquity that God will never have mercy on its doer (which is the kind of iniquity done by intention, with knowledge, and without repentance).

(St. Augustine)

“At evening they return; they growl like a dog, and go all around the city” (6)

If God, his Savior, is the Lord of hosts, the all loving god, Judge of the whole earth, How could the wicked stand before Him? They are like dogs wandering around the city, and gathering together sometimes as though fighting one another.

The prophet David likens his enemies who plot to kill him, to fierce and unclean dogs (Psalm 22: 16-22), which wander all night in the streets, feeding on unclean trash, or search for a prey to attack and kill. Those enemies probably used to wander all night long to spy on David’s movements, to plan the right plot to kill him.

The Holy Book often calls the wicked ‘dogs’ (Psalm 22: 16, 20; Matthew 7: 6; Philippians 3: 2; Revelation 22: 15); on account that they growl, as though intending to attack; yet they fear him who comes against them without fear. Dogs have been included by the Jews among the unclean animals (I Kings 14: 11). The Holy book likens the wicked, as well to pigs, donkeys, and dumb dove.

While the righteous sleep all night in deep peace, the wicked, on the other hand, gather together by night, to plan evil against the righteous.

❖ *“At evening”* means the end of the day, referring to the dwelling of our Lord in flesh at the end of time.

The prophet says that the Jews get hungry on account of not receiving the divine bread coming down from heaven, and become rude like dogs. The prophet Isaiah calls them: blind, ignorant, dumb dogs that cannot bark (Isaiah 56: 10). He called them dogs because when our Lord was delivered, they insolently cried out against Him, not knowing what they said; Hence God deprived them of all the talents that were theirs, and let them wander around hungry for God’s goods like dogs; And their city which they defiled by

killing the Righteous, they were driven out of it, go all around it, but no more allowed to dwell in it as they used to.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Having received from me the testimonies concerning Christ's; first coming, and walking on the sea: as it was written: "*Your way was on the sea*" (Psalm 77: 19). Let us now seek the testimonies concerning His passion. Judas was a traitor; Although he addressed Him with words of peace, yet he planned treason against Him; Hence the psalmist says: "*My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from My plague*" (Psalm 38: 11); and, "*His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords*" (Psalm 55: 21). He addressed Him, saying: "*Greetings, Rabbi*" ; while he intended to betray Him even to death. He did not care for His Lord's warning: "*Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?*" (Luke 22: 48). What the Lord said refers to the meaning of the name 'Judas', meaning (confession); as though saying to him: Come on, Confess that You betrayed and received the price!

"Do not keep silent, O God of my praise; For the mouth of the wicked, and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause" (Psalm 109: 1-3). Some of the high priests were there at the gates of the city, when they arrested the Lord; by which the psalm was realized, saying: "*At evening they return, they growl like a dog, and go all around the city*" (6) ².

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ There was a famine, not in a specific location, but all over the world; as there was no one who does good. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ, having compassion on the hungry of the world, opened up the storehouses of wheat, and revealed the storehouses of the hidden heavenly secrets of wisdom and knowledge; so that no one would feel in need of food; for wisdom proclaimed: "*Come, eat of my bread*" (Proverb 9: 5). He who get filled with Christ would alone be able to say: "*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want*" (Psalm 23: 1) ³.

(St. Ambrose)

Presenting a symbolic interpretation of (Psalm 59: 6) , **St. Augustine** sees the dogs as though have changed from fierce animals to useful guard dogs; and says that after the shedding of the blood of Christ, namely (at the evening of time), our sins are forgiven us by the grace of God, we come to be like Saul of Tarsus, who, after being like a violent fierce wolf, he was changed into what is like a docile (guard) dog that goes all around the cities of the world, in great hunger for the salvation of every soul; and runs here and there to gain every soul for the Lord Christ.

"Indeed they are bellowing with their mouth; swords are in their lips; For they say: 'Who hears?'" (7)

The mouths of the wicked are filled with oppression, vain accusations, threats, and blasphemies, like drawn swords; thinking that God does not care for His believers; saying; "*Who hears?*"; and as the psalmist also says: "*The wicked, in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts; ,, He said in his heart,*

²

³

‘God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see I; tHe will not require an Account’ (Psalm 10: 4, 11).

They spit fire out of their mouths; unceasingly throw a flood of vain accusations and slanders.

They say: **“Who hears?”** For God in His longsuffering, hopes for them to return to Him with repentance, and not to consummate their wicked plots; they despise Him, as.

“They say with their mouths”; namely by the cry outs of their mouths to Pilate, saying; **“Crucify Him, crucify Him”**; and, as a reaction to what their lips uttered, the soldiers of Pilate stabbed His side; as though by the spears of their mouths.

❖ Here there is a sword that is sharpened twice, about which the apostle says: *“The sword of the Spirit which is the word of God”* (Ephesians 6: 17). Why is it sharpened twice? If not because it strikes by the two testaments! By this sword are slain those about whom it was said to Peter *“Rise Peter, kill, and eat”* (Acts 10: 13). . *“And a sword in their lips, for they say: ‘Who hears’”* (7) ... Those who were before not wishing to believe, now they feel disgusted for those who do not believe.

(St. Augustine)

2- DAVID TRUSTS IN GOD, HIS SAVIOR:

“But You, O Lord shall laugh at them; You shall have all the nations in derision” (8)

Whatever the number of the oppressors, even though all the nations join forces against God, to oppose His children, yet God will laugh at them. Hence the psalmist turn his eyes away from the wicked, their meetings, and their evil possibilities, to concentrate on God, against whom no might can stand.

Counting his wicked adversaries like heathen nations, David scoffs at them, and has their movements and plans in derision.

So did the prophet David trust that God follows their steps, listens to their whispers, and makes all their works against him vain, saving him from all their evil plots.

❖ The prophet already said to God: (59: 5): *“Awake to punish all the nations”*. And now he says: *“You shall have all the nations in derision”* (8). Is there contradiction between the two saying? ... No, for, according to St. John Chrysostom: [By the first saying he means the nations and their peoples, who believed in Christ. While here, he talks about the nations of devils, workers of evil, those who persecute the faith of Christ.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ All the nations have become Christians; And yet you say: *“who hears?”* Whom does he ridicule? You count all the nations as nothing. Yes, they will all be as nothing. It is so easy to have all nations believe in You.

(St. Augustine)

“O my strength, I will watch for You. For You, O God is my fortress” (9)

God laughs at everything that the enemy does. Yet, although David does not deny the power of the enemy, he trusts in God his Savior; and watch for His salvation, for He is the Fortress in whom he takes refuge.

Although David cries out because of the dangerous power of Saul, which is beyond all his possibilities, he has no other refuge except in God the Almighty, and will

watch for His divine work. God is David's fortress, the secure place in which he hides, and the high exalted location, where he is lifted up, where no net can catch him.

Some believe that the word "*watch*" here means that, if Saul has sent men to watch the steps of David to kill him, David, on his side, watches the movements of God the Almighty to scatter Saul's plan. If Saul is strong, God is Almighty. That is why the psalm will always say ""*my strength*".

According to the Hebrew text: From the strength of the enemy, or the strength of Saul, the psalmist watches for God to protection. And, according to the Septuagint version, the psalmist says: I keep my strength for You to use, being my Refuge, and the Worker in and by me.

The psalmist makes God his Refuge from the strength of all the wicked, for God Himself is the strength of the psalmist; and in taking refuge in God, he finds protection in Him.

*"I will love You, O Lord, **my strength**"* (Psalm 18: 1)

*"But You, O Lord, do not be far from me, O **my strength**, hasten to help me"* (Psalm 22: 19)

*"To You, O **my strength**, I will sing praises, for god is my defense, the God of my mercy"* (Psalm 59: 17).

*"In God, my salvation, and my glory, the Rock of **my strength**, And my refuge is in God"* (Psalm 62: 7).

*"The Lord is **my strength** and song, and He has become my salvation"* (Psalm 118: 14).

❖ David has been anointed a king by the prophet Samuel, in the name of God. And, although, by the spirit of prophecy, David knew that he was going to become a king after Saul. Yet he did look forward for Saul's perdition; lest he would appear as though he took the reign by force. So he endured all Saul's persecutions, waiting for God's decision, saying to Him: I keep my reign in Your hand, until Your will is realized. We, as believers, should let our life (and reign) in the hands of Christ our God.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ All those "mighty" ones, would fall because they do not keep their strength if or You; namely, they attack me, depending on their own strength. I, on the other hand, keep my strength for You; for, if I retreat from You, I shall fail; and if I come close to You, I would become stronger.

Now, look brethren, how the human soul has no light of her own, has no troops; has no wisdom, and has no strength, and has o virtue of her own.

Come close to Him, to become light; as retreating from Him, you would become darkness. That is why "*O my strength I will watch for you*", I will not retreat from You, and I will not lean upon myself. Now, where have I been? Where am I? Where have You lifted me up? And what iniquities have you forgiven me?

(St. Augustine)

"My merciful God will go before me. God shall let me look in triumph on my enemies" (10)

The psalmist often seek from God to go before him; saying: "I went forth and saw God always go before me". Now he seeks from him to let the divine mercies go before

him; For, in his own eyes, he is not without sin, but is in need of God's mercies to forgive his sins; by which the enemy would not have authority over him.

The Lord Christ presents Himself as "*the Good Shepherd who goes before His flock, , and the sheep follow Him*" (John 10: 4) so the wolves cannot come close to them; and the sheep could walk along the way of truth without diversion.

In some versions it came as: "God of my mercy goes before me". Looking at the Lord, being His God, He Him His mercy, precedes him, flows the blessing on him, fulfill all his needs, and helps him in all his worries.

"God shall let me look in triumph on my enemies". He will let me see them in confusion, all their plans falling apart; grants me victory over them; or He will not let them have victory over me.

❖ **"My merciful God will go before me"**. What goodness did You find in me, that makes You grants me Your mercy, and justify me?!

In me, you shall only find the nature You created; As for other things, they are all evil that, by Your mercy, You shall wipe out.

(St. Augustine)

3- THE PERDITION OF THE WICKED:

"Do not slay them, lest my people forget; Scatter them by Your power, and bring them down, O Lord our shield" (11)

He asks God, not to wipe out the enemies once and for all; but to allow for a remnant of them to remain and be scattered, as a testimony and a memorial for the work of God; so that the people would not forget the work of God to protect them from the enemies. He asks God to scatter. He asks God to bring them down from their haughtiness, to let them perceive that they are helpless to oppose God.

When Cain murdered Abel, God did not punish him by killing him right away, but let him live s a fugitive, and a wanderer on earth (Genesis. 4: 12-14); as a testimony to the fruit of sin, and a fulfillment of the divine justice. Many fathers see in this saying a reference to the Jews who crucified the Lord of Glory, to become scattered all over the earth.

Some may wonder why has God not punish Satan and his angel, to save the believers from their attacks! But letting them survive gives us a chance to enter into continuous battles; and consequently to get united to God our refuge, to enjoy the conquest, and get the crown. For the same reason God let the wicked live, for the sake of the justification of the righteous, beside giving the chance to he wicked to repent; when they perceive that God defends His believers.

God often let the wicked live, yet scattered, without peace, that the believer would see; yet, not to gloat in them, but for their faith in God to become more steadfast.

"Bring them down, O Lord our shield" (11). While the believer is lifted up in he midst of afflictions, and the doors of heaven become open before him; The wicked, on the other hand, will be brought down, together with their father, the devil: **"But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; Bloodthirsty and deceitful men, shall not live out half their days"** (Psalm 55: 23).

By saying **"Scatter them by Your power"**, in the Septuagint version, the scholar Origen, believes it to be a cry out by the psalmist to God, seeing, by the spirit of prophecy, those who crucified the Lord, asking Him to strike them by Jesus Christ, as a

sword, that does not kill, but scatters. By that, the Jews are scattered to this very day, because they crucified the Lord.

- ❖ How can we prove that Christ is the sword? By what came in the psalm, asking God not to hear them, but scatter them, saying: “*Scatter them by Your power*” (Psalm 59: 11 LXX) ⁴

(The scholar Tertullian)

- ❖ “*Scatter them with Your power*” (11). Is realized now; as the Jews are scattered all over the nations; as testimony to their iniquity; and to the truth, which is ours.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ They used their tongue, that is would not be reined against Christ; raised their horns high, and uttered iniquity against God, as is written: “*They fell into their pride*” ⁵.

(St. Cyril the Great)

The psalmist stands in awe, meditating in the amazing mercies of God, comparing between, His work for his salvation from the wicked; and what dwell upon the wicked, who persist on their opposition of the divine truth, of scattering and troubles; Revealing that it is caused by the difference between his acceptance of approaching God, and the persistence on forsaking Him.

- ❖ How amazing is the mercy He presents to me, and shows to my enemies; for man to compare between himself and those forsaken by God; the chosen, compared to the forsaken; the vessel of mercy to that of wrath; to show that God conform from the same lump of clay, a vessel for honor, and another for dishonor (Romans 9: 21).
- ❖ He shows His mercy to the wild grafted olive tree (Romans 11: 17), compared to branches broken because of pride. Look where they fall if they are proud; and where you are grafted instead of those who have fallen. So, do not be proud, lest you may be qualified for cutting (John 11: 24)

(St. Augustine)

“*For the sin of their mouth, and the words of their lips; Let them even be taken in their pride, and for the cursing and lying which they speak*” (12)

Here he talks about two serious ins:

a- The sin of **the tongue**: When their lips utter cursing with lying, slandering, and threatening; Yet, the more their words increase, the more their sins become.

b- The sin of **pride**: Trusting that their plan would never fail, and confirming that they will succeed and conquer, their hearts become haughty; Yet, while in their pride, they are arrested and caught.

This applies to king Saul in his opposition to David, counting that getting rid of him is something sure and done with; cursing him, and charging him of many false accusations.

By their lips, the wicked set their nets to catch the righteous, to find themselves fall into them. In their pride, they anticipate to catch the righteous; to be caught in the same nets they set, “*The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made; in the net which they hid; their own foot is caught*” (Psalm 9: 15). “*The righteousness of the*

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upright will deliver them, but the unfaithful will be taken by their own lust” (Proverb 11: 6).

❖ What do you intend to slay in them? What they cried out, saying: “*Crucify Him, crucify Him*”, and not them who cried out themselves. They intended to wipe out Christ, to cut, and to destroy Him. As for You, By the resurrection of Christ whom they intended to destroy, You kill the transgression of their mouths, and the uttering of their lips. For in Him, for whom they cried out to be crucified, He lives, and they are terrified. He, whom they despised on earth, Is He not worshipped by all nations under heaven, while they are scattered all over the earth?! By that, You kill their transgressions, and the uttering of their pride.

❖ Pride does not allow man to become perfect; Nothing like it would hinder perfection ...

How can I talk about the multitude of evils, that are in pride? ... Satan is punished just for it alone! ... Being in short, the head of all sinners; and the one who tempts by sin, Adultery, drunkenness, fornications, robbery, are not referred to him, but only by pride he has fallen.

(St. Augustine)

“Consume them in wrath, consume them that they may not be; and let them know that God rules in Jacob, to the ends of the earth” (13)

By saying “*that they may not be*”, means not to let them enter into the land of the living, of the righteous.

If he asked before, not to kill them once and for all, but here, prophesying about the destiny of Saul’s household, he says: “*Consume them in wrath, or anger*”; namely, through the divine justice; for they are not worthy of mercy. It carries, as well, a prophecy about the ‘anti-Christ and his followers in the end of days’⁶.

Before God’s wrath on the anti-Christ and his followers, they truly perceive that God is the One with authority, and He who rules over the new Jacob, namely, over the church of the new covenant, spreading from one end of the world to the other end.

Although the word “*Consume*” may sound as (burn with fire); yet it does not mean that fire will be the way of their perdition, but it is rather the fire of God’s wrath on the anti-Christ and his followers. The repetition of the word “*consume*”, for the sake of confirming the utter and complete perdition.

The psalmist asks God to consume the wicked by His divine wrath, to perceive that God is the Almighty One.

“And at evening they return, they growl like a dog, and go all around the city” (14)

Here he repeats what already came in verse 6, with the addition of the word ‘and’, showing that, having lost their peace, once they know that God the Almighty is the king of the church, and its Protector; they, like unclean animals, go all around the city, seeking to devour it, and thirsty for shedding blood. Here, the psalmist ridicules the anti-Christ and his followers, saying, that they return like dogs, for they realized that they are helpless to cause the church of Christ any harm, as king Saul and his men were unable to do to David and his men.

6

- ❖ Here, the prophet calls the enemies of Christ his own enemies, as the Lord Christ comes from his seed. He seeks for their sake, not to kill them once and for all, but to scatter them everywhere; lest the peoples would eventually forget the justice of God and the truth of His law. For, if He has chosen to wipe out the Jews who crucified Christ altogether, they, with the passing of time, would have been completely forgotten.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ How can you see a quadruped animal? You will notice that its head bows toward the ground, and its eyes are directed toward its belly, looking at its body parts that give it pleasure. You, on the other hand, being human, Your head rises high toward heaven, and your eyes look up high. For, if you are preoccupied with the lusts of the body, and worship the pleasures of the lower being, you, by this, would become like irrational animals. I suggest that you should care for something befitting of you as man; “*Seek things which are above, where Christ is*” (Colossians 3: 1), Rise up above the things of the mortal world; Learn from the upright form of your body. Make it a law for your life, that your city is heaven, your true country is the Hiher Jerusalem, and your fellow citizens are the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven⁷.

(St. Basil the Great)

- ❖ I beseech you to “*renewed in the spirit of your mind*” (Ephesians 4: 20- 24; Romans 12: 1-2). Learn that it is possible for you to be renewed, and cast from yourselves the image of (pigs), which is the character of the unclean soul, and that of the (dog), that describes him who growls and barks unclean words.

It is possible to change even from the image of the (Serpent), by which the Lord addressed the wicked, saying: “*Serpents, brood of vipers*” (Matthew 23: 33). If we believe that we could change from the images of serpents, pigs, and dogs, let us now learn from the apostle, how this change could be realized, which depends on us; saying: “*We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 3: 17).. If you were before a barking dog, then you were transformed and changed by the word, you have turned from a dog to a man. If you were before unclean, and your soul was touched by the word, and you presented yourself to the word to conform you, you have turned from a pig to a man And if you were before a fierce beast, and through listening to the word you were domesticated, and turned into a man; you will never, any more, be addresses as: “*serpent and brood of vipers*”.

But if we are slothful to learn the lesson, the truth that we already possess, will lose its appeal, as the book of psalms teaches us.

(The scholar Origen)

We have already seen how **St. Augustine** began to look at the dogs in a more respected way, to see them return in the evening to go all around the city, as a reference to the return of the wicked by repentance to testify to God their Savior; even though they may seem to return at evening, namely, late in their life.

- ❖ “*At evening they return*” (14); namely, although late, after the Lord Christ was already crucified, “*and growl like dogs*”; Yet, like dogs, and not like herds of oxen;

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they have discovered their sin, that they thought they were righteous; ... It is good for the sinner to be humble; for nothing is impossible to heal like when man assumes to be perfect

(St. Augustine)

“They wander up and down for food, and howl if they are not satisfied” (15)

Here, the psalmist likens the wicked who persist on evil, to hungry dogs, which keep on setting forth in the darkness seeking food. They go all around the city, vainly labor all night long, but would not fulfill any portion of their goal. So it is for evil, it would never give anything to its doers, but they would be perpetually in a condition of hunger and thirst.

On another aspect, the sins of the wicked, depriving them of inner peace and quiet, they go around without benefit, nor inner fulfillment.

Seeing in the dogs that return at evening, a symbolic portrait of sinners who return to the truth, confessing their sins, even though late in their life, **St. Augustine** talks of them as being hungry! What kind of food do they seek? ... They seek the return of the sinners to the truth. He says: [*“They wander about for food”*]; namely, they seek to gain the others to become believers]. So it will be when man discovers his sins; and with humility, he enjoys returning to the truth; he longs for the whole world to partake of the same joyful experience he passed through.

4- A PRAISE FOR GOD THE SAVIOR:

“But I will sing of Your power. Yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning; For You have been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble” (16)

“In the morning”. The wicked go around in the darkness of the night without satisfaction nor peace; Whereas the righteous enjoy God’s mercy in the light of the day, by the spirit of praise and singing; The night of afflictions and troubles passes by, and the morning of joy dwells. *“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning”* (Psalm 30: 5).

For the psalmist, the psalms of struggle for salvation, transform into psalms of thanksgiving and singing praise to God.

- ❖ They scatter all around the world, as hearts scatter at night because of hunger; they seek spiritual kind of food, but, when they do not find it, they resort, as is their custom, to groaning and protesting.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ *“In the morning”* when temptations come to an end; when the night of this world passes by; when no robbers are expected to attack; nor the devil and his angels are feared to charge; when we no more walk by the light of prophecy, but meditate in the Word of God Himself, being the Sun of Righteousness. *“I will sing of Your mercy in the morning”* (16).

As the resurrection of the Lord Himself happened at dawn, the saying of the psalm was realized, saying: *“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning”* (Psalm 30: 5). At night, the disciples mourned our Lord Jesus, as dead; But at dawn, with His resurrection, they sang: *“For You have been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble”* (16).

(St. Augustine)

“To You, O my strength, I will sing praises, For God is my defense; the God of my mercy” (17)

The psalmist sings: *“God is my strength; God is my refuge”*; namely, He lifts me up, and exalts me up high! *“God is my mercy”*; All goodness

I enjoy, are from God; Everything comes from His dwelling in me! That is why, it is befitting of me to offer Him glory forever.

That was the experience of the prophet David whenever he confronted a multitude of enemies. And it is, as well, the experience of the church along all eras; and the experience of the true believer, to lean on the chest of God.

❖ That could be the saying of the congregation of believers, saying: “As for me, I sing praise to your might, with joy and gladness, for Your mercy. That You realized for me after Your resurrection from the dead, by the shining of the light of Your faith upon the whole world.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Finally, as we think of all the good things that we have or of the change itself in faith, in love, in the good behavior, in righteousness, in the fear of God; All these are but gifts from God. That is why he ends by saying: *“God of my mercy”*. Having been filled with the good gifts of God, he found nothing to say about God, except: *“my mercy”*. What an exalted name! Through it, no one should despair. If you say *“my refuge”*, you perceive that in Him you have found your refuge. And if you say *“my strength”*, you perceive that He provides you with strength; Whereas by saying *“my mercy”*, All what I have is through Your mercy on me!

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 59

IFT ME UP TO YOU, TO KEEP ME FROM FALLING INTO THE NETS

- ❖ Behold, many are those who make me sad;
They hid for me nets and traps in the dust;
They joined force to bring me together with them down to the pit;
But You came down for my sake;
And made me a member of Your body;
You granted me Your heavenly Holy Spirit;
To lift my heart, mind, and all my senses up to You.
- ❖ With every affliction, my soul rises up;
With every affliction I recognize You better.
- ❖ The wicked find pleasure in giving me hard time;
Who but You can drive the away from me?
- ❖ In my weakness, I feel as though the wicked are mighty;
They do not know how to go to sleep;
Watching all night to plan plots;
I see You as though asleep, and not seeing my weakness;
Awake and look; I have no refuge but You;
You are the Lord of heavenly hosts;
You are the Judge of the whole earth;
You do not have mercy upon him who has no mercy upon his neighbor;
And upon every bloodthirsty iniquitous.
- ❖ Can the wicked stand before You?
They are like dogs that go all around in the darkness of the night;
That pretend to battle one another;
They growl and howl in the darkness.
- ❖ Who can stand before You?
If the whole world stood to oppose You;
You strongly proclaim: "*I have overcome the world*" (John 16: 33).
You have, and will always overcome in Your children;
They carry You in them, and enjoy Your conquest;
Grant me to resort to You, O Grantor of conquest.
- ❖ Let the wicked glory in their evil, strength, malice, and multitude.
As for me, It is enough to behold You;
To hide in You;
For You alone is capable of giving salvation;
You lift me up, for the devil and all the hosts of darkness to fall under my feet.
By You, sin cannot have authority over me;
- ❖ Go before me, O Lord, and make me follow Your lead;
I will take refuge in Your shadow;
That the enemy would never approach me;
To try to deceive me;
But he cannot dwell inside me;

For, by Your cross, I will chase him away;
To find no place in me.

❖ Let the wicked set their nets for me;
For You will save me from them;
And You will let them fall in what they have set for me.
My thanksgiving is for You;
O You, by whose salvation You fill my life with gladness.

PSALM 60

FROM SCATTERING TO CONQUEST

The kingdom of Israel suffered desolation and destruction before David came to reign over the tribes; then to have conquest over all the surrounding nations, except for Edom. Here, the psalmist present a psalm of thanksgiving to God for the conquest He gave to Israel; And, at the same time, he prays to God to grant them help to conquer Edom.

It is a psalm that every believer should sing, when he remembers his own inner destruction, as he gave his back, and not his face to God. But, once he returned to God, He granted him the grace of continuous conquests, that filled his heart with joy and exaltation. A joy that encourages him more and more to have greater conquests, for the kingdom of God to transfigure more and more.

Having settled down on his throne, and having got successive conquests, he never forgot the bitter years through which the people have passed, because of giving their backs to God, and His departure from them. But now, he remembers those years as unforgettable lessons; And he, as well, sings praise to God for the sake of the conquests He gave them. (See 1 Samuel 8: 3, 13; 1 Chronicles 18: 3, 12)

❖ This psalm includes a prophecy concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, born of the seed of David; that, at the fullness of time, He will strike the strange races; namely the devils. He first, mourns and complains for what He endured from the Jews; And He makes the Gentiles His own for believing in Him; and cast the Jews away from being His own; Then after some time, when they repent and believe in Him, they would be qualified to be referred to Him.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

In this psalm, the holiness, authority, and might of God are strongly demonstrated.

1- Years without divine help	1 - 3
2- A reform of Israel after David sat on the throne	4
3- A cry out for salvation from the enemy	5
4- A praise of thanksgiving to God, the Grantor of conquests	6– 12

The title:

An urgent prayer for the restored favor of God

To the Chief Musician. Set to “Lily of the testimony”. A michtam of David.

For teaching.

When he fought against Mesopotamia and Syria of Zobah, And Joab returned and killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salts.

a- **The Lily:** Binding between the two words: “Lily” and “testimony”, many scholars believe that this psalm is like a magnificent “Lily of testimony”, namely, a beloved and joyful testimony of the sure work of salvation of God.

b- When he fought against Mesopotamia and Syria of Zobah.

In the Septuagint version, “When he burned the Syrian Mesopotamia and and Zobah. According to a symbolic interpretation by **St. Augustine**, burning those provinces refer to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in us; burning ‘Mesopotamia’, which, according to him, means (the haughty call), and ‘Zobah’, which means (the void old), with fire and by sword. . It is as though the work of the Lord Christ is to burn our

haughtiness and pride, as well as the void work of the ‘ancient man’ in us. The Lord Christ uses fire, saying: *“I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled”* (Luke 12: 49). As to killing the Edomites by the sword, As the word “Edom” means (earthly), the Lord also destroys in us what is earthly and temporal, by the spiritual sword; saying: *“I did not come to bring peace (on earth), but a sword”* (Matthew 10: 34).

❖ Actually, that destruction done by David by a strong hand, was done by our Christ, whom David symbolizes. The Lord Christ did all that destruction with His sword and fire, oth of which He brought to the world, saying: *“I came to send fire on earth”* (Luke 12: 49); and, *“I came to bring a sword on earth”* (Matthew 10: 34). He came to bring fire to burn ‘Mesopotamia’ and Zobah’; and a sword to strike ‘Edom’, in those who change, for their own good; to make them say that the changed to the better, to what came in the title of this psalm; to “the teaching of David”, to say: You brought Your mercy on us; You destroyed us, to edify us; You destroyed the evil building in us; the void old man; to build the new man forever”.

(St. Augustine)

c- And killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salts.

‘**The Valley of Salts**’ is probably ‘El-Ghor’, a deserted valley, few miles south of the Dead Sea, on the border of the old Edom.

In 1 Samuel 8: 13; 1 Chronicles 18: 12, it so came that 18,000 were killed; But, according to Kimchi and Yarchi, Abichai first killed 6000 then his brother Joab killed 12,000 as he returned after he stroke Syria.

As to the destruction of ‘Edom’, **St. Augustine** presents to us the following Symbolic interpretation:

As the word ‘Edom’ means (what is earthly), Every earthly thing should be destroyed. Why would man live an earthly life, , when he shouldlive a heavenly one?! ... *“As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the Heavenly Man”* (1 Corinthians 15: 49); and, *“Put to death your members which are on earth”* (Colossians 3: 5).

He killed 12,000 men in the Valley of Salt in Edom. The figure 12,000 is a perfect figure; as to it is referred the perfect number of thetwelve apostles; By this number the word of God reached the whole world. The Word of God, namely, the Lord Christ is in the clouds,namely, in those who preach the truth. As the world has four divisions or directions, well known, and often referred to in the Holy Book:

East, West, North, and South, the word was sent to these four divisions, where the Holy Trinity is called The figure 12 is the product of $4 \times 3 = 12$. Killing 12,000 refers to that the church (put to death for the earthly life), was established in the four directions of the world by the power of the Holy Trinity.

Why, in the Vallet of Salts? As the ‘Valley’ refers to (humility); while ‘Salt’ refers to (tasting); Many are those who are humble, yet they are ‘void’ and ‘foolish’; being humble in old and void things.

(St. Augustine)

d- Of David, for teaching: Having reached the climax of glory, and enjoyed many conquests, David presents this psalm as a confession and a testimony to the divine work of God with him. He would never forget that the past years of bitterness were caused by God’s rejection of them. Because they forsook Him, and gave Him their backs,

and not their faces, He left them to their bare human arms; to end up with an utter failure. David also testifies to the fact that their present conquest is due to divine help.

We can say that this psalm is a confession of man's weakness for forsaking God, as well as a confession of the love of the Almighty God, who desires the salvation of man.

The Levites used to sing this psalm for teaching purpose; to keep reminding the people that every conquest is from God. How beautiful it is to teach with the language of joy and singing praise; as the divine commandment, in its essence, is a return to encounter God, the Provider of joy to hearts, the Grantor of goodness, and the Presenter of every conquest to those attach themselves to Him.

e- **A Mitcham (A golden psalm)**: According to Adam Clark, it is so called because it was inscribed by gold on papyrus papers from Egypt.

1- YEARS WITHOUT DIVINE HELP:

The goal of this psalm was to remember the destruction caused by the bitter events that dwelt upon Israel in the past, before David came to reign over all the tribes. It is a bitter portrait, that every believer should put before his eyes, to realize his past condition of inner destruction, when he was far from his true King, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David.

He remembers the past days of desolation, to motivate him to a life of thanksgiving for what he came to enjoy, and to seek the perpetual growth of the Kingdom of God in his heart, as well as in the hearts of his brethren; by which he would sing a praise for the exalted love of God, saying: "*The Lord has appeared of old to me saying: 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore with loving kindness, I have drawn you'*" (Jeremiah 31: 3).

O God, You have cast us off; You have broken us down; You have been displeased; Oh, restore us again" (1)

According to Matthew Henry, the prophet David, having reached the climax of his conquest, with the full establishment of the entire kingdom of Israel, at the beginning of his reign, he remembers what dwelt upon Israel of troubles and calamities in the days of king Saul, and also in the days when he only reigned on Judah. The reason of all those calamities was because God has forsaken His people because of their going astray. That also apply to the two kingdom of Israel and Judah, as they were under the Babylonian captivity, because of their sins, And it applies, as well, to every man or congregation who reject the divine truth, and trust the human arm.

Here, confessing before God what came upon his people of scattering and desolation, the psalmist speaks in the name of the entire nation or people. So it is befitting of every believer, as a true member in the body of Christ, to pray in the name of the whole church, the one body; as did the prophet Daniel when he presented a confession in the name of the whole people (See Daniel 9).

"O God, You have cast us off": The word, here, came to carry an abhorrent smell of corruption; as it refers to the despised rebelling opponents¹, with whom God dealt as opposing Him personally.

¹ Barnes, Nares.

“O God, You have broken us down”, As it happens when an army is defeated, and scattered (See 2 Samuel 5: 20); When God forsakes them; and instead of being their leader in battle, it is as though He became a leader of the army of the enemies.

“You have been displeased”, Here, the psalmist uses the kind of language that could be understood by man. The displeasure of God is not a kind of reaction, but a revelation of the natural fruition of sin, which filled the hearts of individuals, homes, the nations, and the whole world with tribulations. God’s displeasure because of sin, is the only reason of the misery of all, whether on individual or collective level. That kind of tribulation could endure with time, and reaches eternity¹, unless we return from it, and come to enjoy the fellowship of God.

❖ When we read about God’s anger and displeasure, we should not understand the term according to the imperfect human emotion, but according to a meaning befitting to God, who is above every emotion of that sort,. For we should perceive that He is the divine Judge who avenges all the unjust things committed in this world.

According to such concept and its meaning, we should fear Him, being the fearsome Condemner of our works, and fear to commit anything against His will. For the human nature, (especially those with troubled conscience), is used to fear those known to have a displeased nature, as it happens with some of the best judges on the bench of justice, who are reputed of being firm and objective².

(St. John Cassian)

❖ Notice the accuracy of the expression: **“You are treasuring up for yourself wrath...”** (Romans 2: 5); by which the apostle Paul clarifies that the judgment does not come from the Judge, as much as it is a result of a faulty deed. He does not say: “God reassures for you”, but says: “You treasure for yourself” ... God tries to draw by every possible way; but if you persist upon your stubbornness, *“you are treasuring for yourself wrath in the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God”*. Yet, you should not think that His wrath is an intense reaction, as much as it is justice; it is “a revelation”, when every man gets what he deserves³.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ This saying is as though coming from the Jews, saying to God: *“You have cast us off”*; namely, You have sent us away from Jerusalem, Your dwelling Place, to the far off land of Babylon; and *“broken us down”*, namely, allowed for us to lose our privileges, and *“You have been displeased”*, and consequently, we fell into sorrows and tribulations, to be chastised, and be trained on perseverance; Then You had compassion on us, and let us return to what we were before, enjoying Your mercy and love for men.

By saying: *“You have been displeased”*, is interpreted by ‘Aquila’, as (by Your wrath, You made us return), that it would refer here, not to their captivity to Babylon, but to what dwelt upon them after they crucified the Lord Christ; As from that time God has cast them off from being His own, and scattered then disgraced everywhere.

According to **St. Basil the Great**, God’s wrath on us has been so great in the past, on account of that, having been ignorant of God, we made themselves the children of

¹ Plumer, Ps. 60.

² Cassian: *De institutes caenoboum*, 8: 2-4.

³ *In Rom. Hom 5.*

wrath, and had no hope in salvation. Then God had compassion on us, sent His only begotten Son, for the forgiveness of our sins.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“Oh, Restore us again”, meaning “Return to us, Be, again, our Leader, and go before us”. Many psalms begin with praying or crying out for help; and end with enjoying salvation; as God hears those cries. Then the psalmist presents praises of thanksgiving to God.

“You have made the earth tremble; You have broken it. Heal its breaches, for it is shaking” (2)

The defeat they went through, let them feel that the earth has been shaking with an earthquake; as though God has broken the earth and split it apart; which no one can reform but God who has created it.

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, by the earth here, the prophet means **the city of Jerusalem** that was disturbed when the Assyrians (the Babylonians) fought against it; as well as the entire province of Philistine that suffered much tribulations and afflictions, We can also say that the word “earth” may refer to the soul, bound to temporal things.

If king Saul has torn apart the people, and destroyed them as though by an earthquake; yet that has taken place through the allowance of God, to make the people return to Him, then He would *“heal its breaches”*

❖ As their souls are allegorically called “earth”, the prophet seeks from God, the Healer of souls and bodies, to heal its breaches, and reform its fracture.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ How can the “earth” be disturbed? Where can it go, when God threaten it with the sword? ... *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 3: 2; 4: 17).

(St. Augustine)

Indeed, the tribulations that sometimes dwell upon us, whether on the personal or the collective level, often motivate us to set forth to the divine throne of grace; and makes prayer occupy a prominent place in our life.

“You have shown Your people hard things, You have made us drink the wine of confusion” (3)

The psalmist made this analogy from how those who are addicted to drink wine, suffer many troubles because of losing conscience, wisdom, and rationality. If this is the work of getting drunk with wine, How about getting drunk with sin, that may bring man under the divine wrath?!

If this is the action of getting drunk with wine, How much more would it be that of sin, that leads to falling under the divine wrath?!

The psalmist looks at the condition of the Israeli people, having drank from the cup of sin, and see afflictions dwelling upon them; as though he sees a man drunk with wine, lost conscious, became drowsy and unable to keep his balance while walking, because of the troubles and calamities that God allowed for him to have. How can such a man succeed in any work he does, or how can he conquer in any battle he fights?!

Some believe that the psalmist is describing the condition of Israel after king Saul was killed, when chaos dwelt upon the land, until David reigned over Israel.

- ❖ Here he calls the calamities that came upon Israel “wine”; on account that wine impedes the activity of man’s mind and ration. Yet, if man perceives that it comes through God’s allowance, as a result of his sins, and he consequently repents, it would be called instead ‘the wine of submission and remorse’.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

Commenting on this issue of being spiritually drunk, **Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle**, says:

- ❖ Like when those who get drunk with wine, thirst for more wine, So it is with the dedicated, pure, rational, and repentant soul, who can say, together with psalmist: “*You have made us drink the wine of confusion*” (3). When such a soul meditates in the hope for the life to come, and thirsts for the heavenly goodness, it will know how to quench her thirst and will be able to say together with the prophet the longing words: “*My soul faints for Your salvation*” (Psalm 119: 81); and, “*My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart*” (Psalm 73: 26); and, “*My soul longs, even faints for the courts of the Lord*” (Psalm 84: 2)¹.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- ❖ “*You have shown Your people hard things*” (3). How? It is when persecutions dwell upon the church of Christ; and an abundance of blood is shed.... “*You have made us drink the wine of confusion*” (as though kicking against the goads). How? It is not the kicking of killing, not the kicking of destruction, but is rather a wonderful kind of medication.

(St. Augustine)

2- A REFORM OF ISRAEL AFTER DAVID SAT ON THE THRONE:

“You have given a banner to those who fear You, that it may be displayed because of the truth” (4)

If God allows for His people to have great calamities, that may seem like an earthquake has destroyed the earth underneath them, Or as though they became drunk and helplessly swaying with wine, Yet He grants those who fear Him a sign or a banner that proclaims their conquest, on account of that they bear the truth, testify to it in holy fear, and hold fast to the divine promises, capable of giving them salvation and conquest.

The Jews have once got such a sign on the day they departed from the land of Egypt, namely, the sign of the blood of lamb n their doors. That sign symbolized the sign of the cross, the true sign, the blood of the true Lamb who lifts up their sins from them, and brings them into the heavenly glories.

The word “banner” here (nec) in Hebrew, is used on any thing set up as a banner; probably refers here to the banner or flag of the victorious nation sets upon the tops of mountains in the defeated nation. It also may refer to the banner raised up at the front of the advancing army. It is as though God has set up His banner, being the Leader of our armies, after having been an opponent, and displeased with us.

“*displayed because of the truth*” (4). Taking up the leadership here, is not something without cause; but it is on account of that they returned to Him, and became soldiers of the divine truth. Now, if the Lord Christ is the Head of the church, and the Leader of its procession, It would be befitting of us to perceive our mission, which is to

¹ *Sermon 167: 10.*

proclaim the truth, and to practice the life befitting to us in the righteousness and sanctification of Christ. By that we would sing and say: *“We will rejoice in Your salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners”* (Psalm 20: 5).

This sign set up by the psalmist in the name of the Lord (Psalm 20: 5), because of the truth (Psalm 60: 4), is the Lord Christ Himself, being the Truth itself (John 14: 6). We can say that the Lord Christ allows for the afflictions, to present Himself to us to acquire, being our Banner, or the Sign of our glory in Him.

The banners are also set up in the regions where there are certain risks, to be seen from afar, and people would get away. What is this sign but our Christ who proclaims Himself in the midst of afflictions, and bears us in Him, to be spared from the risks of this world, and to enjoy the fellowship of His glories.

❖ Like the armies in the time of war would provide their followers with a sign by which they would be identified, and separated from the enemies; So are You, O God, who by Your Knowledge, you would identify Your pious believers, and would not let them be harmed by the enemy; the way You did in the old when You put a mark on Cain, to protect him from being killed by anyone who meets him (Genesis 4: 15). It is not a sensed mark.

This psalm includes a prophecy about the sign given to us, believers; which, according to St. Basil the Great, is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which we are saved from the fiery arrows aimed against us by the adversary enemies. That sign which had a certain form was put by the Hebrews on the doors of their houses in the land of Egypt, by the blood of the slain lamb for the Passover. And it is, as well, the sign drawn by the believers as it came in the prophecy of the prophet Ezekiel, whom the angel commanded *“to go through the midst of the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the forehead of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it”* (Ezekiel 9: 4).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ The Hebrew alone have been saved by that sign of blood; not because the blood of the lamb has activity in itself to save men, but because it was a sign for things to come¹.

(Father Lactanius)

❖ Do not ever be ashamed of the cross of our Savior; but you should rather be proud of it; because *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 1: 18, 23). For as I have already said, He was not a mere man, He who was crucified for our sake, but he was the Son of God, the incarnate God.

If the lamb in the time of Moses made the angel of perdition pass by; Will He not take away our sins from us, He who is *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”* (John 1: 29).

The blood of the dumb lambs is given for our salvation; Will the blood of the only begotten Son of God rather save us?! ... He, who denies the power of the Crucified, let him ask the demons! ... He who does not believe in the words, let him believe in what is seen. Many have been crucified in the world, yet the demons were not terrified by any of them; as they are when they see the sign of the cross of Christ. For those men were

¹ *Lactantius: Divine Institutes 4: 26.*

crucified for their own iniquities, while Jesus Christ was crucified for the iniquities of others ... *“He committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth”* (Isaiah 53: 9; 1 Peter 2: 22). Peter was not the only one who uttered these words, or we may say that he was taking the side of his Lord, but it was also said by Isaiah, who was not with Him in flesh, but prophesied, by the Spirit about His coming in flesh.... Let us also hear the testimony of Pilate, the Roman Ruler who delivered Him to death; Let us hear him say: *“I have found no fault in this man”* (Luke 23: 14). And then he washed his hands and said: *“I am innocent of the blood of this just person”* (Matthew 27: 24).... There is, as well, another testimony about Jesus the Just, who is without sin, by the robber who was the first man to enter into paradise, when he rebuked his fellow robber, saying: *“We are under the same condemnation; but we are indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong”* (Luke 23: 40, 41) ¹.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ It is the sign of the blood, put in the houses, as well as in the souls, where God will find His holy dwelling plac.

(St. Hypoletes the Roman)

❖ Being a believer, Make the sign of the cross, and say: This is my only weapon; this is my medication; I know nothing else.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ No one with the sign of the cross on his forehead, can the devil strike him, as he cannot wipe it out; Only sin can.

(St. Jerome)

3- a cry out for salvation from the enemy:

“That Your beloved may be delivered, Save with Your right hand, and hear me”

(5)

The prophet David seeks from God to hear his prayer, for salvation, not only for him, but for all those who love God. the salvation that is realized by the right hand of God, their weapon, and the secret of their conquest. He seeks the complete conquest, which has already begun as a gift from God; Yet the psalmist keeps on seeking it until he gets it complete and final.

That divine sign motivates us as well to beware lest we would perish because of not returning completely to the Savior, and our ultimate salvation from our sins.

❖ As the water has been turned into wine through the love of God; it is befitting of us, on the contrary, to beware lest the wine for us would turn into water, through our love of the world, and choosing its pleasures².

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

❖ Saying *“Your right hand”*, means (Your High Might); And also, the Right Hand of God is the Son by whom He created the creation; It came in Isaiah: *“I will strengthen you; Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”* (Isaiah 41: 10); and, *“Indeed, my hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has stretched out the heavens”* (Isaiah 48: 13). By His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the salvation of all mankind was realized.

² Sermon 169: 9.

¹ مقال 13 :3.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“You hold me by my right hand, ... and receive me to glory” (Psalm 73: 23, 24)

Man would receive a good counsel when God holds his right hand; to be able to say, together with the psalmist: *“The Lord is at my right hand, I shall not be moved”* (Psalm 16: 8).

If Adam chose that God be at his right hand, the serpent would not have deceived him; but because he forgot God’s commandment, and consummated the will of the serpent, the devil held his hand, and made it stretch to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to pluck things he was ordered not to eat.

That is why the Lord Jesus Christ, who adopted the case of man, set the devil on His own right hand; as we read in the book of Zechariah (3: 1). And so, where the inheritance of Adam stands, there Christ stood; And as good Sportsman, He allowed the devil to stand on His right hand (the right hand of the Lord), to eventually cast him backward, saying to him: *“Away with you, Satan”* (Matthew 4: 10). Then the arrogant Satan was cast away from his position, and departed.

Lest Satan would stand on your right hand, Christ says to you: *“Come, follow Me”* (Matthew 19: 21) . And that is why David prophesied beforehand the coming of the Lord, who descended from heaven to set us free from the power of the arrogant adversary, saying: *“The Lord is at my right hand, I shall not be moved”*. But he on whose right hand Satan is, will be moved. David was also justified in saying: *“You held my right hand”*; namely, Lest I would err, and so as to take my position in trusting God; having been before swaying, and my steps were shaken.

How truly wise was the apostle, because, seeing him disturbed, the Lord stretched His hand and did not let him fall, but helped him to walk without fear (Matthew 14: 30, 31). Once Peter was saved, what did he say, but those prophetic words: *“You held my right hand”*, and with Your will You led me, and set me up with glory. What is the right hand but the strength of the working hand (the strength of the soul that does not cease to strive) ¹?

❖ What snare was broken? (Psalm 124: 7). The apostle says: *“The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly”* (Romans 16: 20); *“They may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil”* (2 Timothy 2: 26). Now you can see that Satan is the hunter who longs for catching our souls to perdition. He is the master of many snares and deceptions of many kinds ... Yet when we are in a condition of grace, our souls will be secure; But once we play with sin, our souls would be disturbed, and become like a ship struck with mighty waves².

(St. Jerome)

4- A PRAISE OF THANKSGIVING TO GOD, THE GRANTOR OF CONQUESTS:

“God has spoken in His holiness: ‘I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and measure out the Valley of Succoth’ (6)

If God saves His people, and sets up His banner as a sign of conquest, it is for the sake of truth. This divine truth is *“holiness”*, as *“God ha spoken in His holiness”*, promised, and fulfilled His promise to grant them the promised land, the entire land of

¹ *Prayer of David, Book 3: 10: 27.*

² *On Ps. Hom 20.*

Canaan, of which the valley of Succoth represents East of Jordan, and Shechem west of it.

“I will rejoice”. David feels joy and gladness whenever he looks at the Holy One who promises His people and fulfills His promises.

According to St, **Basil the Great and St. Athanasius the apostolic**, God has spoken in His saints, to make Shechem that belongs to Joseph, a common possession for all those who believe in Him of the Gentiles and the Jews; And the Valley of Succoth to refer to the whole world, when it is filled with churches in which the name of God is glorified, which would bring pleasure to the Lord.

❖ *“God has spoken in His saints; I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem, and measure out the Valley of tabernacles (the Valley of Succoth”*. Saying “God has spoken” means, He has commanded and ordained. And saying “in His saints” means that He vowed by His saints, or ordained what befit His saints, or commanded by the Spirit of His Holiness. God has spoken in His saints as He did in His prophets and apostles. What did He say? And what did He command? He says: ***“I will rejoice”***, namely, I will make my people rejoice, and I will rejoice together with them, when I bring them from the captivity of Babylon back home.

“I will divide Shechem”. Shechem is a fertile city in the province of Samaria, and because of its fertility, Jacob gave it to Joseph, his beloved son. And when the kingdom of Israel was divided in the days of king Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, the nine tribes that rebelled set over themselves a king from the tribe of Ephraim in Shechem. But after they were captivated to Babylon, foreign nations came to dwell in their land. But God eventually promised to bring them back to their land, to grant them Shechem, and to send the foreigners away from it.

As to the Valley of the tabernacles (the Valley of Succoth), it refers to Jerusalem and the entire land of Palestine, called (the Valley of tabernacles) because, having no walls to protect it, it was ruined by the Babylonians. But God promised to bring them back to it, and to increase them.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ It is written: ***“God has spoken, I will rejoice, I will divide Shechem”*** (6). Being the greater and better part of the land, Jacob gave it to Joseph, saying to him: ***“I now give to you one portion more than to your brothers (the magnificent Shechem) the portion that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow”*** (Genesis 48: 22 LXX). The right to divide is the Lord’s alone.

Therefore, *Shechem* is **the church**; For Solomon has chosen it, revering its hidden love.

Shechem is **Mary**, through whose soul the sword of the Lord pierced and divided (See Luke 2: 35).

Shechem is **the ascension**, as is obvious from the meaning of the word itself. ... Listen to Solomon, talking about the church, saying: ***“Who is this coming out of the wilderness (in white attire, leaning on her brother)?”*** (Songs 3: 6 – the Septuagint). **“Shining”**, a word meaning in Greek (aktinodes), namely, shining in faith and works, to whose children it is said: ***“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorifies your Father in heaven”*** (Matthew 5: 16) ¹.

¹ Prayer of David 4: 4: 15-16.

(St. Ambrose)

According to **St. Augustine**, “*His holiness*” here, is Christ the Holy One, the object of the pleasure of the Father, in whom He rejoices and measure Shechem. ...

The word **Shechem** means (shoulders). When the people of Shechem presented to Jacob all the idols of the foreign gods, he hid them under the oak that was near Shechem. This act refers to that the people of Sgechem were divided into two groups: one group carried their sins on their shoulders, and a second group, having given their idols to Jacob, carried the light and joyful yoke of Christ on their shoulders.

St. Augustine says: [While the former burden is heavy, and presses on your shoulders, the yoke of Christ, on the other hand, grants you comfort. The yoke of Christ has wings Let them carry the yoke of Christ to perceive how light, sweet, and joyful it is; and how it marvelously moves them from the earth up to heaven].

“Gilead is Mine, and Manassah is Mine; Ephraim also is the helmet for My head; Judah is My scepter” (7)

If God allowed for Gilead, Manassah, Ephraim, and Judah, to go into captivity, and for land to be ruined by the surrounding nations, yet God remains caring for His own; He will bring them back to their land, and will refer them to Himself.

Looking at His people as His Kingdom, here He proclaims what came in a previous phrase that His kingdom extends to east and west of the Jordan.

“Ephraim”, having been one of the strongest and richest of the tribes (Genesis 48: 19; Deuteronomy 33: 17), it is counted as a helmet that protects the whole kingdom.

“Judah” is the royal tribe. And as Jacob said: “*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and the obedience of the peoples is his*” (Genesis 49: 10).

❖ **“Gilead”** is translated as (the heap of testimony or of martyrdom); how great is the heap of testimony in the martyrs!

“Gilead is Mine”; Mine is the heap of martyrdom; Mine are the true martyrs.

❖ Through the heap of martyrdom, the love of Christ grows and become wider; and through this nations are acquired.

❖ **Ephraim** is translated as (fruition). He says “The fruition is Mine”; This fruition is the strength of My head; as My Head is Christ.

(St. Augustine)

“Moab is My wash-pot; Over Edom I will cast My shoe; Over Philistia, I shout in triumph” (8)

As those tribes have gloated over Israel and Judah, ruined their lands after captivity, and have been allowed by God to reproach His people; their reproach will be brought back over their heads.

By saying **“Moab is My wash-pot”**, God described Moab with the lowest level of analogy¹, as in the wash-pot all the filth and dirt of man and utensils accumulate. And casting the shoe on Edom refers to submitting them to practice the lowest of tasks.

Some consider the two verses 7 and 8 as being a proclamation of David’s conquest over all his enemies. They interpret them as such: Gilead and Manassah are

¹ Adam Clarke.

submitted to Me; Ephraim provided Me with mighty warriors; Judah provided Me with men of ration and wisdom; As to Moab, I shall bring them down to servitude; I shall overcome Edom, and make them My slaves; And I shall add Philistia to the list of My conquests.

Although his conquest over Moab let him do whatever he wishes with them, yet it did not add to his strength, nor is counted as any substantial addition to his dominion or authority, if compared to other parts of his kingdom. In his eyes, Moab could be likened to a lowly washpot, compared to other more useful utensils.

Edom, up to the time this psalm was written, was not submitted by David, who had a vehement desire to submit it; For by that, Israel would possess all the promised land. By saying “*Over Edom I will cast My shoe*” (6), he expresses that desire of possessing it.

During the middle ages, it was the custom for the victorious king to cast a glove (or a shoe) on the land he comes to possess. Although at the time of Columbus, they used to place a cross with reverence on what comes in the possession of someone or a congregation. The banner of the victorious nation was set on a high mountain or on a stronghold of the defeated country. As to saying: “*Over Philistia, I shout in triumph*”, it is a form of ridicule and scoffing; as Philistia was no more a place worthy of thinking to overcome¹.

According to **Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the prophet here, prophesies about the enjoyment of the nations of faith in the Lord Christ:

The “wash-pot” refers to the font of baptism in which they are purified and cleansed of the filth of sins.

Edom and the rest of the western tribes will submit to the Lord Christ with faith, and will bow their necks under His good yoke.

The “shoe” of the Lord is interpreted as His body by which He came down to earth, and walked like a man. His apostles are likewise called His shoes, having walked all around the world preaching the upright faith. So have the teachers of the church who seek the truth, and by whom the knowledge of God extended to Edom and the rest of nations.

❖ To what does “the shoe” or “the feet” refer, but to the gospel? Listen to the words of Isaiah, saying: “*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news*” (Isaiah 52: 7) ... In the present time, brethren, there are many who commit sins, for the sake of profit; or seek the counsel of diviners and astrologers, Those are (Edomites), namely (earthlies); But all of them will eventually come to worship Christ through His (shoe); for even on Edom He cast His shoe.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The Lord Himself – through David – proclaimed that that shoe refers to the steps of preaching the gospel; by saying: “*Over Edom I cast My shoe*” (Psalm 60: 8; 108: 9); As, through the steps of His apostles, He spreads the preaching the gospel all over the world².

(Father Khromatius)

“*Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me to Edom?*” (9)

¹ Barnes' Notes.

² Chromatius: Tractate on Matt hom 11: 4.

According to Adam Clark, the verses 6 to 12, probably refer to the return of the captives from Babylon. The strong city, here, could mean

‘Tyra’ the capital of Edom, which, being located between the rocky mountains, it is difficult to overcome; Or it could mean ‘Bosra’ in Arabia, near the mountains of Gilead; or ‘Rabba’ the capital of the Emonites; or ‘Tyre’ according to the Chaldean text, the capital of the Phoenicians; or ‘Jerusalem’ itself, which, although ruined, yet it remained a long time, among the strongest cities in the East. It is as though the psalmist says: Who can grant me the authority over those strong cities?! Who will bring me into Edom, and give me the authority over its people?!

David hoped to reach ‘Petra’ or ‘Sila’, to be able to submit the whole land of Edom, and its people; which was eventually realized through the joint leadership of Joab and Abishai¹.

“Is it not You, O God, who cast us off? And You, O God, who did not go out with our armies?” (10)

It is only God, who sometimes cast us off to chastise us. Yet, He alone can grant us, not only to repossess what we have lost, but to give us more than what we ask for. In His chastisement, God does not forsake His people; nor those who believe in Him, forever. He chastises for some time; He may seem as though have forsaken His people, but He opens the doors of hope before them.

❖ The prophet talks about Jerusalem as the strong city; as, by the spirit of prophecy, seeing the Babylonians ruin its walls, but after the return of its people, seeing them rebuild it a strong city, he says to God: Who but You, O God, can bring me forth into it, to see it a strong city, then lead me to Edom? Only You, O God is capable of doing that; You who sometimes cast us off because of our sins, and do not go out with our armies, to chastise us.

The city, here, can be said about the church of Christ, on account of that it is orderly dwelt, and is a stronghold, because it is surrounded by the angels of God, and protected by the grace of God; that the prophet longs to see by his sensory sight, what he has seen by a spiritual insight. That is what the Lord of Glory expressed by his words in the gospel of Matthew: *“Many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it”* (Matthew 13: 17)

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man” (11)

In the time of affliction, the believer feels as though the calamities have destroyed and swallowed him, because of the divine chastisement.

Then, he would cry out to God His Savior, For he perceives that his human arm, as well as those of his brethren, are helpless to present salvation. God alone would remain the Savior Helper, not only from afflictions, but also from sins. He would help the body and sanctifies the soul, and purifies it from sins.

The psalmist confesses that he has done he could do; but, vain is the labor of man, unless the divine grace helps him

“Through God we will do valiantly, for it is He who shall tread down our enemies” (12)

¹ Barnes' Notes.

Having perceived his failure, because he trusted upon his own human arm, he now sees in God alone the power, and might, to make him enjoy the conquest over the enemies.

❖ *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against power, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6: 12). What does this mean?

We, as well, has a crown in case we conquer our own kind of enemies: the physical thoughts, the law stirred up in our body members. The different kinds of lusts, like that of sexual pleasure, of the love of riches, etc. We actually wrestle against these as a violent legion of enemies.

How can we overcome? By faith: *“Through God we will do valiantly; for it is He who shall tread down our enemies”* (12)

About such trust, the prophet Isaiah says to us: *“Surely the Lord God will help me; Who is he who will condemn me?”* (Isaiah 50: 9)

And the psalmist David sings: *“The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall be afraid?”*(Psalm 27: 1).

He is our strength; By Him we gain the conquest; *“For He gives us the authority to trample on serpents, and scorpions, and all the power of the enemy”* (Luke 10: 19) ¹.

(St. Cyril the Great)

¹ *In Luc. Ser 105.*

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 60

THE STORY OF YOUR LOVE FOR ME IS ETERNAL

- ❖ O my God, Your presence in my depths fills my heart with exultation;
And opens my mouth to praise You;
If I look back at my past,
When I gave You the back and not the face;
I used to count life with you a deprivation;
My depths were like a trash can;
Its odor was unbearable;
With the smell of rebellion and corruption;
You rejected me; because by my own free will, I intended to escape from You;
My depths were scattered, like a defeated army;
I counted You as an enemy against me;
And I did not perceive that I, myself is the cause of my perdition.
- ❖ Now, I testify to You in my depths, as well as before my brethren,
Once I cried out to You; You were as though anticipating these moments;
You hastened to return to me as a Savior, and rescued me from all my opponents.
You became the Leader of the battle to my account;
You set up the banner of Your cross over the mountain of Calvary in my depths;
You have captivated my heart with love;
You proclaimed Your kingdom inside me;
And set up in my depths a center for truth, righteousness, and holiness;
My soul exults strongly, O Holy and Righteous One; O You the Truth!
- ❖ I became wholly Yours; As You proclaimed that You are mine.
You counted me as the new Ephraim;
Full of strength, like a helmet on the head;
You counted me as the new Judah;
You set me a king of authority;
You are inside me;
You are my strength and glory; O King of kings.
- ❖ Now, how can I fear sin;
Can the devil with all his hosts terrify me?
Can the world captivate me with all its seductions?
Can it destroy me by its afflictions and troubles?
I shall not be afraid, For I am wholly in Your hands;
You destroy evil, and will not let it crawl into me;
You set out of the temptations a wash-pot;
In which You cleanse me by Your mercy;
You make the devil my footstool;
For You dwell in me.
- ❖ My soul will remain praising You, and exult in You;
For the sake of the amazing conquests You have granted me;
Here she is extending forward;
To enjoy new locations, and perpetual conquests;

You lead all my energies, thoughts, emotions, and talents;
You lead me as though in a procession of conquest, always moving ahead;
Every morning I anticipate a new conquest, until the day of my departure;
Glory be to You, O Grantor of salvation, and of the heavenly glories.

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PSALM 59:YOU ARE MY REFUGE AGAINST THOSE WHO LIE IN WAIT FOR MY LIFE:

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-- An inspiration from psalm 59: Lift me up to You, to keep me from falling into the nets.

PSALM 60: FROM SCATTERING TO CONQUEST:

Years without divine help; A reform of Israel after David sat on the throne; A cry out for salvation from the enemy; A praise of thanksgiving to God, the Grantor of conquest.

-- An inspiration from psalm 60: The story of Your love for me is eternal.

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PSALM 61

A CRY TO SEEK HELP AND A THANKSGIVING TO GOD

Here, the psalmist presents a cry from the heart of someone feeling cast out of his homeland and from the law of his God (1-2); and expressing grief for being denied the presence in the house of the Lord, and the fellowship in the collective worship to Him. Yet, coming to remember the mercies of God in the past, as an unforgettable experience (3), he is filled with hope. Hence, he puts in his heart to dedicate his whole life to serve God (4-5), a spiritual vow he pledges to fulfill all the days of his life.

According to **St. Athanasius**, this psalm could be a thanksgiving to God who brought the captives back home; or presented, as well, by the people who enjoyed salvation through faith.

Beside being a personal lamentation, this psalm, includes certain liturgical verses that made it a part of the collective liturgical worship.

It reminds us of the importance of praying for the sake of the church and the temporal leaderships; and draws our attention, as well, to the fact that the sound spiritual life exhorts us to the unity and integration between our personal life, on the one hand, and the national, and even the international life on the other hand.

In this psalm, as well as in the seven psalms to follow, the Lord Christ is shown as the Head, and the Representative of His people.

1- A cry to God his Savior	1 – 2
2- A thanksgiving to God for His mercies	3
3- A vow to dedicate his whole life to serve God	4 – 5
4- A prayer for the sake of the king	6 – 7
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The title:

Assurance of God's eternal protection.

To the Chief Musician. On Neginoth or Neginath (a stringed instrument that came about 30 times in the psalms). A psalm of David.

1- A CRY TO GOD HIS SAVIOR:

“Hear my cry, O God; Attend to my prayer” (1)

If it is one person who cries, who would it be? It may sound as a cry of one person, but it is actually a collective cry by all of us in the whole world from east to west; In Jesus Christ we are all one man, whose Head is in heaven, and his members still thrive on earth. Let us see what this man says.

This psalm represents a cry of someone cast away and persecuted; yet he resorts to God, being the Rock, the Refuge, and the strong Tower; and seeks a perpetual dwelling with Him. Amid affliction, man, usually suffering seclusion and alienation, as though he is a stranger, with no one to partake of his feelings, or to have compassion on him, he cries to God, who alone, can hear the cries of the heart, and partake of the feeling of the one who suffers.

“From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart grows faint; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (2)

Some believe that the prophet David, when his own son Absalom rebelled against him, and he had to escape from Jerusalem, he became as though a cast-away to the end of the earth. Feeling such bitterness, man usually finds in God the Rock who, not only protects him, but His grace would lift him up high, where no one can reach him.

God hears the cries of man, even if he is cast away by others to the end of the earth; like when He heard Daniel and his companions while in Babylon; and when He heard Jonah while in the belly of the great fish. He hears the sinner who cries to Him in repentance, whatever great his sins are. He is the Listener to our prayers.

❖ This cry could be of the people captivated in Babylon, far away from Jerusalem, who cried to God in their grief, with their hearts abiding on the Rock of hope.

Or could be the cry of someone taken over by the devil; And feeling far from God, he say to Him: ***“From the end of the earth, I cry to You”***.

Those who are submerged in the lowly lusts of the flesh, and are preoccupied in the worldly pleasures, dwell in the depths of the earth; Whereas those who worship God on the mountains and in the wilderness, dwell in the end of the earth, and God hears their prayers, responds to their supplications; and strengthens them, when their hearts grow faint.

The Rock is our Lord Jesus Christ; And he who acquires such a rock, will have his heart lifted up high to the heavenlies, and will reach God.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

According to some fathers like **St. Augustine**, this cry is that of the whole church, extending to the end of the earth; moaning together with the spirit of unity, being the suffering body of Christ. It is the cry of every believer, crucified together with the Lord Christ, crying on account of all those who suffer, are oppressed, and persecuted.

❖ Having forsaken the Jewish people, and unified with the church coming from far away places, Christ call her in the psalms, saying: *“From the end of the world I call you!”*¹.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

❖ The body of Christ is melted in the whole world, it means whole the church, regret is practiced by a firm unit, as states in the psalm *“I cry to you from the end of the world, you hear me when I am in severe pain”*²

❖ There is no cry from the end of the world, except from the heritage, about which it is said to the Son Himself: *“Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the world for Your possession”* (Psalm 2: 8). It is the cry of the one church, the possession of Christ, His inheritance; His body, the one unit which is us, crying from the end of the earth.

(St. Augustine)

“When my heart grows faint” (2). Even though the heart of the church, as well as that of every believer, is lifted up together with the Head from earth to heaven; Being wide with love, it moans together with the moans of everyone, and is set on fire with his offense. His feelings are a mixture of the exalted glory, he perpetually experiences, and the fellowship of the sufferings and the labors of the wounded church.

¹ Sermon 95: 2.

² Sermon 21: 6.

According to **St. Augustine**, it is the Lord Christ, the Savior, who cries in the persons of the members of His body.

- ❖ He manifests Himself through all nations, all over the world, in great glory; yet also in great affliction. Our life in this journey could never be without temptations; Our progress is realized through temptations; Man will not recognize himself unless he is tempted; will not be crowned, unless he overcomes; will not overcome, unless he fights; and will not fight, unless he encounters enemies and goes through temptations. Such man, therefore, as his heart grows faint, he cries from the end of the world; yet he is not forgotten. Christ intends for us, being the members of His body, to be like His body: to die, to be risen, and to ascend to heaven; So that wherever the Head goes, the other body members would be sure to follow. That is why, through the symbol, we move up in Him, when he allows for us to be tempted by the devil.

(St. Augustine)

According to **St. Augustine**, together with the cry of every believer, wherever he is in this world, the whole body of Christ cries; and even the Head Himself cries on his account; for the believer to perceive that his temptation is a marvelous chance to have a fellowship with the suffering Christ, risen from the dead, and ascended to heaven.

- ❖ We read in the gospel how the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4: 1); Christ as a whole, the Head and the members – the church) was tempted; because Christ for your sake has taken a body; for your sake, received death, reviles and honor; for your sake He received temptation, and conquest. Therefore, if in Him we are tempted, in Him, as well, we shall conquer the devil. **“On a Rock higher than me, You lifted me up”**.
- ❖ From the end of the earth, the church cries, she, whom He intends to build on the Rock (Matthew 16: 18). Let us listen to Paul saying: **“And the Rock was Christ”** (1 Corinthians 10: 4). On Him, therefore, we are built.

(St. Augustine)

2- A THANKSGIVING TO GOD FOR HIS MERCIES:

“For You have been my refuge, and a strong tower against the enemy” (3)

How amazing is the protection that a believer finds when he resorts to God! when He embraces him as a strong Tower, into which no enemy can crawl. There is no strength that man can get like when he holds fast to his faith in God, and when he enjoys the divine presence, while being inside the furnace of temptation.

- ❖ Blessed is that Architect who became a Tower for our peace¹.
(St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian)
- ❖ The Lord Christ is the Tower of our salvation, by whom we, the believers are protected against all the arrows of the enemy, and against the temptations that may dwell upon us from the wicked, as well as from the heretics.
- ❖ Within the church herself, the grains of wheat suffer from the interference of the tares. In the midst of all that, when my heart grows faint, I cry from the end of the world. Yet, He who lifts me up upon the Rock will never forget me, but will lead me to Him. Although I labor a lot because of the enemy who persists on opposing me in several

¹ *Hymns on the Nativity, 2.*

places, times, and situations, Yet the Lord is the Tower of power to whom I flee for protection¹

- ❖ Christ Himself is the Tower. For our sake, He made Himself a Tower against the enemy; and a Rock on which the church is built. Do you wish not to be stricken by the devil? Flee to that Tower, where the spears of Satan would not reach you. There, you will stand fast and be protected.... The Tower is here before you; Remember Christ, and enter into the Tower!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ By Your leadership, O Lord, You have brought me back home, as entreated You; You became a strong tower to keep me safe against the strikes of the enemy. So will be him who gives head to the words of the Lord: “*Follow me!*” Therefore, calmly follow His lead; Resort to the strong Tower to protect you against the enemy; the way He was a Refuge and Help for the apostles who followed Him.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

3- A VOW TO DEDICATE HIS WHOLE LIFE TO SERVE GOD:

Having his heart grown faint, while being at the end of the world, the psalmist found no one to help him, except the Savior, the Rock of ages, who transfigured to Him, and in Him he found refuge to enter and enjoy protection.

By entering into the Tower, he not only found protection against the deadly arrows and the bitter temptations of the enemy, but experienced as well, the sweetness of the fellowship with Christ, in which he wished he could spend his whole life. That is the true vow of dedicating his heart to Him.

“I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings” (4)

According to some, the psalmist’s request to abide forever in the house of the Lord, did not mean to dwell physically there, as the temple, at that time, was not yet built; He actually expressed this heart desire in several psalms he wrote before the temple was built (Psalm 15: 1;19: 4; 27: 5-6); because he saw in the tabernacle of the meeting, or in building a house of God (that was built later by his son Solomon), a living portrait of heaven, and of the heavenly worship; that made his heart long for the heavenly life.

His request to take refuge under the shadow of God’s wings, refer to the appearance of God over the cover of the ark of the covenant; namely over the ‘mercy seat’ under the shadow of the wings of the cherubim in the Holy of Holies, into which no one, not even the king himself, could enter except the High Priest.

If the psalmist counts that his great happiness would be realized by being cast down before the altar, rather than by sitting on his royal Throne; If he finds his happiness would be in standing before the ark of the covenant, feeling the divine presence, and hiding under the shadow of God’s wings; How much more would be our happiness when we encounter God Himself face to face², and live together with Him in His heavens forever?!

What would the believer enjoy through salvation from temptation, is to enter into new depths in his relationship with God. He would then, long to pass soon through this

¹ Explanation of Psalms 61: 4.

² Plumer, Ps. 61.

world; not because of the bitterness of temptations, as much as of longing to dwell eternally together with God.

- ❖ The prophet calls Jerusalem: *“the house of God”*, on account of God’s appearance in it, and the presence of His temple; He also means the heavenly Jerusalem, the dwelling place of those who pleased the Lord. By the *“wings of God”* he means His care and protection.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Here, we only live few days then pass away. Here, we are nomads, but in heaven, we shall be residents.

Here, you are sojourners, where you hear the voice of the Lord, your God say: “Depart!”. While there, in the eternal house in heaven, no one will command you to depart!

In the world it is very hot; but there, we shall enjoy great shade under the wings of God.

(St. Augustine)

“For You, O God, have heard my vows; You have given me the heritage of those who fear your name” (5)

According to the ‘Tergum’, the ancient interpretation of the Holy Book, the king whose vows God hears, is the “King Messiah”, about whom the apostle says: *“Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear”* (Hebrew 5: 7).

What were the vows presented by the Word of God, but to sanctify His body, or to dedicate His life for the sake of the world, and for the glory of those who believe in Him? In His farewell prayer He said: *“For their sake I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth”* (John 17: 19).

As members of His body, we bear fellowship in His features, and present vows to live sanctified by His Holy Spirit; and work for the sake of sanctifying every one, and for the growth of the kingdom of God in every heart, counting all sufferings as a fellowship with the crucified Christ.

God the Father’s response to the farewell prayer of the Son is our heavenly deposit; as by it, our souls become sure that what we seek in the name of Christ the Savior, to the account of His kingdom, will be realized by the Father. We count that response as our personal heritage, if we are truly among those who fear the Lord.

- ❖ Those who have reached the climax of perfection, would have their own haven; not in this life, nor in the resurrection, or in any thing they admire; but in that beloved Himself, for whose sake they count calamity as rejoicing, labor as sweet comfort, dwelling in the desert better than dwelling in the cities, and richer than wealth... That is the reward anticipated by those who practice virtue. It is the heritage of those who minister to God, as proclaimed by the prophet (Isaiah 65: 9)¹.

(Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus)

What is the heritage enjoyed by the believer as a king; but to enjoy his rights as a son of God, who got the adoption in the water of baptism; and he would rejoice more,

¹ On Divine Providence, Disc, 9: 11.

when he sees all mankind enjoy this sonhood, and come to have the eternal right to inherit the heavenly glories.

- ❖ Let us then keep on fearing the name of God, as the Heavenly Father would never deceive us. The children may labor to get the inheritance from their parents, whom they succeed after their death; Do we labor to receive the heritage from God the Father, whom we shall not succeed; but will be together with Him in the same heritage; living forever?

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The heritage that was given to the children of Israel is the promised land that flows of milk and honey – the land of Palestine which they have eventually lost. It was called the Promised Land on account of that it was promised to their fathers. But the true heritage, of sure possession, given by God to the believers, is His heavenly kingdom, promised to them, according to the saying of the Lord of glory: *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”*.(Matthew 25: 34).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

4- A PRAYER FOR THE SAKE OF THE KING:

“You will prolong the king’s life, His years as many generations” (6)

This could not be interpreted except by applying it to the Person of the Messiah. The psalmist David, together with his father Abraham, desired to see the joyful day of the Messiah (John 8: 56); and that His days would be prolonged as many generations, through His salvation work in His holy church.

Some interpret this verse literally, seeing that David was on the verge of death when his own son Absalom sought his head; Yet God granted him an age that reached up to 69 years, to see the third generation of his descendents. During those critical moments of his life, David probably looked forward to the promised Messiah, whom death could never destroy, nor corruption could come over His body.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the prophet David would not seek from God to add days to his age as many generations, namely to prolong his mortal life; as much he would seek for his psalms to abide from generation to generation, and to pass over from the Jews to the Gentiles; for all to become one spiritual kingdom; one flock under One Shepherd.

- ❖ For the King Christ, our Head; we seek days above days, not just days of this temporal life that will eventually come to an end, but days that will never end. Anything with an end is short; but the days of that King are days beyond days. In these days with no end, Christ will nor reign alone in His church, but together with Him, the saints will also reign... *“You are the same, and Your years will have no end”* (Psalm 102: 27).

(St. Augustine)

By saying: *“You prolong the King’s life, His years as many generations”* (6), he probably refers to that the Lord Christ, the eternal King of Kings would rejoice to see humanity receive faith in Him, and unify with Him, to come to be kings partaking of His eternal kingdom. He would count their eternal kingdom as though an addition to his days. Namely, with every believer who becomes a king, the King of Kings would exult and rejoice, as though He Himself has got what He gave to that believer.

“He shall abide before God forever. Oh, prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him” (7)

David reigned over Judah for only about 40 years; then who is that King who will sit before the Father forever, except the Son of Man, to whom the prophet Daniel referred, saying: *“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days; and they brought Him near before Him”* (Daniel 7: 13-14).

The foundation of His eternal kingdom is the harmony between mercy and truth, that were together realized by His salvation work on the cross.

❖ He also says: *“All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies”* (Psalm 25: 10). Speaking of mercy, God does not care for our worthiness, but for His goodness, to forgive us our sins, and promise us the eternal life. He speaks as well of the truth, for He will not fail to fulfill what He promises.

I wish we know that here, and to practice it, so that God would show us His mercy and truth: Shows His mercy by forgiving us our sins, and His truth by fulfilling His promises. I also say: I wish, on our side, we would show mercy and truth: show mercy on the weak and needy, and even on our enemies; and show truth by not doing wrong, and not adding sin to our sins.

(St. Augustine)

The psalmist ends his psalm by proclaiming the fulfillment of his vows; which is by singing praise to the name of God forever.

5- A PLEDGE TO FULFILL HIS VOWS:

“So I will sing praise to Your name forever, that I may fulfill my vows day after day” (8)

The psalmist moved from the cries of the heart because of affliction, to a fellowship with the suffering Christ, resurrected from the dead, and ascending to heaven. His soul sets forth to the bosom of the Lord, there to abide, to meditate in His mercy and truth, and to enjoy the fellowship in the divine nature. There, she can practice mercy and truth according to the image of her Savior; forgives those who do her wrong, have mercy with love on the weak and needy, and practice the truth by trusting and holding fast to the divine promises.

❖ *“So I will sing praise (play music) to Your name, that I may fulfill my vows day after day” (8).*

If you play music to the name of God, do not do it just for some time; but forever.

Fulfill your vows day after day For *“he who endures to the end will be saved”* (Matthew 24: 13).

(St. Augustine)

❖ Beloved brethren, Friendship has numerous benefits. When someone pays his debt back before its due time, it would be a point in his favor. He would not be turned back any time he needs another debt. But he who proves that he who does not, will find all doors shut before his face; However much he cries and begs, he would go empty-handed and rebuked.. If this applies to relationship with men, how much more would it be, if man acts with deception toward God; and despise the Lord of heavenly greatness by smooth vows, he does not intend to fulfill?!

Did he say year after year? No! he said “*day after day*”. This is a commitment for us, beloved brethren, to work every day. It is befitting of us not to do wrong concerning our debt toward God and its fulfillment¹.

(Father Valerian)

- ❖ Jacob said to God: “*If you will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat; Of all that You give me, I will surely give one tenth to You*” (Genesis 28: 20- 22); and he fulfilled his vow. This I shall do myself when I get from God what I sought; I shall fulfill my vows; namely, I shall sing praise to His name with thanksgiving, as long as I live.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

¹ *Fr. Valerian: Homilies, 4 (Frs of the Church).*

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 61

OUR MOANS ARE A FELLOWSHIP WITH YOURS

- ❖ Amid my temptations, You, O crucified transfigure before me;
My heart grows faint because of my weakness;
But I perceive that I am a member in Your body.
Together with every moaning that comes out of my heart, Your whole body cries;
You moan together with me, O the Head, amazing in Your love;
You lift me up with You, and bring me forth into Your heavens;
Wherever You are, I shall be together with You;
- ❖ Allow for me to go through affliction, as long as You plant Your cross in me;
For then, I shall forget all about my sufferings and temptations; and my soul would fall in love with You;
I shall cast myself into Your bosom, and enter inside Your heart, O Rock of ages;
- ❖ Allow for me to go through affliction, as long as I hide in You;
Being built on You, the storms of the world and its floods would not be able to destroy me;
Lifting me up, I shall dwell together with You in heaven itself
- ❖ I wonder how shall I call You!
You are “the Rock” on which I build my life!
The enemy – the ancient serpent -- would not be able to crawl toward me;
For he has no place in You!
You are “my Refuge”, in whom I resort!
Where the devil does not dare to approach me;
You are the “high Tower”, You bear me as though to heaven!
Where the arrows of the devil cannot reach me;
- ❖ The world is red hot with the heat of temptations;
But the shadow of Your wings give me a great comfort;
Amid the temptations I resort to Your compassion;
I enjoy the sweetness of dwelling in You, and would never intend to forsake You;
Let me dwell in Your bosom forever
- ❖ Dwelling in Your bosoms;
By You I become a king, O King of kings;
You are glad to have me as a member of Your royal body;
You count the royalty You have given me, as though You have got it Yourself; O You who satisfy all!
Indeed, When shall I see all mankind become kings?
- ❖ Abiding in Your bosoms,
I shall be perpetually in Your presence;
Meditating in Your mercy and truth;
Sing Your love; for, by Your mercy, my sins are forgiven;

And by Your truth, You offer me divine promises;
I am amazed by Your mercy and truth;
I desire to become an icon of You;
To have my heart filled with mercy;
Even toward my opponents;
And to walk in Your truth;
To come to despise and to hate sin;

- ❖ As long as I am kept safe in Your bosoms;
I shall fulfill my vows day after day;
With every new day, and every new morning, I shall come to experience new mercies from You;
My love for You will kindle more and more;
I will sing praises for the sake of Your amazing and true promises;
And my life will be transformed into a song of thanksgiving and praise;
How shall I pay back, O my Savior, Your abundant goodness?
I shall stay all days of my sojourn praising You by my whole being;
And once I set forth to Your great day;
There, on the clouds, I shall join the chorus of Your exultant church;
I shall stay my entire eternity in glorious joy, and in unceasing praise.

CHAPTER 62

TRUSTING IN GOD

In the midst of his affliction, the prophet David used to exhort and motivate his soul to trust in God as a Support, Help, and Rescuer. We do not know the circumstance in which David wrote this psalm; Yet, some believe that he wrote it when his son Absalom rebelled against him, and his counselor Ahitophel betrayed him together with others.

1- God, my Rock and my Salvation	1 - 2
2- The deception and violence of the opponents	3 - 4
3- Confirming his trust in God	5 - 7
4-Exhorting others to trust in God	8 - 10
5- God, Whole in might, mercy, and justice	11 – 12

The title:

A calm resolve to wait for the salvation of God.

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A psalm of David

‘Jeduthun’, like Asaph and Heman, were appointed by king David as chiefs of musical bands in the tabernacle of the meeting (1 Chronicles 25: 1-3). Those, together with their families did not perform their musical chores as a job; but as saints, filled with the Holy Spirit, they prophesied by the spirit of praise and joy, and gave thanks to God. They used to testify to their God with the language of praise, presenting a magnificent portrait of men of God exultant with the Spirit; and a living portrait for every soul to bear the spirit of joy for the salvation of God.

The word ‘Jeduthun’ came in the title of psalm 39. According to **St. Augustine**, it means (over-leaping them). If some put their hope on temporal things, Jeduthun over-leaps them, and passes on without binding to temporal things.

1- GOD, MY ROCK AND MY SALVATION:

“Truly, my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation” (1)

It is befitting of him who is called ‘Jeduthun’ to leap over those who put their hope in temporal things, to hide in God, his Rock and Salvation; with the spirit of humility, and not of pride. He would not be able to realize this except through waiting for the Lord, through trusting that from Him, comes his salvation; and not through trusting in his own abilities, wisdom, nor self-righteousness.

❖ Having heard that *“Whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Mathew 23: 12); and for fear that, through leaping-over, he may be puffed up over those lower than him, David humbles himself for the sake of Him who is High up. And to those who envy him for leaping over them, and threaten him that he would fall, he would say: *“Truly, my soul silently waits for God; From Him comes my salvation,. He, alone, is my Rock and my Salvation; He is my Defense; I shall not be greatly moved”* (1-2). I know who is above me. I know that, with His mercy, He covers those who know Him I know in whom I hope; And that under the shadow of His wings, *“I shall not be greatly moved”*.

(St. Augustine)

It was not possible for the affliction, however great it may be, to let the soul lose her inner peace, nor to move the believer to despair; As, concentrating the inner insight

on God, who, alone can save, will make the believer, calmly, in submission, piety, and perseverance, waits for the exalted work of God.

According to **St. Athanasius** the apostolic, the prophet here, talks in the name of those contemporary of Antichus Epiphanus, who committed the Jews to break the divine law, instead of submitting to God, their Salvation.

St. Basil the Great believes that the word “salvation” here, refers to the Lord Christ Himself, according to the saying of Simon the Elder, when he carried the infant Jesus on his hands: “*My eyes have seen Your salvation*” (Luke 2: 30).

❖ Because of that, beside other such secrets, the bride of the song desires to get inside the house containing the secret of wine. Then having done that, she started leaping-over to reach what is greater; namely, to fall in love; As according to St. John the Evangelist: “*God is Love*” (1 John 4: 8). The submission of the soul to God is salvation, as said by David (Psalm 62: 1). “*He brought me to the banqueting house, And his banner over me was love*” (Songs 2: 4). Saying that He put His love over her; the bride submits to His love; both expressions have the same meaning¹.

(**St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa**)

“*He alone is my Rock and my salvation; my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken (moved)*” (2)

As long as God is on our side, our souls will abide in peace; all the troubles in the world, the attacks of the devil, or the body lusts, will be able to shake them.

It is befitting of us, if we intend to enjoy the inner peace, to join the prophet David in recognizing God, as being our unmovable Rock, our joyful salvation, our fortress of refuge against the enemy, and our glory.

By saying “*I shall not be **greatly** shaken*”, the psalmist clarifies that, although no one in the world is never shaken; yet God would not allow for him to be “**greatly shaken**”, namely, beyond what he can endure.

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, every man is shaken according to the measure of his sin; If he falls in little faults, he will sway like bushes in a mild breeze. But if his falls are more frequent and serious, he will be “**greatly shaken**”.

❖ The Son of God is our God, the Savior of mankind, who supports our weakness, and corrects the disturbance that dwell upon our hearts because of temptations².

(**St. Basil the Great**)

2- THE DECEPTION AND VIOLENCE OF THE OPPONENTS:

“*How long will you assault a man? Will you batter your victim, all of you, as you would a leaning wall or a tottering fence?*” (3)

In Hebrew, this verse came meaning an attack with violence and ferocity.

As the wicked who are attached to temporal things, envy the souls lifted up by God, and abiding in His bosoms, they attack them violently; Yet, he who leaps-over high, does not fear them, nor collapse under their threats.

❖ He who stands on a high and secure place, where God is his fortress of refuge, would look down at those over whom he has leapt, and speak to them as though from a high tower. God is described as “*A strong tower from the enemy*” (Psalm 61: 3). He would

¹ عظة 4 على نشيد الأنشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

² Homilies on Psalm 61 (62): 2.

say to them: *“How long will you assault a man?”*. By your reviles, rebukes, persecution, and lying in wait, you are burdening him with what is beyond what he can endure. Yet inside this man there is He who created him. *“You may batter your victim, all of you, as you would a leaning wall or a tottering fence”* (3); You may press, strike, and cast him down, yet *“he will not be greatly shaken”* (2) For God Himself is His Rock and fortress. You, as humans can cast burdens upon him; But can you, by any means, cast them on God, the Protector of man?

(St. Augustine)

Who is that man whom all the wicked intend to destroy as they would a leaning wall, or a tottering fence? According to **St. Augustine**, He is the Lord Christ the Head of the church. Opposing the church, the wicked are persecuting the body of Christ, who counts their opposition as though directed against Him personally. That was what He proclaimed to Saul of Tarsus, saying: *“Why are you persecuting me?”* (Acts 9: 4). What Saul did against the church, the Lord Christ counts as though he did it against Him.

As the wicked will not cease to persecute the Lord Christ in the persons of His believers; the apostle Paul says: *“I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church”* (Colossians 1: 24).

According to **St. Augustine**: [In this mutual (Republic) of ours, everyone of us is committed to share in paying back our mutual debt, according to his or her abilities and possibilities; Everyone should carry a portion (a quota) of the sufferings which we all partake of. The storehouse of suffering of mankind will not be completely exhausted, until the world comes to an end Here, it is the whole city talking: from the blood of the righteous Abel, to the blood of Zechariah (Matthew 22: 35); to the blood of John the Baptist, to the blood of the apostles, to the blood of the martyrs, and of all the believers in Christ. It is the whole city talking; as one man, saying: *“How long will you assault a man; Will you batter your victim, all of you?”* (3). Let us see whether you could wipe out the name (the name of Jesus Christ by which the one city – the church -- is called); Let us see if you could destroy Him, or take Him away from the earth; Let us see if you could realize what you vainly thought: *“When will he die, and his name perish?”* (Psalm 41: 5).

You, yourselves, are like a leaning wall that would fall and collapse, and kill those beside it; namely, would be destroyed, and destroy others as well.

According to **St. Basil the Great**, the human nature is like a wall shaken by the shock of sin, to lean and collapse. It would not be possible to Rebuild, except after destroying it altogether. That is why God allowed for death to destroy that shaken wall, to rebuild it by the general resurrection; in a secure and confirmed way.

“Their only plan is to cast him down from his high position; They delight in lies; they bless with their mouth, but inwardly they curse” (4)

What preoccupies the hearts of the wicked is not to succeed or progress in something, as much as to destroy the righteous and to wipe his name out. That was their intention, whether against king David, or against his Son according to the flesh -- Jesus Christ.

Receiving the sonhood of the devil, and not of God, the wicked would find their delight and the gladness of their heart in lies and vanity; as their father, the devil, is a liar, and the father of liars.

The wicked cast their nets mostly through sweet words that conceal the violence of their hearts. Here he refers to Absalom, David's son, who won a multitude by his deceptive sweet words.

- ❖ I wish we attach ourselves to those who plant peace with piety, and not those who seek peace with hypocrisy¹.

(St. Clement the Roman)

- ❖ The honor of man is his proper worship of God, and keeping His statutes; and the honor of the righteous is virtue and good religion According to the apostle Paul: "Glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good" (*Romans 2: 10*).

The evil hosts; namely, the devil and those who follow him; being helpless before those who courageously oppose them; they think of diverse tricks. By the sweetness of the words of their mouths, they would deceive man, to let him fall down into their pit; they would strongly seek to cast him down from his high position, to take away his honor, to draw him over to blasphemy, and to works that are against the law of God; that whoever does, would lose his honor, and would turn into what is like irrational beasts. And as St. Basil the Great says: [The honor of the believer and the price for which he was purchased – the precious blood of Christ – the followers of the devil would strongly attempt to wipe out, to corrupt his freedom, and to bring him back to bondage].

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ The hearts of the wicked are tortured to see the honor of the Christians. The spiritual Joseph, after being sold by his brothers, taken away from his home to Egypt, namely, to the Gentiles; humiliated through casting in prison (*Genesis 37: 36; 39: 20*) based upon a false testimony; after "*hurting his feet with fetters, and laying him in iron*" (*Psalms 105: 18*); Now, he came to promise the hungry with grain; By his humility, purity, non-corruption, temptations, and suffering, he is highly honored.

(St. Augustine)

3- CONFIRMING HIS TRUST IN GOD:

"For God alone, my soul waits in silence; for my hope comes from Him" (5)

The prophet David exhorts his soul to bow down with the spirit of submission and piety, before the good will of God; to wait in silence and hope for His mercies.

According to **St. Augustine**, 'Jeduthun', namely he who leaps over those who love the temporal things, submits to God, who grants him endurance, and perseverance with hope in the true promises of God.

- ❖ What perseverance would possibly be in the temptations, and amid such serious slanders, unless "*we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance*" (*Romans 8: 25*)?

My suffering comes, and there, as well, dwells my comfort.

My tribulation comes, and there, as well, comes my purification.

Gold does not glitter in the furnace in which it is purified? It glitters in the necklace and jewelry.

Gold endures the heat of the furnace to get rid of the impurities, and for its splendor to come to light.

¹ *First Epistle, 15.*

Put me in the furnace of temptations, to rid me of my impurities! “
For God alone, my soul waits in silence, for my hope comes from Him”

(St. Augustine)

“He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress, I shall not be shaken (moved)” (6)

Here, he repeats what came in verse (2), omitting the word “*greatly*”. If, at the beginning of his crying to God, he proclaims his trust in Him, that, even if he is shaken, it would only be temporary, for God is his support. Now, in a general way, he says that “*he will not be shaken*”.

He came to be filled with greater peace, and his mind is completely calmed down! Talking to God, and meditating in his dealings makes hope grow in us, and grants us greater abidance.

- ❖ Strength to endure tribulations and disturbances is from God, who does not forsake us, or let us endure beyond our ability; lest we would go from bondage to Him to bondage to someone else.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ “For He is my God, my salvation, and my (Lifter); I shall not be shaken” (LXXX 6). Being my God, He calls me; Being my salvation, He justifies me; and being my (Lifter), He glorifies me; Here, I am called, justified, and glorified; Being glorified, “*I shall not be shaken*”. Being a sojourner on earth, as were my fathers, I shall be moved from my dwelling place; whereas, from my heavenly home, I shall never be moved.

(St. Augustine)

“In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God” (7)

The psalmist no more looks up to God to save him from a specific temptation or from an anguish that dwelt upon him, as much as to enter into His bosoms, and to enjoy fellowship with Him. That would be his true glory and strength!

- ❖ In God, I shall be saved, and in Him I shall be glorified, I shall not only be saved, I shall also be glorified.... I shall be saved, because I shall change from an evil man to a righteous one; “By Him I shall be justified” (Romans 4: 2). I shall be glorified; as I am not only justified, but honored as well. “*Whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified*” (Romans 8: 30). Justification belongs to salvation; and glorification to honor.

(St. Augustine)

4- EXHORTING OTHERS TO TRUST IN GOD:

“Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us” (8)

It is befitting of us to trust in God, and to deliver all our affairs to Him; not only in times of tribulation, and not only in things that seem serious to us; but even in things that do not seem as serious; “*at all times*”. We should pour our heart before Him wherever we are, and under all circumstances; whether they are times of affliction and sorrow, or times of joy and comfort.

❖ Instead of spreading our garments, let us pour our heart before Him¹.

(Father Methodeus)

❖ This saying is a prophecy about calling all the Gentiles. By saying “*Pour out your heart*”, he means: Take out from your souls the evil and harmful thoughts; separate them, cleanse and purify your hearts.

According to **St. Basil the Great**: We cannot enjoy the pure spirit, as long as the defilements are still in our heart. He exhorts us to love God with no hypocrisy, from the whole heart and intentions; Our faith should be free of any doubt that God is the only Helper. Pouring the heart also means, Do your best, and concentrate on entreating and beseeching God.

Pouring implies multitude and profusion; according to the saying of the apostle: “The love of God is poured out in our hearts”

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

According to **St. Augustine**, the word “*trust*” means (hope), which, in Greek, implies the (surety); and not the (probability) of the fulfillment of the promise; It implies trusting in the sure fulfillment of the divine promise.

❖ Follow the lead of ‘Jeduthun’; Leap-over your enemies, they fight you because they hate you, and intend to shut the way before you; Leap-over them. “*Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him*” (8) Do that by entreating Him, confessing to Him, and trusting Him. Pour out your heart before Him; as what you pour is not destroyed.

“*Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you*” (Psalm 55: 22) Could they be equal to God in any way? Are they stronger than Him? “*God is our Helper*”. So do not worry! For “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” (Romans 8: 31).

“*Pour out your heart before Him*” (8), by leaping-over to Him, and lifting up your head toward Him.

(St. Augustine)

“*Surely men of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are but a delusion; If they are weighed in balances they go up, they are altogether lighter than a breath*” (9)

The psalmist believes that God is his Salvation, Glory, the Rock of his strength, and his Refuge; He no more anticipates from God to rescue him from a specific temptation, or from an affliction that dwelt upon him; but he desires to enter into His bosoms, and to enjoy the fellowship with Him; That is his glory and his strength.

As man by nature, tends to lean upon human arm, upon the temporal authority, and the material possibilities; the psalmist compares between God and man, where there is no point of comparison. Man is nothing more than a breath, All what he acquires are vain, however long he lives, and however great are his possibilities, capabilities, and authority. He is nothing more than a shadow walking on earth, and just for a certain time. He is vain if compared to God, the Mighty and the Truth!. Whatever the behavior of man is, he will not be justified by himself before God. That is why, without the divine grace, in the balances, he goes up, he is altogether lighter than breath.

¹ *Oration on Psalms 1.*

According to **St. Augustine**, the slanders and evil of the wicked are so numerous and diverse, that the wicked are divided among themselves, destroy one another, to become vanity.

- ❖ Everything in men are vain, whether wealth, intelligence, possessions, or glory; the balances of their hearts are prejudiced and not upright; they lean toward doing injustice to men. According to the reverend **St. Athanasius**, the Jewish leaders, by their balances and measures, plotted treason against the Lord Christ to destroy Him; but their plans came to no avail.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ The offerings of fasting which we hasten to present before God, although we count them as bringing pleasure to God, are doing us no benefit; He, “*who loves righteousness and justice*” (Psalm 33: 5), hates robbery in the burnt offering Those who rob the greater portion of their offering (by fasting to seek honor from men), and leave only the lesser portion for God; will be condemned by the divine Word, as deceptive laborers, and to them He says: “*Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully*” (Jeremiah 48: 10).

Therefore, it is not without reason, that God, rebuking those who deceive themselves by false considerations, says: “***Vain are men, just a delusion; if weighed in balances, they go up***” (9). The blessed apostle counsels us “*not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think soberly*” (Romans 12: 3). And the divine Giver of the law, says: “*You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume*” (Leviticus 19: 35). It is therefore, not befitting of us to have oppressive, or double balances in our hearts, or in the storehouses of our consciences; Namely, not to burden those to whom we preach the Word of God, by deceptive and extreme statutes, more than we ourselves could endure For, if we weigh for our brethren in a way different from that we do for ourselves, we shall be rebuked by the Lord; according to the words of Solomon: “*Diverse weighs and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to the Lord*” (Proverbs 20: 10) ¹.

(Father Theonas)

“Do not trust in oppression, nor vainly hope in vain robbery; If riches increase, do not set your hearts on them” (10)

Because of the love of money, and the desire to increase his riches, man sometimes resort to cheating and oppression, and even to robbery. If man thinks that oppression is an easy and a swift way to realize material benefits, won't he by this corrupt his heart?!

- ❖ My trust is in God. Yes, I would not approach evil; for the Scripture says: “*Do not trust in oppression*” (10). In order to leap-over upward, I should trust in God.... Is there oppression with God?!

Oppression could endure for some time, Yet it would never endure forever.

To become rich, will you rob? What will you get? And what will you lose?

What a lost cause it would be: to get wealth, and to lose righteousness!!

¹ Cassian, Conferences 21: 22.

“Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies” (Psalm 40: 4). Yes, you intend to swindle; but what will be your benefit by that? *“Do not set your heart on cheating and oppression!”*

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ You should not only keep away from oppression, but, even if it so happen that wealth rushes toward you like a torrent flood, do not set your heart on it; for wealth is no more than a fluid that would not abide.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ When I see you worried, I feel sorry for you!; For you worry for nothing! You save your treasures, assume the success of your enterprises; utterly forgetting the losses, the evil thoughts, and the great risks that would result from fighting fiercely to get all kinds of profit; Gold may come, but it will eventually go away; You will be clothed on the outside, yet you will be naked on the inside! To pass calmly over all these things, that are against you, *“You should not set your heart on them”* (10) ¹

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The soul reigns over the body, and gives it life; Without the soul, the body would have neither life nor feeling. *“He who is spiritual judges all things; yet he himself is rightly judged by no one”* (1 Corinthians 2: 15). And even on such an exalted man, David says: *“What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him?”* (Psalm 8: 5; 144: 3-4); Man is just vanity!. As an image of God, man is not vain; yet in case he loses that image, by falling into sin, and stumbling into material things, such a man is certainly vain².

(St. Ambrose)

5- GOD, THE WHOLE MIGHTY, MERCIFUL, AND JUST:

“God has spoken once, twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God” (11)

Profusely commenting on this verse, St. Augustine demonstrates the following points:

a- *“God has spoken once”*. What God said to Adam, said it as well to Cain, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and to all the apostles.

God is unchangeable, so are what He utters; It is us who change. St. Augustine intends to confirm that, As God is impartial, If we humbly submit to Him, we would enjoy His blessings; and if we arrogantly disobey Him, we would fall under judgment. While God the Philanthropic does not change, yet we sometimes submit ourselves to His mercies; and other times, we fall under the corruption of sin.

b- God the Father who has spoken to those saints, spoke to His only-begotten Son, saying: *“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Matthew 3: 17). This is the Son through whom all things were made, and without Him nothing was made (John 1: 3). He is the Son, the Savior of the world, who wishes to see all enjoy the pleasure and mercy of the Father in Him.

c- Saying: *“I have heard”*, the psalmist confirms that what he says is not on his own, but heard it from the only-begotten Son of God *“in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Colossians 2: 3).

¹ Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 10: 3.

² إسحق أو النفس، 2: 4.

d- The two things he heard were: “*Power belongs to God*” (11), and: “*To Him belongs mercy*” (12).

- ❖ These two great things: the power and the mercy of God, constitute the foundation of all the Holy Scripture. For their sake, and because of them, came the fathers, the prophets, the law, our Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles, and all those who preached the Word of God in the church

Let us then fear the power of God; and let us love His mercy. Do not lean upon the mercy of God, and disregard His power. And Do not fear His power, and despair from His mercy; For to Him belong both the power and the mercy.

(St. Augustine)

What are the two things that belong to God? The first thing is His whole Might; He is God of the impossible; We cannot replace Him with another; For He is the true Support, the One capable of salvation.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the proclamation saying: “*What man sows, he will reap*”, implies two things: punishing the wicked, and rewarding the righteous.

“Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy, For You render to each one according to his work” (12)

This is the second thing that belongs to God. Together with His whole Might, His mercy is exalted and without limits; And through this mercy, He also realizes His exalted justice. These two things conform to one another, and are manifested on the cross: By carrying our sins on the cross, He realizes the divine justice; and by His mercy and love, He presents us, bearing His righteousness, before God the Father.

- ❖ “*He puts down one, and exalts another*” (Psalm 75: 7). He puts the one by His power; and exalts the other through His mercy.

“*God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction*” (Romans 9: 22). Here, you hear about the “*power*”; Concerning the “*mercy*”, the apostle goes on to say: “*And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy...*” (Romans 9: 23). Judgment of the oppressors belongs to his power.

The devil is a kind of power; he often intends to do us harm, but is not able to; because his power is under a more exalted Power... If Satan has the power to do what he wishes to do, there would not be a single righteous man, nor a single believer on earth. The same thing applies to the vessels which he strikes, to become like “*a leaning wall*”, *whom* he strikes as much he is allowed by God; but in order not to fall, these “*leaning walls*” are supported by God. He who gives (the tempter) the power, is Himself who grants (the tempted) mercy; He allows Satan to tempt, yet within certain limits. “*I have given them tears to drink in measure*” (Psalm 80: 5).

Do not, therefore, fear the tempter, who is given the power within limits; as you have, on your side, the Savior, the One whole in mercy; who allows for temptation in measure of your benefit, for you to be tested and justified The apostle says: “*God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able*” (1 Corinthians 10: 13).

Do not fear the enemy, for what he does is within the power he is given; but fear instead, the One who has the greatest power.

How great are the good things that the divine Righteous brings, out of the evil practiced by the oppressors! This is the great secret of God! Even the good things that you may do, is given to you by Him; And He uses the evil of the wicked for your own good. Therefore, do not marvel if God allows for temptations to come over you, yet in certain measure, in certain weight, and in certain number; In Him there is no oppression; Be sure to do what is befitting, and trust in Him; Let Him be your support, and your salvation. I wish you find in Him a Stronghold, a Tower of power, and a Refuge.

(St. Augustine)

❖ A man of God once went to visit **father ‘Bellidius’** about whom he has heard much. He addressed his soul beforehand, saying: [I shall introduce myself to the saintly father; and you are to notice carefully what he will say]. He said to the elder: [Pray for me father, for I have done a multitude of sins]; to which the elder responded by saying: [Jesus Christ, alone, is the One without sin]. The visitor said: [Shall we, O father, be punished on every sin we commit?] The elder answered: [It is written: “*You, O Lord, render to each one according to his work*” (Psalm 62: 12). Have you annoyed your neighbor? Have you robbed the goods of the humble? Have you stricken the poor? Have you reviled, slandered, or lied? Did you intend to marry someone else’s wife? Have you falsely testified? Have you cast away the law of the fathers? Have you oppressed the fatherless and the widow? Have you preferred the present pleasures to the promised ones? Then you will anticipate to have like things! For man will reap what he sowed. Likewise, you will anticipate to have the good things you may have done, and even more. If you put in mind these things all the days of your life, you will be able to keep away of committing many sins].

When the visitor asked him: [What should I do, father?]. The elder said: [Think about the everlasting eternity, where there is no night nor sleep. Put before your eyes death, after which there is no more food nor drink, no illness, pain, medicine, courts of justice, trade, or riches; and where there is no cause for envy, nor for wars. It will be the land of the living; Not of those who died in sin, but of those who lived a holy life in Christ Jesus]. Hearing all that, the visitor was so impressed that he went home thanking God.

(The paradise of fathers)

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 62
YOU ARE MY ROCK, SALVATION, AND REFUGE

- ❖ My soul praises You, O Mighty Creator;
By Your love You created this beautiful world;
For me to dwell in for sometime;
By Your Holy Spirit, Grant me to leap-over high;
Grant me to desire nothing of the pleasures of this life;
Nor to debase myself by entering into struggle with those who are enslaved
by this world;
Grant me to leap-over, as though up to heaven;
To abide in Your divine bosoms;
For You are my Rock, Salvation, Refuge, and Glory.
- ❖ Who can dare to crawl into my soul, while being in Your bosoms?
What fiery arrows of the devil can reach me?
The hosts of darkness intend to destroy me;
To make me like a leaning wall, or a tottering fence!
The wicked plot oppression against me;
They utter smooth things;
While their hearts are like those of the deadly wolves;
By their mouths, they may utter blessing;
While their hearts utter curses;
But I trust in You;
And in You I hope.
- ❖ Let the enemy bring oppression on me;
As this is nothing but his nature;
But Your mercy will support me;
You will not allow the enemy to attack me beyond my ability to endure;
If he thinks that he has the power;
Your power is far greater.
- ❖ I will not fear the enemy, as long as I am in your bosoms.
You grant me conquest over him by the riches of Your grace;
You adorn me with the crowns of glory, that You prepare for Your believers;
You turn the temptations of the enemy to my glory by, and in You;
To You be the power, O Lord of Mercy!

CHAPTER 63

MY SOUL THIRSTS FOR YOU, O MY GOD

When the prophet David sang this psalm, he was in the wilderness of Judah, exiled from God's sanctuary (the tabernacle of the meeting), and a homeless fugitive; although he was anointed as a king by a prophet sent by God (Samuel). In it David expressed his longing from the depth of his heart, for God, and for dwelling in His house and city.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the fathers of the early church believed that no day should pass without singing this psalm in collective worship. So it is also befitting of the church to keep praising God with this psalm, she calls "the morning psalm" every day.

❖ Since early eras, psalm 62 (63), was used in the East and West, as a morning praise. In the laws of the apostles in the East (2: 49; 8: 37), it is still counted as one of the psalms of the Vesper prayers (Lauds); and so it is in the West according to the Roman rites (although it is obvious that it was later moved from the 'Vesper' to the 'Prime' prayers)¹.

(**St. John Cassian**)

This psalm is presented as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God (2 – 6), together with a confession of great trust in Him (7 – 8).

Its divisions:

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1- The soul's thirsts for God | 1 - 4 |
| 2- The soul's satisfaction with God | 5 - 7 |
| 3- The soul's confidence and trust in God | 8 – 11 |

The title:

Joy in the fellowship of God

A psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah

There is controversy among scholars as to the circumstances in which this psalm was written. Some believe that it was written when David was persecuted by king Saul; while others believe that it was when he was chased by his own son Absalom. In either case, David was in exile far away places in Judah. The first group refer to 1 Samuel 23: 14, 25; 24: 1; and confirm that the forest of 'Hareth', 'Ziph', 'Moan', and 'En Gedi', were provinces under the tribe of Judah. While the other group quote 2 Samuel 15: 23, 28; 16: 2, 14; 17: 16, 29, to confirm that the title refers to a more late period during the rebellion of Absalom², based upon the fact that David called himself a king (11).

In this psalm David reveals his longing for God; as well as prophesies the perdition of Saul.

It is a psalm that suits every soul going through a condition of poverty, lacking everything good, and feeling that by returning to the Lord Christ, it will enjoy every grace.

1- THE SOUL'S THIRSTS FOR GOD:

¹ *The institutes*, 3: 3.

² *Palmer. P. 630.*

“O God, You are my God; early will I seek you; My soul thirsts for you; My flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water” (1)

It is not a strange thing for men of God like the prophet David and others, to be sent away from, and deprived of the enjoyment of the fellowship in the collective church service (Hebrew 11; 37-38). Sending them away by the flesh, will nevertheless kindle their hearts, souls, as well as their bodies with longing for God.

In the wilderness of this world, where there is no human help to support him, the believer looks up to the Lord as his own and personal God; He opens his eyes early every morning, together with the eyes of his soul, to proclaim his longing for Him.

In the midst of his anguish, the psalmist felt, that although he has lost temporal things, became a fugitive, persecuted, and denied partaking of the collective worship; yet all those circumstances would never be able to deny him access to the Almighty God, his personal Friend. All the human springs dried up, and could not provide him with comfort and help; but the divine fountain remained open before him, and will never dry up.

- ❖ The prophets so used to refer to themselves Him who is the God of all: saying: “O God, You are my God; early will I seek You” (1). Such a language, teaches us, as well, that every individual is justly indebted by great gratitude toward Christ, as though He came personally to Him alone. As He, actually, would never hesitate to condescend even for the sake of a single individual. The measure of His love for every one is as great as His love for the whole world¹.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ This is however, the voice of the saints alone, to whom God is their God; as He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For no one can say that God is his God, if his belly, his greed, the glory or pride of this world, or the temporal issues of this life, are his gods; For what man worships more is counted as his god².

(The scholar Origen)

Here, the prophet repeats the name of God, to reveal how much he longs for Him. And by saying: “*My God*”, he shows that the God of all is specifically the God of the righteous.

By saying “*Early will I seek You*” he is as though saying: [My longing for You, O Lord, wakes me up early, and before doing anything else, I would start by praying to you].

By saying: “*My soul thirsts for you*”, he means to say that the way the thirsty desires to drink water, my soul desires to reach You, by prayer; or by returning to Jerusalem.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ My soul thirsts for You, yet I seek you as well through the labor of my body, although I am not able to look up at You in Your temple³.

(St Jerome)

- ❖ You can see how Jacob did not go on wrestling until the morning (Genesis 32: 26); as actually, there is no wrestling for those who live in the light. It is befitting of those

¹ *Commentary on Galatians (Gal. 2: 20).*

² *Commentary on Rom. 1: 8.*

³ *Epistles, 122: 1.*

who reach such greatness to say: “O Lord, my God, I anticipate You in the light” (Psalm 63: 1 LXX). And to add as well: “*My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; In the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up*” (Psalm 5: 3).. Once the Light of the morning; namely Christ, shines in our minds, and sends His splendor in our hearts, we anticipate as noble souls, and become qualified for God’s interest in us. “*God’s eyes are on the righteous*”. Once dawn appears, wrestling will come to an end¹.

(St. Cyril the Great)

❖ God thirsts for your thirst for Him.

(St. Gregory the Nezianden)

❖ Here is a wilderness where there is much thirst; and here we hear the voice of him who is thirsty. But if we recognize ourselves as thirsty, we shall also recognize ourselves as drinking; For those who thirst in this world will get satisfied in the world to come; according to the saying of the Lord: “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled*” (Matthew 5: 6). It is befitting of us, therefore, not to desire to be filled in this world, as we shall be in the world to come. But now, in order not to let us get weak in this wilderness, he sprinkles on us the dew of His word, and will not forsake us to dry up.

❖ “*My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You, in a dry and thirsty land, where is no water*” (1). The soul and the body thirst for God... He provides the soul with her food, which is the word of truth; and will also provide the body with his needs; as God is the Creator of both.

(St. Augustine)

Thirsty for God day and night, the psalmist watches all night long, as his soul proclaims her longing for God, until the Sun of Righteousness shines on her. It is therefore, befitting for our soul to watch perpetually, to proclaim her thirst for God.

❖ God grants sleep to the body, to replenish the energy of its members, to become able to support the soul in her watch. Yet we should be aware not to let our souls sleep; for this implies the forgetfulness of her God. Hence the apostle says: “*Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light*” (Ephesians 5: 14).

❖ “*Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light*” (Ephesians 5: 14).

Was the apostle waking up a sleeping body?

No! He was waking up a sleeping soul, to arise and be given the light of Christ.

In the same way the psalmist says: “*O God, You are my God; early will I seek You*” (1). Christ gives light to souls, make them awake; They will sleep if He is sent away.

For the same reason, he says in another psalm: “*Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death*” (Psalm 13: 3).

(St. Augustine)

❖ My God, and my life! My mind is captivated by talking to You; as I have no one but You to talk to!

¹ Glaphyra on Genesis, 5: 3.

What should I do? *“My soul thirsts for You; and my flesh longs for You”* (Psalm 63: 2)¹.

By talking to You, I can ascend to you; and by thinking of You, I will be granted to see Your face.

❖ I am thirsty for the water of life, for I, still, have not run to the Fountain of Life!

He called me, together with my brethren, saying: *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me to drink”*

And here, the prophet cries loud, saying: ‘All of You, O thirsty, go to the water of life; as those who drink from it, out of their hearts, rivers of living water will flow!’

(The spiritual elder –John El-Deliaty)

❖ *“Rebecca went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up”* (Genesis 24: 16). So did the church (or the soul); she came down to fill her jar with the pure teachings of wisdom from that flowing Spring, forsaken by the Jews... Hear the Spring Himself say: *“They have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living water”* (Jeremiah 2: 13).

The souls of the prophets thirst for this fountain. David says: *“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God”* (Psalm 42: 2-3); to quench his thirst by the riches of God’s knowledge, and to cleanse the blood of foolishness by the streams of spiritual waters; This is the flow of blood referred to by the law (Leviticus 20: 18), when someone lies with a woman during her period. As the woman here, refers to the gladness and pleasure of the body, beware lest the steadfastness of your mind would collapse and grow soft by the physical pleasure. By lying with her, her flow of blood will open, that which should be shut up by the zealous intention and the sound reason. *“You are a spring shut up, a fountain sealed”* (Songs 4: 12). Once the steadfastness of mind is loosened, thoughts of very harmful physical pleasure will pour out, and will turn into torrential lust, that leads up to deadly consequences. But when, on the other hand, we have the reasonable sense to watch over the living mind, we can put those body pleasures under control².

(St. Ambrose)

“So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory”
(2)

Now, as the psalmist’s body became like a dry wilderness, thirsty for God, the true Fountain; he longed to appear before God in the sanctuary to see His power and glory. The word *“see”* here, means to (experience and enjoy) God’s power and glory (See psalm 27: 13;34: 8, 12; Matthew 5: 8; John 3: 36).

According to **St. Augustine**, as the believer’s soul longs for God, he goes to the house of the Lord, and appears before Him, to enjoy seeing

His power and glory; Or, as said by the apostle: *“After you have known God, or rather are known by God”* (Galatians 4: 9). While feeling thirsty to know Him, we will discover that it is God’s pleasure for us to be known by Him.

❖ Let us first appear to God, to have God appear to us ***“to see Your power and glory”***.

Let us leave the wilderness where we strived to get enough help. Or else we shall not be able to see God’s power and glory, but will remain there to die out of thirst; and will not know the way, the comfort, or the water, by which we can endure living in the

¹ رسالة 51 :6.

² إسحق أو النفس، 1 :1.

wilderness. But arising up to God, where all the believer would say to Him: *“My soul thirsts for You; and my flesh longs for You (with all its members)”*, lest he would seek, not what is God’s, but what is the others’, lest he does not long for the resurrection of the body, promised by God By so arising up, he will have a lot of comfort.

(St. Augustine)

According to **the scholar Origen**, the Son is the Power of the Father, as said by the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 1: 18); as well as His Wisdom and Glory. The psalmist, therefore longs to see Christ and to recognize the ordinance of his incarnation.

❖ As the dry land thirsts for water, so I long for coming to Jerusalem, where the shade of your sanctuary is.

While **St. Athanasius, the scholar Origen**, and others, believe that the psalmist means to say: [The dry wilderness did not keep me from longing for You, but there, I pray to You, and praise You as I do in Jerusalem, as long as I enjoy Your presence, and see Your wonders that manifest Your power and glory.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“Because Your loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You” (3)

According to the psalmist, death, together with the enjoyment of the love and compassion of God, is better than life without them. Life has no value without the divine love.

According to **St. Athanasius**, he who approaches Christ will rather have His mercy and praise, than to have the longevity of life.

❖ The life of men may diverse; but there is only one kind of life promised by God, which He grants to us, not for the sake of our worthiness but for that of His mercy For with justice, He punishes the sinner, and with His mercy He may justify him, and set out of the sinner, a righteous man, and of the oppressor, a good man.

“My lips shall praise you” (3). My lips will not be able to praise you, unless your mercy would move before me. By Your gift and your mercy I praise you. I cannot praise God, unless He grants me the ability to praise Him.

(St. Augustine)

“Thus I will bless you while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name” (4)

The psalmist presents a vow, that while he lives he will proclaim the glory of God.

Lifting up the hands is a very old custom which often came in the Old Testament. It does not only mean supplicating to God, but giving Him thanks as well (Psalm 134: 2). Here, the psalmist lifts up his hands, not to seek something, but to seek God Himself the subject of his inner thirst, and of his body as well. He desires to appear before Him, and to praise and glorify Him.

Lifting up the hands or the eyes toward heaven (John 17: 1). Implies that the body partakes of the longing of the soul toward God. It is a rite of worship to God (Psalm 134: 2), or to seek something from Him (Psalm 28: 2); a language also used by the New Testament (1 Timothy 2: 8).

❖ He whose beliefs in God are upright, and whose religion is sound, by lifting up his hands, his practical powers would be lifted up to the heavenlies, in the name of the Lord; praise Him with his lips and his mouth, and sings for Him by his spirit and mind.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

According to **St. Augustine**, as God grants the believer a new holy life, he praises God with his lips, and blesses Him with his life; namely, he testifies to God's goodness and mercy through his behavior.

We glorify the name of God by lifting up our hands, namely, by stretching them to work according to his commandment and His holy will.

❖ Lift your hand up in prayer. Our Lord lifted his hands up on the cross for our sake. he stretched His hands to make us stretch our hands for good works.

Look! He lifts up His hands, and offers Himself a sacrifice to God the Father; and through that sacrifice He wiped out all our sins. I wish we, as well, would lift up our hands in prayer.

Those hands we lift to God will not return empty if we do good works The apostle says: "*lifting up holy hands, without wrath or doubting*" (1 Timothy 2: 8).

(St. Augustine)

2- THE SOUL'S SATISFACTION WITH GOD:

"My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips" (5)

The tough circumstances, through which the psalmist passed, could not deny his soul the feeling of satisfaction with God; nor could shut up his mouth from praising Him with joyful lips.

Because of this verse (5), the Armenian church binds this psalm to the liturgy of the Eucharist.

❖ The words "marrow" and "fatness" refer to (richness). The soul that feeds on good things, shall be satisfied with the riches of virtues. On the contrary, the soul that feeds on evil, is full of the riches of iniquities¹.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Like marrow and fatness that provide the body with the pleasure and well being of eating them, Praising You, O God, and reciting Your divine sayings, provide the soul with pleasure, the lips with gladness, and incite the mouth to praise You.

Saying "*My soul shall be satisfied*" refers to the fact that in the life to come, the soul will not feed on sensory food, as some think, but on spiritual food; namely, on beholding the glory of God, and enjoying the eternal joy.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

"When I remember You on my bed, I meditate in You in the night watches" (6)

If at dawn he opens up his eyes on praising God, proclaiming the longing of both his body and soul for Him; he will remain all day long preoccupied with Him until he goes to bed at night. A magnificent portrait of the thirst for God day and night.

In the laws of the apostles (2: 59), it came, that, it is befitting of us, as members of Christ, to partake of the day and night prayers of the church: [Do not be slothful to yourselves; do not deny Your Savior His members; do not divide His body; do not scatter His members; and do not prefer other circumstances of life to reading the word of God; but gather together every morning and evening, sing psalm 63, and pray to God].

¹ *The prayer Job and David, 3: 4: 10.*

- ❖ The prophet teaches us that by remembering God by day, and in bed by night, the evil thoughts will flee away from our mind, as the darkness flee before the light.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ It is befitting of us to remember God perpetually, specially by night, when our mind is not disturbed, and our soul is calm and relaxed, as though in a haven under a clear sky; for then, we can judge ourselves by bringing back to remembrance all what we have done all day; not like in the day when other worries of life would draw our mind away.

If we start our early morning by meditating in God; When, by prayer and supplication we make God our help, we can go to our work feeling greatly secure; and in case we encounter an enemy, we scoff him, for God will be on our side¹.

(St. John Chrysostom)

According to **St. Augustine**, the word “bed” here refers to rest and comfort. If we remember God in the time of our troubles, it would be befitting of us as well, to remember Him when we enjoy rest and comfort.

Dawn for those of the world is the time of deep sleep; while for the true believer, it is the time for praising the Lord.

We sing praises for Him at dawn, namely, with the shining of the Sun of Righteousness on us.

- ❖ He who thinks of God while comfortable in bed, and meditates in Him in all his behavior, Christ will help him to do good work, and would not let him fail because of weakness.

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Because You have been my help; Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice” (7)

What was the help given by God to David, and what is the shadow of His wings that made him rejoice, other than the satisfaction and gladness of having God Himself.

- ❖ There is nothing better than the storehouse from which we draw help through our prayers; Listen to the psalmist says: “*When I remember you on my bed, I meditate in you in the early morning*”².

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ Those who lose the ability to distinguish between the taste of the different kinds of food, because of the tough battles they go through, will enjoy the sweetness of the Creator instead³.

(St. John Saba)

- ❖ I am glad for the good works, because I feel the shadow of Your wings on me. If you do not protect me, the vulture will devour me as a little hen; For the Lord Himself says about Jerusalem: “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem how often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing*” (Matthew 23: 37). As little hens, I wish God protects us under His wings.... Hoe will it be when we grow bigger? I wish He keeps on protecting us; we shall always be little, and He will be always the Mightier!

¹ On The Epistle to Hebrews, 14: 9.

² Homilies on The Acts of the Apostles, homily 26.

³ الرسالة الحادية عشر: 6 (ترجمة الأب سليم دكاش اليسوعي).

(St. Augustine)

3- THE SOUL'S CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN GOD:

“My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me” (8)

The goal of the psalmist from singing praise to God in the time of anguish, is not to lift up the anguish from him, as much as to cling to the

Lord his God, to embrace him with His right hand, and proclaim Himself to him; he wishes to have a fellowship with God, to get enlightened by Him, and to cling to Him forever.

Walking with God will kindle more the longing for Him; the believer will forget all what is around him, and, thirsting for God, he clings to Him.

In a message to Demetrias, a noble Roman woman, who vowed herself to a life of virginity, **St. Jerome** clarified to her that he who clings to the world will find it difficult to grow spiritually, while he who clings to God, the way before him will be much easier. [Preoccupy your mind with readings from the Holy Book Say together with the bride of the song: *“By night on my bed I sought the one I love; Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon?”* (Songs 3: 1; 1: 7). And with the psalmist, say: *“My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me”* (Psalm 63: 8); and with Jeremiah, say: *“I have not run away from being a shepherd following You”* (Jeremiah 17: 16 LXX); For *“He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel”* (Numbers 23: 21 LXX). When you were in the world you loved the things of the world¹].

❖ This conforms to the words of Jeremiah: *“I have not run away from being a shepherd following You”* (Jeremiah 17: 16); and of Hosea: *“They shall walk after the Lord”* (Hosea 11: 10); and of the apostle Paul: *“He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him”* (1 Corinthians 6: 17). He who hates evil, would cling to goodness; is joined to God by faith and works; and God will support him and hold him by His right hand; namely, by His only-begotten Son; that no one can do him harm.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ David flew away from the face of king Saul, not to forsake his land, but to avoid the confrontation of someone so cruel and vicious. He flew away to cling to God; saying: ***“My soul clings to You”*** (8). He withdrew, utterly exalted his soul, and kept himself away from the iniquities of this world; as did Isaac when he *“went out to walk in the field”* (Genesis 24: 63) It is a clear testimony concerning clinging to the virtues; when man walks with an innocent heart and a free, namely, blameless mind; when he does not partake of the earthly lusts; and has no place for corruption within himself².

(St. Ambrose)

❖ I want you to have knowledge of the features of the different kinds of weapons; As, in case we intend to fight the divine battles against the devil, and to be counted among the spiritual (centurions) of the gospel, we have to gird ourselves with these weapons.

The gospel says: *“Above all, take the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one”* (Ephesians 6: 16). Faith will stop these darts and destroy them through fearing the judgment, and believing in the kingdom of heaven.

¹ St. Jerome: Letter 130 to Demetrias, 7.

² إسحق أو النفس، 3: 6.

According to our experience, we can hold fast to God through bringing our will to death, severing the lusts of this world, and following the lead of those who, in their relationship with God, say with faith: **“My soul clings to You”** (8); **“I cling to Your testimonies; O Lord, do not put me to shame”** (Psalm 119: 31); and: **“It is good for me to draw near to God”** (Psalm 73: 28). ... We should not despair because of slothfulness and distraction of mind; because **“He who tills his land will have plenty of bread; but he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough”** (Proverbs 28: 19).

We are committed not to withdraw from our strife in watching, because of despair; because **“Now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it”** (Matthew 11: 12). Virtue could not be taken without strife; and the mind could not be controlled without deep heart grief; for **“Man is born to trouble”** (Job 5: 7); and in order to reach up **“to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”** (Ephesians 4: 13), we are perpetually committed to great strife and endless care¹.

(Father Serinus)

- ❖ Having heard all that, the great David says: **“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty; under His wings, you shall take refuge”** (Psalm 91: 1, 4); and: **“My soul clings to You, Your right hand upholds me”** (8) You can see how the psalms conform to history in the Holy Book: The psalm says that God’s right hand helps him who clings to Him, and follows Him. And history in the Holy Book says that God’s hand touches him who waits in the cleft of the rock, as he hears the divine voice, and prays to follow God².

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

- ❖ According to the apostle Paul, **“He who is married cares about the things of the world – how he may please his wife”** (1 Corinthians 7: 33); whereas you (who have forsaken the world), who love God, would live without ever being separated from Him, unceasingly saying the words of the prophet David, longing for God: **“My soul clings to You, Your right hand upholds me”** (8)

You do not care for the possession of fields, houses, or the like; You keep yourselves away from shameful lusts, slander, greed, and any deception; and on the contrary, **“You fear the Lord Your God, serve Him, and to Him you hold fast”** (Deuteronomy 10: 20). In your life you actually realize the words of the Savior: **“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me”** (Matthew 19: 21). The power of this saying is realized in you when you firmly keep yourselves free from the worries of this world, despise its cares, and wholly lean upon God who says: **“Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”** (Matthew 6: 33)³.

(St. (abba) Serapion, bishop of Temmy)

- ❖ A brother once came to St. Maccary, with the intention to serve Christ as a monk; and begged the elder father to guide him, and provide him from the spring of the monastic principles that abundantly flowed from him, by the grace of the Holy Spirit; and to clarify to him, how he could, by the help of God, avoid the traps of the enemy, and his evil attacks. The saintly father answered him, saying: [If you, O my son, truly desire,

¹ Cassian: Conferences, 7: 4-6.

² حياة موسى، 250.

³ Letters des Peres du Desert. P. 133, traduit de P.G. 40, 925 D – 941 B.

from your whole heart, to desert the world, and cling to the Savior Lord, according to the words of the prophet: *“My soul clings to You, Your right hand upholds me”* (Psalm 63: 8); And the right hand of the Lord is always prepared to receive those who resort to Him; You should despise the world, and reject all its works, according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory”* (Colossians 3: 3, 4).

(Paradise of the fathers)¹

Commenting on the verse: *“My soul clings (behind) you”* (Psalm 63: 8 LXX), **St. Augustine** say:

- 1- Clinging (*behind*) God, is only realized by the (glue) of love.
- 2- Clinging behind God is realized by longing to God; the soul should thirst for Him.
- 3- The clinging should be (behind) God; lest we would wrongly count ourselves as giving Him counsel, and he would be walking according to Our will; instead of being the Leader who precedes us, we follow Him, receive His will, and observe His commandments.

❖ The (glue) by which our soul clings to God, is ‘Love’. But we should not cling to God, but (behind) God; so that He precedes us, and we follow Him.

(St. Augustine)

“But those who seek my life to destroy it, shall go to the lower parts of the earth” (9)

The prophet does not mean that the earth would open its mouth and swallow his enemies, as it did with Korah and his company in the time of the prophet Moses (Numbers 16: 31-34).

When the Jews sought to destroy Jesus Christ by the cross, they did for fear for their temporal positions, and the loss of their earthly possessions (John 11: 48). Fearing the loss of the earth, they went down to its lower parts; which, according to **St. Augustine**, are the earthly desires.

❖ Walking on the earth is better than going into its lower parts through the evil lusts. He who, instead of his salvation, seeks the earthlies, is in the lower parts of the earth.

Those who feared losing the earth, having seen the multitudes go after the Lord Jesus Christ, said: *“If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation”* (John 11: 48). Fearing to lose the earth, they went down to its lower parts, and what they feared dwelt upon them. They intended to Kill Christ so as not to lose the earth; while by slaying Him, they lost their land to the Romans.

(St. Augustine)

“They shall fall by the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals” (10)

The second book of Samuel (18: 16-17) tells us how Absalom and those who followed him died, and found no one to bury them; how Absalom himself was cast into a pit in the woods, and a very large heap of stones was laid over him².

² Plumer, p. 633.

¹ عن فردوس الآباء ج 1.

According to **St. Augustine**, the jackals refer to those who rejected Christ to be their king, and said: “*We only want Caesar to be our king*” (John 19: 15). They rejected the Lamb and chose the jackals, and so deserved to be a portion for the jackals.

❖ Those who intend to kill me without reason, according to the weight of their wickedness, will go down to hell, falling by the sword.

Saying: “*they shall be a portion for jackals*”, refers to the fact that the lion after choosing the best parts of its prey, leaves the remains to be eaten by the jackals. The prophet means that the wicked shall miserably fall before the weak, after being defeated before the strong. He also means that after being killed in battle, there will be no one to bury them, but will be left to be devoured by the beasts, even by the jackals.

The evil hosts are also mental jackals, because, by their deception, they deceive the ignorant, and divide them as portions among themselves.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ In the time of the resurrection, The Most High will distinguish between the nations, and divide mankind according to their worthiness: some of them “*will go down into the lower parts of the earth*” (9), “*be a portion for jackals*” (10); namely, for the demons; as “*the little foxes (jackals) spoil the vines*” (Songs 2: 15); ‘Herod’ is one of them, according to the Lord Christ who said about him: “Go and tell this fox”(luke13: 32).

Let us, therefore, forsake from ourselves, our earthly behavior, lest we would be weighed down by the earthly thoughts, go into the lower parts of the earth, and become a portion for the jackals... The apostle clearly says: “*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God; Set your minds on things above, not on things of the earth*” (Colossians 3: 1-2)¹.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ Because all men who dwell under the sun, have become, as it is written “*a portion of jackals*” (10); and because of their evil; they were overcome by the darkness of ignorance, and have fallen into the deepest of depth of sin; We hear the psalmist pray to God the Word to come down to us from heaven, saying: “*Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel; You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell between the Cherubim, shine forth! Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, Stir up Your strength, And come and save us*” (Psalm 80: 2-3). And when the psalmist perceived that the coming of the Word is going to happen in due time, as we are fallen down and cast away, he cried out, saying: “*Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?*” (Psalm 10: 1). Before incarnation, the Savior, has not yet taken our likeness, and has been far away from us; as the distance was great between the human nature and that of the Word of God².

(St. Cyril the Great)

“*But the king shall rejoice in God; everyone who swears by Him shall glory; but the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped*” (11)

Despite David’s grief on the death of his son Absalom (2 Samuel 18: 33; 19: 1-7), yet his rejoicing in the Lord has not forsaken him.

¹ In Lev. 11.

² الرسالة الفصيحة الأولى، ترجمة د. ميشيل عبد الملك، مايو 2004، ص 15.

- ❖ This, as well, bears a prophecy about Zerubbabel who ruled over the Jews after their return from captivity, those who, after being liberated from their enemies rejoiced in the Lord, and praised God whereas the mouth of those who vainly reviled them were stopped.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

Jesus Christ own, and established his Church with Cross, Kingdom of joy and peace, while the dispersion of the crucified and closed their mouths, who sentenced him to be crucified!

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 63

WHEN WILL MY SOUL BE SATISFIED BY YOUR LOVE?

- ❖ My soul will stay thirsty for You in the wilderness of this world;
But by Your grace You will pour on it the dew of Your Word;
My soul will taste its sweetness, and the fire of my Love for You will kindle more and more;
My soul will quench her thirst by Your splendor, and my thirst for You will grow even more.
- ❖ By Your mercy, You allow my body to rest;
But my soul will perpetually watch, and proclaim her intense thirst for You;
My soul will never sleep, anticipating the Sun of Righteousness to shine on her.
- ❖ By Your love, You shine with Your light on my soul, to behold Your power and glory;
She desires to set forth to You, to enjoy Your divine bosoms;
Both my soul and my body will shout together, and my lips will unceasingly praise you;
And my hands are lifted toward You to practice Your work.
- ❖ My whole being calls You, to cling to You;
To follow You; for You are the Way, and the eternal Life;
I shall walk behind You, O faithful Shepherd of the souls;
The shadow of Your wings will protect me against the fiery darts of evil;
- ❖ How can I cling to You, except by Your work in me?
There is no (glue) to let me cling to You; but the (glue) of love;
The enemy will not be able to separate me from You;
You are Love; Grant me Yourself; as in You my soul will cling.
- ❖ I will cling to You, O crucified, to let You reign in me, and satisfy my depths;
I see the cause of Your cross: "The King of Jews";
Reign on me; and I shall not seek another beside You!
I shall not desire the earth, lest it may have authority on me, and I would go down to its lower parts.
And it would crush me with the weight of its pleasures
- ❖ Set Your kingdom of joy, O King, inside me;
For You are the amazing divine Lamb;
The jackals of the world will not be able to devour me;
For You are my Portion; And I am Yours;
The enemy will not dare to take me away by force from Your hands;
To You be the power, and the glory, O King of kings.

CHAPTER 64

COMFORTS AMID THE AFFLICTION

In the last chapter we saw the psalmist thirsty for God. We saw him longing to see God, to dedicate his energies to His account, and to cling to Him; but the enemies are doing their best to seek his soul. In the present chapter, looking around him, and seeing a multitude of enemies opposing him, and plotting a secret counsel on him, the psalmist cries out from the depths of his heart to God, who is capable of destroying evil. The psalm ends by the proclamation of God's protection for him, and his enjoyment of joy and gladness.

This psalm is a personal lamentation presented by the believer amid his anguish, while standing alone among a multitude of the wicked and evil doers, who are trained on plotting secret counsels; and their tongues turn into deadly swords, and their words into bitter arrows. They think of themselves as being hidden from view; and do not perceive that God of the righteous sees what others could not see; and is capable of making void their evil plots.

If this psalm expresses the depth of the suffering through which the soul go because of the enemies, It is as well, a praise of thanksgiving to God who keeps His believers safe; destroys evil, and helps the upright of heart.

Its divisions:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------|
| 1- The evil doers | 1 – 6 |
| 2- The divine intervention | 7 – 10 |

The title:

Oppressed by the wicked, but rejoicing in the Lord.
To the Chief Musician, A psalm of David.

1- THE EVIL DOERS:

“Hear my voice, O God, in my meditation; Preserve my life from fear of the enemy” (1)

According to St. Augustine, it is the cry of our Lord Jesus, suffering during the events of His crucifixion; and suffering, as well, through His body – the church, all along the eras. It is also a cry by every believer, crucified together with His Lord, and enduring pains for His sake. For all true believer fall under sufferings.

❖ I wish no one would ever say that we are no more passing through the tribulation of sufferings. The fact is that in those times the whole church was together stricken as one body; While nowadays, she is stricken through her individual members. Yes, the devil is bound, and cannot do as much as he wishes to do; Yet, he is allowed to tempt according to the progress of men. It is not good for us not to be tempted; nor to seek that from God; but we should seek from Him *“not to lead us into temptation”* (Matthew 6: 13).

(St. Augustine)

According to **St. Augustine**, this cry is presented by the martyrs when persecuted; as it came in Sirach: *“Consider the generations of old and see, has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed; ... or has anyone called upon Him and been neglected?”*

(Sirach 2: 10). This cry does not mean to ask God to be saved from martyrdom, but to be saved from fearing it.

St. Augustine says: [This cry is the voice of the martyr saying: Save me, not from being killed by the enemy, but not to fear him while killing me. I do not want to fear him who kills the body, but to fear Him, who has the authority to cast both the body and the soul into the fire of hell.

I do not want to be relieved of death, but to be relieved of the fear of the enemy, through the fear of the Lord, being His minister].

Indeed, the history of the church is packed with afflictions and temptations. But the wicked should not assume that they have the authority over the church of God; but only within what the Lord Christ allows them to do. By that, the believer does not fear the temptations and tribulations.

- ❖ *“Hear my voice, O God in my meditation; Preserve my life from fear of the enemy”*
(1) There are two kinds of fear: the fear of God, and that of men. The fear of God is love; but the fear of men is the real enemy. The prophet seeks to be saved from the fear of men, like king Saul and the likes; for this kind of fear is harmful to the soul; hence he says: *“Preserve my soul”*. About such fear, the prophet Isaiah says: *“Do not say ‘A conspiracy’ concerning all that this people call a conspiracy ;nor dread their threats; nor be troubled. The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread; He will be your sanctuary”* (Isaiah 8: 12-13).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity” (2)

The wicked plotters gathered together against our Lord Jesus Christ. We as well, being the body of Christ receive physical sufferings, and the secret counsel plotted against us; Yet these sufferings will turn into glories on the great day of the Lord; while our bodies are preserved here under the divine protection.

- ❖ The prophet seeks to be preserved from the wicked, who, by their plots corrupt the sound dogmas; and from those who practice violence and oppression.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“Who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows – bitter words” (3)

He likens the tongues of the wicked to a sharp sword, and to the bow that shoots deadly arrows to kill.

The psalms often refer to the tongues of the wicked that turn into swords, spears, and arrows, because of envy and deception (Psalm 55: 21; 57: 4; 59: 7). The prophet David, being a symbol of the blameless Son of David; against whom plots were set to crucify Him, and to get rid of him, has long suffered such deadly weapons.

“That they may shoot in secret at the blameless. Suddenly they shoot at Him and do not fear” (4)

- ❖ They delivered Him to Pilate, to appear as though innocent of killing Him. And while Pilate issued a verdict against Him, and commanded His crucifixion in such a way to appear as His killer; You, the Jews have actually killed Him by the sword of your

tongue, which you sharpened, and cried out: “Crucify Him, Crucify Him” (John 23: 21).

(St. Augustine)

Commenting on what came in the New Testament that Christ was crucified in the sixth hour of the day (John 19: 14), and also in the third hour (Mark 15: 25); **St. Augustine** says: He was hanged on the cross in the sixth hour; but he was crucified when the multitudes cried out: “*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*” in the third hour. The Jews crucified Him by their tongues; killed Him as though by the arrows of their words; although the physical crucifixion was executed in the sixth hour of the day.

Because the wicked shoot at the blameless in secret, the psalmist likens their plots to arrows; for, according to **St. Augustine**, those who shoot arrows do it while hidden, swiftly, and in secret.

❖ “*Suddenly they shoot at Him and do not fear*” (4). How cruel! They intend to kill Him who raised the dead! ... “*suddenly*”, namely craftily, as though it is something unexpected and in secret; as though the Lord is not aware of what they were doing!

(St. Augustine)

“They hold fast to their evil purpose; they talk of laying snares secretly; thinking, ‘who can see us?’” (5)

The wicked held counsel together secretly, to lay their snares for the Righteous to fall in, thinking that no one can see them! This applies to the trial of the Lord Christ. According to **St. Augustine**: [The ruler, with authority was horrified to condemn the Righteous; but they were not!

He intended to wash his hands, but they defiled their tongues by crying! “*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*” The repetition here is to confirm what they say; “*We have no king but Caesar!*” (John 19: 15); “*He is worthy of death*”; ... “*His blood be on us and on our children*” (Matthew 27: 25)].

“They devise iniquities; ‘We have perfected a shrewd scheme’, for the human heart and mind are cunning” (6)

What are those perfect schemes perfected by the wicked? ... Let His own disciple betray Him, and not us! ... Let the Ruler kill Him, and not us! ... Let us do everything; yet seem as though we have done nothing! ... They assumed that God does not see them; but they, themselves have not perceived the truth of Jesus Christ; ... Although He became a true Man, Yet He remained God the Word; ... They saw Him a mere Man, whom they could kill; but they did not perceive the secret of His incarnation, and the width of His heart for the whole humanity.

2- THE DIVINE INTERVENTION:

“But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly they shall be wounded” (7)

The wicked may bear the appearances of love, yet with deception; the truth hides deep in their hearts; But God up high searches the depths of their hearts.

How could this apply to the crucifixion of the Lord Christ? The wicked intended to kill Him, suddenly and craftily; but what actually happened is that their arrows returned to them and killed them. **St. Augustine** expresses it by saying: [Death did not kill the Lord; but the Lord killed death. They, on the other hand, were killed by iniquity, which they did not intend to kill!].

- ❖ Now, see what dwells upon the wicked soul? ... It departs from the light of the truth. And not able to see God, it wrongly assumes that God does not see her!

(St. Augustine)

“He will turn their own tongues against them, and bring them to ruin; all who see them will shake their heads in scorn” (8)

According to **St. Athanasius** the apostolic, the opposition of the wicked against the apostles; despite what it bears of deception and threats, yet, they are no more than slings of kids.

- ❖ *“He will turn their tongues against them”*.... Let them sharpen their tongues like sword! ... Let them have their secret counsel! ... Could that hold against God?!... See the Lord who chose not to come down from the cross; how He is raised from the grave?!... What is then, the significance of what they have done?

“All men shall fear, and shall proclaim the work of God; for they shall ponder what He has done” (9)

- ❖ Those who challenged the Lord to come down from the cross; When He was risen, and was glorified by ascending to heaven, they proclaimed His work, and pondered what He has done!

(St. Augustine)

“The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and trust in Him; and all the upright in heart shall glory” (10)

- ❖ Sorrowful when the Lord was crucified; and overwhelmed by grief, the disciples forsook Him. He encountered two of them walking on the way, sighing and moaning, and restrained their eyes from recognizing Him, He explained to them from the Holy Books, that what happened was supposed to be (Luke 24: 16, etc.); and that, according to the Scripture and the prophecies, He was to be risen on the third day. ... Let us then rejoice in the Lord, and not in ourselves; for our goodness is not on our own, but He so made us. He, Himself is our Goodness, who makes us glad.

I wish no one rejoices in himself; no one leans upon himself; and no one despairs in himself ... *“all the upright in heart shall glory”*; and all the twisted-hearts shall be condemned. There are now two things before you; Choose while there is still time ... If you are heart-twisted, you will be judged.

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 64

LET ME TAKE REFUGE IN YOU AND LET ME EXULT

- ❖ If they have so done to You, O Lord,
What will they do to me?!
They held secret counsel;
They sharpened their tongues like deadly swords;
They shot their arrows at the Grantor of life;
They insisted on opposing You, and intended to get rid of You;
They thought that no one could see them, or punish them;
In their foolishness they did not recognize You as the Lord of glory, Savior of the world;
- ❖ Carry me in You, so as to fear no man;
Nor be disturbed by death;
Let me be Your partner, be crucified with You;
And enjoy the power of Your resurrection.
- ❖ Their arrows, all of a sudden, turned backward toward them;
What they uttered against You, testified against them
They got terrified and confused when they heard of Your resurrection;
Whereas Your believers were exulted and rejoiced;
Glory be to You, who entered the way of the cross;
To give sweetness to the suffering;
To carry us together with You to the power of resurrection;
And to bring our hearts by You up to heaven

PSALM 65

GOD'S EXALTED GRACE AND CARE

The people of God most probably used to sing this praise in one of the feasts. And some believe that it is a psalm of thanksgiving to God, after saving them from a famine that dwelt upon the land.

The people of God give God thanks, being the Savior of man from his sins, the amazing Creator who cares for His creation, and for the sake of His work with them in His holy house. They also acknowledge His exalted care and divine gifts; and in particular, the gift of His Holy Spirit, who turns the wilderness of their life into a joyful paradise.

According to **St. Athanasius**, this psalm includes a prophecy about those from the Gentiles who came to believe in Christ, thanksgiving God for leading them to faith; and seeking His forgiveness for their past worship of idols.

Its divisions:

1- Praise be to You, O Savior	1 – 4
2- Praise be to You, O Creator	5 – 8
3- Praise be to You, our care-Giver	9 – 13

The title:

Oppressed by the wicked, but rejoicing in the Lord
To the Chief Musician. A psalm of David. A song.

1- PRAISE BE TO YOU, O SAVIOR:

The people of God, as well as every one of them, stand in awe before the exalted love of God, who receives us as His own people; and sets us as members of His church, where they enjoy the abundance of His goodness, turning it into a storehouse of the treasures of His amazing grace.

In the Liturgy of the feast of the renewal of the church of resurrection in Jerusalem; in the feast of the cross; and when reciting the gospel of Palm Sunday, the church sings the two verses 1 and 2 of this psalm, for the following reasons:

a- The church, is the congregation of praise and inner joy; And the cross of the Lord Christ, is the source of joy, and the fountain that flows on us with the spirit of praise to God, the Lover of mankind.

b- The gates of the church of the New Covenant are wide open before everyone; whatever is his citizenship, or the multitude of his sins. She invites all to enjoy the cross, on which the Word of God delivered Himself for the sake of the whole world.

c- The word “prayer” in Hebrew came to mean (vow). Having proclaimed His love to mankind, God gladly receives the believers’ vow to respond to His love by their own.

“Praise is due to You, O God, in Zion. And to You shall vows be performed” (1)

The word “praise” originally came to mean standing in awe and silence, when the people, as well as every believer, contemplate in God’s gifts that surpass all thoughts. They stand in silence in anticipation of recognizing the will of their Lord who gave them such gifts in abundance.

St. Augustine, in his interpretation of this psalm in some detail, says that it concerns the people who were captivated by force to Babylon, and were anticipating the realization of God's promise, as it came in the book of Jeremiah, to bring them back after 70 years of captivity (Jeremiah 25: 11; 29: 10). Before man, there were two options: either to dwell in Jerusalem, which means (the vision of peace), or to dwell in Babylon, which means (confusion). **St. Augustine** says: [There were two kinds of love: the love of God, dwelling in Jerusalem; and the love of the world, dwelling in Babylon Let us now, O brethren, listen, praise, and long for that city in which we are citizens].

❖ Our home country, being Zion; which is Jerusalem, it is befitting of us to know the interpretation of these two names. As "Jerusalem" is interpreted as (the vision of peace), "Zion" is interpreted as (beholding, vision, or contemplation). We were promised a great vision, difficult to interpret; as this city is built by God Himself.

If this city is so beautiful and magnificent, how much more would be the One who built it?!

"Praise is due to You, O God" (1). But where? **"in Zion"**. Whereas in Babylon, it is unbecoming to praise!

Once man starts to get renewed in heart in Jerusalem, he would sing together with the apostle, saying: *"For our citizenship (behavior) is in heaven"* (Philippians 3: 20). And: *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh"* (2 Corinthians 10: 3).

We indeed long for being there; we hope to be in that city (heaven), being a haven where we land, lest we would be swept away by the waves of this sea. Or we can truly say that it is (a ship) which is still being carried up and down on the waves; but once it reaches the land, it comes to be safe from the troubles of the wind and storms.

Thus, confronting the temptations of this journey, our hope is founded on reaching that city of Jerusalem, so as not to be wrecked on rocks.

Let him who has this hope, sing and say: **"Praise is due to You, O God, in Zion"** (1).

(**St. Augustine**)

What does performing of the vow means here, but offering the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, together with joyful obedience to the beloved commandment of God!

❖ **"And to You shall vows be performed"** (1). In Jerusalem, namely, in the resurrection of the righteous, we shall be perfect. There, all our vows will be performed, not only concerning the soul, but the body as well, which no more will be prone to corruption, for it will no more be in Babylon, but will rather change to a heavenly body.

Peace will prevail, and war will come to an end; and when peace prevails, that city, "Jerusalem", called (the vision of peace) will prevail. And there will be no more strife against death; How dangerous is death against which we are striving now!

(**St. Augustine**)

This saying reveals the longing of some of the captives to go back to their land, to present praise to God in Zion; and to perform their vows in Jerusalem, in the temple of the Lord.

According to **St. Athanasius**, this concerns the believers from the Gentiles who say: [We, in the past, used to present praise to stones, wood, and demons; But now, by faith, we perceive that **"Praise is due to You (alone)"** in Your holy church.

Unless the believer's heart is raised up high to the heavenly Zion, and experiences the deposit of life in Jerusalem, he will not be able to present praise to God, nor to perform his vows of thanks giving to Him.

“O You who hear prayer, To You all flesh will come” (2)

The Holy Book often uses the word “flesh”, “body”, or “soul” to mean man as a whole. When it is said “*The Word became flesh*” (John 1: 14), it means He incarnated; namely, became Man, with body, soul, and mind; and likened us in everything except for sin.

And when it was said about Joseph that “*His (soul) was laid in iron*” (Psalm 105: 18); it means the whole human body and where the imprisoned soul groans of distress.

According to **(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)** that all sinner was human, as it comes to God, and enjoy with the company him has become more like a spirit.

❖ Those of knowledge are in no need to be told, that in the Holy Book, Christ is called “*Man*”, “*The Son of Man*”, etc. Nevertheless, if they persist on the letter of the text saying: “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1: 14), and make this an excuse to cancel the most noble feature of man (namely the mind), connecting God merely to the flesh, It is high time to say, that, according to their literal interpretation, God would be God of flesh alone, and not of souls as well, based on the following texts:

“*As You have given authority over all flesh*” (John 17: 2);

“*To You all flesh will come*” (Psalm 65: 2);

“*All flesh shall bless His holy name*” (Psalm 145: 21).

By “*all flesh*” he means (all men). And our fathers must have gone to Egypt in an incorporeal and unseen forms. And Joseph's soul alone (and not his body) was jailed by Pharaoh and put in iron; when the soul could not be shackled in iron.

Where we read that those who were summoned to Egypt were “seventy-five persons” (Acts 7:14) and also “he was laid in iron:” (Ps 105: 18)

Those who hold fast to the letter, disregard the principle that (the part could refer to the whole), as a form of eloquence. In this case, the ‘soul’ could refer to man as a whole with his soul, flesh, and mind; “*the young raven*” (Psalm 147: 9) could refer to all kinds of birds; (job38: 33, etc). “The evening star”, “the polar bear” could refer to all the celestial bodies, and their ordinances¹.

(St. Gregory the Neizianzen)

❖ “*To You all flesh will come*” (2); and, “*All flesh shall see the salvation of God*” (Luke 3: 6); and, “to you all flash come” (ps65: 2) what means the word “all flesh” however “all human beings”.

❖ “*By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight*” (Romans 3: 20); What does “*all flesh*” mean, but (all men)? This is more clarified by the apostle, saying: “*Are you not still carnal, and behaving like mere men?*” (1 Corinthians 3: 3). When he called them carnal, he did not say: “and behaving like flesh”, but said like “*men*”. As truly, if he, who behaves like flesh is to be blamed, while he who behaves like men is to be commended, he would not rebuke them by saying: “*and behaving like men*”.

¹رسالة رقم 101، 11 الرسالة الأولى إلى كليدونوس الكاهن.

Therefore, O brethren, Do not behave like men, but according to God who created you¹.

(St. Augustine)

❖ By saying: “*To You all flesh will come*” he means: (every kind of men).

Will it be only the poor who come, and not the rich? the lowly, and not the elite?; the illiterate, and not the educated? men, and not women? masters, and not slaves? elders, and not young? young, and not kids? Jews, and not Greeks? Greeks, and not Romans? Romans, and not barbarians?

All kinds of men from every nation on earth will come to Him!

(St. Augustine)

According to **Pope Gregory the great**, this verse is a prophecy about all the Gentiles receiving faith, when the whole earth comes to be for the Lord and His Christ. The church prays for the sake of all men, to enjoy the fellowship with God; a prayer well-received, and responded to by God,

❖ This net, at the end of times, will be utterly filled with all human races; will be brought over from the sea to the beach by the divine Fisherman to sort out; the sea refers to the present time; while the beach refers to its end².

(Pope Gregory the Great)

Finally, we can perceive from this verse that men of God, by the spirit of prophecy, were eagerly anticipating, and perpetually praying, for the sake of the enjoyment by all mankind of the fellowship with God. It has been rather difficult for the regular Jew to cry out to God to let all kinds of men come to God; But men of God found pleasure in the fulfillment of the divine promises for the salvation of the whole world.

“Deeds of Iniquity overwhelm us; As for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them” (3)

While nonbelievers will not cease to oppose the divine truth, and to persecute the believers in some way or another; believers seek from God to forgive the transgressions into which they fell because of the wicked.

Here, **St. Augustine** feels bitter concerning those who were raised in pagan provinces, where children were raised on evil; Yet God would not forsake them in corruption, but opens before them the gate of salvation, and proclaims Himself as the Forgiver of sins.

According to **St. Augustine**: [Wherever man is born, he learns the language, the ethics, and the way of life prevailing in that province, or city.

What can a child do, who is born to parents who worship the stone, and inspire to him that kind of worship, except to learn from them the iniquity together with the milk he suckles? Children, raised in such nations that turned later to faith in Christ, would say together with the prophet Jeremiah: “*Surely our fathers have inherited lies, worthlessness and unprofitable things*” (Jeremiah 16: 19). They would deny the beliefs and blasphemies of their wicked parents].

“*As for our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them*”. The believer does not justify falling into sins by the opposition of the devil and his hosts; but he confesses his transgressions before God, trusting that He is the Forgiver of sins and

¹ *Conrinnence, 11.*

² *Forty Gospel Homilies 11: 4.*

iniquities; according to the words of the prophet Micah: “*Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity, and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?*” (Micah 7: 18).

There is no way to salvation other than to run to God, to cling to Him, and to confess sins and iniquities from the whole heart. This salvation is realized by the atonement work of the Lord Christ on the cross.

❖ “*As to our transgressions, You will provide atonement for them*”. For You are the High Priest, and You are the Sacrifice. You are the One who offers the sacrifice, And You are the offering as well.

(St. Augustine)

“Blessed is the man whom You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts, We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple” (4)

If the enemy intends to rob us of everything; By entering into the house of the Lord, the gates of heaven will open before us, to see the eternal temple, and to enjoy the heavenly goodness.

By entering into the house of the Lord, we experience the blessed heavenly life, and perceive that our entrance is not because of our worthiness, but through the love of God who chose us to approach Him, and made us his members of His household.

The beatitude is given, not only to the people as a whole, being the body of Christ, but to every true believer as well, being a member of that blessed body.

“*Blessed is the man whom You choose*”. According to St. Augustine, the Word of God, having incarnated for our sake, is chosen by the Father; for us, being His members, united to Him, to enjoy His choice as a choice of us; “*till we all come to the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*” (Ephesians 4: 13).

❖ “*And cause to approach You*”. Being His members, we are all under the control of one Head, one Spirit, and one Fatherhood, for which we long.

And “*dwell in Your court*”; namely in Jerusalem; “*to be satisfied with the goodness of Your house*”. What are the goodness of the house of God?

Let us talk about some of the goodness (the riches) of that house. The luxurious furnishing, the golden and silver vessels, the horses and beasts, the marble ceilings and pillars, etc. They are all things to be admired; but they are still the product of Babylon’s confusion.

Let us then cut off those (Babylonian) desires, O citizen of Jerusalem; Cut them off, if you intend to return home; do not let the captivity confuse you!; do not look backward; do not linger on the way!

There (in the house of God), there are no enemies to justify captivity to you. no one to stand against you by talking evil.

The house of God longs for you; So, do not desire such things you used to seek in your own house, or in that of your neighbor.

(St. Augustine)

2- PRAISE BE TO YOU, O CREATOR:

In the name of the whole church, the psalmist sets forth to nature to seek the amazing might of God, the might that proclaims His divine authority, inseparable from

His love and care. He is the heavenly Father who is perpetually preoccupied with man to whom He has given the earth to live on, and to be trained on the heavenly life to come, and to enjoy the eternal glories.’

“By awesome deeds of righteousness You answer us, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth, and the farthest seas” (5)

The deeds of God are indeed terrifying to the sinners, the wicked, and the disobedient; Yet they are awesome even to the righteous.

The sinners are terrified as slaves who have taken the position of animosity and opposition against God, the Master of humanity. Whereas the righteous are awed as children who revere their heavenly Father.

Although God is awesome to all, yet He responds to the supplications of His believers for the sake of the salvation of the world, by opening the gates of hope before all nations. As the Savior of the world, He is pleased to hear the voice of His church, full of love toward all humanity, for whose sake she prays to Him.

Great is His free gift that invites all to enjoy it.

St. Augustine believes the righteousness to be the goodness or the riches of the house of God. The temple of God is amazing, not for its marble pillars, its golden-paneled ceiling, etc. but amazing in righteousness. The righteousness that may not bear beauty before the physical eyes, but before those of the heart

❖ There is a kind of beauty in righteousness, which we see by the eyes of the heart, and we love by the soul.

These are the riches of the house of God, by which you promise to satisfy yourself.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5: 6).

Your holy temple is amazing in righteousness! ... That temple, O brethren, is yourselves!

Love righteousness to become the temple of God.

(St. Augustine)

According to **St. Augustine**, the sea here refers to the world where everyone devours the other. But the children of God have the Savior as their hope to protect them, yet not to isolate them from the wicked. For even in the same net there are the good and the bad together (Matthew 13: 47-49); And on the shore of the eternal life, they will be sorted out.

❖ *“You answer us, O God our Savior” (5).* Here he reveals to us, that the One he calls God, is our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, it is obvious, to whom will all flesh come. *“You answer us, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and the farthest sea”* They will come to You from everywhere *“from the farthest seas”* For the sea is the symbol of this world, being salty, bitter, and stormy; where there are people gone astray, with corrupt lusts; and like fishes, they devour one another.

There are those who covet for inheritance through the death of the living; who seek profit through the loss of others; and who seek glory through their fall.

O citizens of Jerusalem; Being good fish, you should endure the wicked, You may be together with them inside the same dragnet, but you will not end up in the same vessel

on the shore. He who is the hope of the ends of the earth, is, Himself, the hope of the farthest seas.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ By so saying, the prophet clearly shows that our Lord Jesus Christ is God and Savior, He who saved us from the bondage of the devil.

“those in the farthest seas”,... those who were in the sea of atheism, the very salty and stormy, far away from God; Yet through faith they were saved from the violence of the evil waves, and came to be near to Him.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Those in the ends of the earth are those who practice iniquity in its fullness; and those in the farthest seas are those who are in great ignorance; And yet, Christ is the hope of them all¹.

(Father Dorotheos of Gaza)

“Who established the mountains by his strength, being girded with might” (6)

What are these mountains that seem well established and abiding forever, but the kingdoms and empires, thought by kings and emperors to be eternal; as king Nebuchadnezzar said: *“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power, and for the honor of my majesty?”* (Daniel 4: 30). About those mighty mountains, it is said: *“We will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the seas; though its water roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling”* (psalm 46: 2-3); and yet, it is also said, *“Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, who destroys all the earth, says the Lord, I will stretch out My hand against you, roll you down from the rocks, and make you a burnt mountain”* (Jeremiah 51: 25).

Referring to the haughty emperors and their empires; these mountains also refer to those mighty in faith who enjoy the steadfastness and strength, not on their own, but through the divine Might, and the rich grace working in them.

- ❖ ***“Who establish the mountains by His strength” (6)***. He establishes His great preachers by His strength, and not by theirs. Those he call mountains are humble in themselves, but strong in Him.

One of those mountains, the apostle Paul says: *“Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead”* (1 Corinthians 1: 9).

Those who put Christ in their midst; they (gird) the *“girded”* from all sides; they all acquire Him, for they believe in Him; Yet He is girded with His Might, and not with our strength.

(St. Augustine)

“You who silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves; the tumult of the peoples” (7)

The Almighty God who establishes His holy mountains, namely His saints; also grants His holy seas quietness and inner peace.

It is written: *“He drew a circular horizon on the face of the water”* (Job 26: 10). It is amazing that the frontiers put by God for the seas and oceans, are established by very

¹ Fr. Dorotheos of Gaza: *On Fear of Punishment. homilies on Statues, homily 9:9.*

tiny particles of sand. It is as though God confirms that whatever inner disturbances and outer tribulations, carried by man, He uses certain very tiny things like the sand of the sea to keep him safe amid all of them.

When the Lord Christ came to our world He gave His command to the wind and the waves of the sea to calm down, and the nature instantly obeyed Him.

❖ God the Savior, working in the life of the nations, giving His preachers strength like haughty mountains, and girding Himself with His own believers, granting them His might; the sea is stirred up from its depths; the wicked of the world are stirred up to persecute His church; But the Savior provides us with the strength to endure persecutions and threats.

(St. Augustine)

He formed the mountains with his power, and sends them to preach have armed the believers with strength, and then move the sea, the world moves on and starts persecuting his saints

“Having armed yourself with strength, which stilled the roaring of the seas”. Didn't say: "disturbed the sea ", but “the depth of the sea.”Depth of the sea is the heart of the wicked. They are as deep trove arise all things, and prove all things from the rear. What is happening with the tongue or hands and the different forces to persecute the church out of depth if it were not the root of evil in the heart were all these things occur against Christ. Disturbed depths and it also may not empty the rear. In the case of some bad guys finished (God) of the depth of the sea, the sea and make the ground said this in another Psalm: “He turned the sea into dry land” (ps66: 6) All the bad guys and the pagans who believe they have become a land and sea. Were in the first sterile saline waves, and became then produce fruitful land.

Who can estimated that the depth of the sea, and the noise of waves? ... Any person likely to sound waves of the sea and commands forces lofty world? ... We ourselves do not appreciate ourselves to endure the persecution, which did not give this power.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Do you see how the vast sea with its mighty waves and violent currents, is reined by weak particles of sand? Do you see how God, with His wisdom, allowed the sea not to stand still; but to roar up high all the time with its mighty waves and violent swells. Yet, once they reach the shore, they are checked and broken by sand, to retreat back. This is to teach you that what is happening is not the work of the nature on its own, but that of the divine One with authority. God meant for that bound or frontier to be of such weakness; He did not support the shore with levees of wood, rocks, or mountains to check and break the waves of the sea; and drew the attention of the Jews to meditate in it, by saying: “Do not you fear Me? ... who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it?” (Jeremiah 5: 22) ¹.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ The particle of sand, the weakest of the weak, breaks the violence of the mighty ocean².

(St. Basil the Great)

¹ *Homilies on Statues, homily 9:9.*

² *Hexaemeron, ho,ily 4: 3.*

- ❖ The symbolic interpretation, on the other hand is that the sea refers to the Gentiles whom God terrified, disturbed, and amazed by His wonders, by which He moved them from disbelief to faith. Now, the roar of their (waves), namely, their praise of God, heard in a multitude of tongues are beyond imagination or description.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“They also who dwell in the farthest parts are afraid of Your signs; You make the outgoing of the morning and evening rejoice” (8)

Before the signs and wonders performed by God in the old, and is still performing; in particular the great wonder of the divine incarnation, the nations stand in awe. And as said by the prophet Isaiah: *“The Lord Himself will give you a sign; Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”* (Isaiah 7: 14).

This is the sign of divine love that amazes the heavenlies and earthlies. The Sun of Righteousness shone over humanity, gave her a new morning, to experience the deposit of heaven; and granted her, as well, gladness in the evening; when the souls exult on setting forth from this world, to enjoy the light of eternity.

According to **St. Augustine**, “the morning” refers to the life full of abundance, and “the evening” refers to the troubles of this world. When man is promised profits, life for him will be like morning; and when he suffers troubles, it becomes for him like evening. The believer, though, having got the light of the Lord, does not care much for the morning of the world; and is not disturbed by the troubles of its evening, for the sake of the Lord. When man does not find pleasure in the things of the world, he would not be disturbed by its troubles, but will find his pleasure, instead, in the promises of the Savior.

- ❖ The sea may keep on stirring up, and striking the mountains with his mighty waves; but will eventually calm down, and the mountains will not be shaken. “The nations are disturbed, and men are afraid”. See how men, who were disturbed, are now afraid! ... Seeing the signs performed by the apostles, the farthest parts of the earth became afraid, and believed.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Before Your signs You have done in the old in the land of Egypt and in Canaan, and those You will perform when You came in flesh on earth, the nations were disturbed and terrified. Then, perceiving that, by Your command, the mornings shine, and the evenings set; they rejoiced and became glad.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

3- PRAISE IS TO YOU, OUR CARE-GIVER:

The soul praises her Savior who grants her the forgiveness of sins, and opens before her the gates of heaven, the house of God, where she can practice her worship. She praises the Creator, who, in His love, provided man with all his needs, satisfied his inner depths and his body as well. Now, she praises God who cares for her, not only on the body level, but presents to her His Holy Spirit, to set out of her a holy garden, a spiritual paradise, and a kingdom, on a heavenly level.

“You visit the earth and water it, You greatly enrich it; The river of God is full of water; You provide their grain, for so You have prepared it” (9)

The Middle East, because of its sparse rain, cherish its rivers, like the Nile, the Jordan, the Tigris, and the Euphrates; as well is its springs. The rivers flow with fertility

over the lands, and turn them into gardens filled with fruits. So God visits the earth, and waters it with His divine water.

Here, the psalmist presents a portrait of how God, in his care for the whole humanity, visits the earth from end to end, directs the clouds here and there, sends the rain, fills the rivers and springs with water, so that man is in need of nothing.

Christ came down to our world to set inside us springs of living water; And as said by St. John the Evangelist: *“On the last day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying: ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’. This He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given”* (John 7: 37-39).

In the old, it has been one people of God; But now, the grace of God works in a multitude of peoples, to make them rivers of God, filled with living water, according to His divine promise (John 7: 37-39).

❖ *“You visited the earth, and made her drunk”. You send over Your clouds, You rain the preaching of truth, that enrich the earth, and make it drunk. “The river of God is full of water”.*

(St. Augustine)

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the river of God here, refers to the goodness He flows on us; to the Holy Book full of His divine promises; and refers as well to the grace of the Holy Spirit that He sends over His believers.

If we present the word of God to others, it is God Himself who prepares the food; He gives milk to the babes, and solid food to the mature.

“You water its ridges abundantly; you settle its furrows; you make it soft with showers, you bless its growth” (10)

The psalmist looks at God, as being the Unique Farmer, who visits the soul, to set out of her a fruitful garden. The human farmer, however great is his love for his field or vine, cannot do more than to plow the land, make ridges and furrows, cast seeds, adds manure, and water it one way or another, then goes home and sleep. But this Unique divine Farmer, is so much preoccupied with His field, to deliver His life for its sake, water it with His Holy Spirit, manure it with His holy body and His precious blood, shed for the sake of the world; flows his blessings on it, dedicate everything for its sake; and sends His angels to guard it.

This is the perpetual work of God by His grace in the life of man.

“You bless its grain”. When the preaching gives fruit by someone receiving faith, he draws to him another as well.

“You crown the year with Your goodness, and Your paths drip with abundance” (11)

The church sings this verse in the liturgy of the Coptic New Year (Neruz); confessing God’s favors and goodness; He who fills the church –

His beloved field – with His goodness, and flows on it with the spirit of joy and praise. It is a praise of thanksgiving for the sake of His work all along the past year, and a supplication to Him to receive her as His personal field, and to keep on granting her His goodness, righteousness, and joy, by His Holy Spirit.

While God does not cease planting his word through the preachers, the enemy will never cease sowing tares among the wheat in the darkness of the night (Matthew 13: 25).

Yet the Lord tells us not to get disturbed, and counsels us not to take out the tares with violence, but to let both the tares and the wheat grow together until the harvest (Matthew 13: 30). The secret of our conquest is the blessing of the Lord working all along the year, crowned by His goodness.

According to **the scholar Origen**, the year crowned by God's goodness concerns the period during which the Lord lived in flesh on earth.

And according to **St. Athanasius the apostolic**, the "paths" of God, that drip with abundance, are the souls of the righteous.

"They drop on the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side" (12)

Here, the psalmist contemplates in the wisdom and love of God; If He turns some of the wilderness into gardens by the water of His Holy Spirit, He adorns some wilderness and hills with pastures, on which live flocks of sheep, cows etc. in a joyful and exalting atmosphere!

Touches of God's compassion and love pour the spirit of joy everywhere, into the life of everyone. The plains, hills, and mountains with their pastures, all sing praise to God. By the plains, hills, and mountains, he means men.

❖ The righteous are called "plains" because of their simple nature, and are called "hills" and "mountains" because of their exaltation; as God lifts up the humble in Him. The "wilderness", on the other hand, are the Gentiles, to whom no prophets were sent; were like a desert through which no one passed, The word of God was not sent to the Gentiles, but the prophets were sent only to Israel. There are two harvests: The first harvest are the Jews to whom prophets were sent to proclaim the coming of the Savior. Hence, the Savior said to His disciples: *"Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest"* (John 4: 35). And there will be another harvest in which the apostle will labor. And, at the end of time, God will send His angels for the ultimate harvest.

(St. Augustine)

"The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered with grain; they shout for joy, they also sing" (13)

Here, the psalmist presents nature itself as a living portrait of an exultant chorus playing a symphony of joy and of thanksgiving to God; all sing; all rejoice; all exult.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, If the captivity has turned Jerusalem into a desolation, the prophet seeks from God to bring His people back to Jerusalem, for her pastures and valleys, to be clothed again with flocks, and her valleys to be covered again with grain.

As to the symbolic interpretation, By the salvation work of the Lord Christ, the Gentiles, which were before more like dry wilderness, will turn into gardens through the work of baptism. As to the hills and mountains that will shout for joy, they are the elites and great men of the Gentiles who used before to offer sacrifices to the idols, have now chosen the angelic way, And made the wilderness and the mountains exult by their dwelling, and by their songs of praise to God, and their shouts for joy, that satisfy the soul as though by heavenly wheat.

❖ If you shout blasphemy, you would produce thistles and thorns; but if you shout praise, you will be covered with grain.

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 65

MY HEART SHOUTS FOR JOY FOR YOUR CARE

- ❖ You open Your house up for me, the house of joy and exultation;
In it, my soul praises You, and fulfills her vows
Vows of paying love, back with love;
And of offering sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving.
- ❖ My soul praises You, for You listen to prayers;
Together with David, I pray to You;
I seek nothing but that all men would come to You;
Your grace covers me, and opens my heart with love to everyone;
Together with Moses, amazing in his vision, I shall say:
“Forgive them, or blot me out of Your book”
And together with Paul: “I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ
for my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Romans 9: 3).
For the sake of the enjoyment of all mankind of Your salvation.
- ❖ My iniquities will not stand in my way, and will not keep me from working for the
sake of my brethren.
For You, Yourself, atone for them, and wipe them out by Your precious
blood.
- ❖ My soul exults because, out of void, You set an established mountain;
By Your might, You turn men into angels, and the earthlies into heavenlies.
You calm down the roaring of the seas and the waves of the world;
And grant the nations Your peace that surpasses the mind;
- ❖ O You, Maker of signs and wonders;
Is there a sign, greater than Your incarnation?
Is there a miracle greater than Your cross?
Is there love greater than granting me the strength of your resurrection?
Is there anything I would further seek, after You carried me to Your heavens?
All those signs of Yours, have given my life a new taste;
Together with the prophet Jeremiah cries out: “Your compassion fail not, they
are new every morning” (Lamentation 3: 22, 23)
And with the apostle Paul, I say: “I have the desire to depart and be with
Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1: 23)
My morning becomes glad, and my evening exults, for You are perpetually
present in my life.
- ❖ How amazing! You care for the whole earth!
You visit men wherever they are;
You pour on them the water of Your Holy Spirit.
You turn their wilderness into heavenly gardens;
You bless their produce;
And You pour on them the fruits of Your Holy Spirit.
- ❖ My depths perpetually shout for joy;
You crown the year with Your goodness;

Your paths drip with abundance;
My depths perpetually sing Your praise;
For Your care surpasses every imagination.

PSALM 66

A CALL TO PRAISE THE LORD

Like the last psalm, this one is a liturgical praise sung by the people on a joyful occasion, probably the feast of Passover.

This psalm is a call to all mankind to praise and glorify God for His amazing works, and for His exalted love.

The people praise God for His works in the old, like letting them cross over the Red Sea and the River Jordan, He turned for their fathers into dry land; by which they crossed over from the life of bitter bondage in Egypt, to become heirs of the promised land.

His talk about “*the house of the Lord*” (13) does not necessarily refer to the temple of Solomon, as the tabernacle of the meeting was also called the house of God (Exodus 23: 19; Judges 18: 31; 19: 18).

Some believe that it was king Hezekiah who wrote this psalm, after God sent to him the prophet Isaiah, to say: “*Thus says the lord, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears, and I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city*” (Isaiah 38: 5-6).

And **St Athanasius** the apostolic believes that this psalm includes a prophecy about the resurrection of souls, realized by the coming of the Lord Christ; It prophesies as well about the sorrows that were to dwell upon the apostles when they preach the holy gospel; confirms to us that the sorrows of this world will bring us forth to the eternal comfort; and also tells us about the rejection of the Jews of the Lord Christ.

The unity of this psalm:

Some critics claim that this psalm is formed of two halves of psalms; based upon that its first part (verses 1 to 12) came in the pleural tense, whereas the second part (verses 13 to 20) came in the singular tense, which is a point of view difficult to accept. For the first part could be a praise sung by the congregation together; while the second part could be sung by the Chief Cantor alone. Supposing the two parts were gathered together by someone from two separate psalms, he would have easily changed the tense in one part to conform to the other. Moreover, there is an obvious harmony in thought in the psalm as a whole.

Its divisions:

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1- A call to all the earth to praise God | 1 - 5 |
| 2- Remembering God’s salvation works | 6 - 7 |
| 3- Praising God for His salvation of His people | 8 - 12 |
| 4- Paying vows in the name of the people | 13 - 15 |
| 5- A call to all those who fear God to praise Him | 16 – 20 |

The title:

Praise to God for His awesome works
To the Chief Musician. A song, A psalm.

The two psalm 66 and 67 are the only ones that came without a reference to their author.

According to the Septuagint version, and the Volgata it is also called ‘the psalm of the resurrection’, for it prophesies the resurrection of our (Righteous) Lord Jesus Christ (9, 16).

1- A CALL TO ALL THE EARTH TO PRAISE GOD:

“Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!” (1)

It is befitting of all the earth to praise God, being the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. Before His great wonders even the non-believers stand in awe; whereas the believers respond with perpetual praise as a natural reaction to the blessed life they experience; as it is written: *“Blessed are the people who know the festal shout”* (Psalm 89: 15). This sort of shout raised by the whole congregation for joy, gladness, and exultation, is the best sacrifice to be offered to God, for it is a true testimony to the purity of heart, and piety of life.

It is befitting of every believer to call the whole earth, by his practical life, as well as by his tongue, to praise God, and to meditate in His mighty and amazing works. This is the role of the priest, as well as of every individual in the congregation, especially the parents and the guides, to exhort all to glorify God the Lover of mankind!

- ❖ The exultation is a shout of joy for the conquest; whereas the singing is the voice of praying accompanied by music. The name and glory of God the Father, is the Son; and the name of the Son is the Father; As we know people by their names, we knew God the Father by the Son, and the Son by the Father, according to the word of the Lord, glory be to Him: *“I came forth from the Father”* (John 16: 28), and *“I glorified Your name on earth”* (John 17: 4).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

As the Jews believe, and hope to be the only people to attain the resurrection from the dead, on account of their blessed life according to the statutes of the law, and of the justification by the holy books which are only theirs among the nations; This psalm, according to **St. Augustine**, came as a praise presented for the sake of the enjoyment of the Gentiles of the resurrection in Jesus Christ.

- ❖ Look, O brethren, how the catholicity of the church makes it spread over the whole world ***“Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth”*** (1). A shout, not by words, but by the voice of exultant people, making such voice of gladness for something they count as inexpressible by words *“Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth”*; It is a call to *“all the earth”*, and not to individuals to shout; a call to all the catholic (the collective) church to shout together; the (catholic) church embracing all. He, who cuts himself off the multitude, should wail, and not shout.

(St. Augustine)

“Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious” (2)

About the praise in heaven, it came: *“They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the lamb, saying: ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!’”* (Revelation 15: 3).

This way the praise of the Old Testament melds with that of the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the people praised God on saving them from the bondage of Pharaoh, and casting him and his men in the depths of the sea. This song shall remain all along the eras and generations, on both the levels of the congregation and of the individual. Now, with the coming of the Word of God incarnated, we come to have a new

praise for Him who opened the gates of hope before all the nations of the world to have the conquest over the devil and all the hosts of darkness; and to enjoy the reign of the Lord Christ Himself on their hearts; according to the words of the prophet Melachi, saying:

“From the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations” (Melachi 1: 11).

He who sings for his own glory shall get his wages in this world; But he who sings for the glory of the name of God will get his wages from his Father in heaven.

Singing is not just praising by the tongue; but the believer sings when he, by his whole being, practices the good deeds. Yet he who does good for his own glory, will lose his heavenly reward.

According to **St. Augustine**, when we praise God by words, as well as by work; and when all our goal in life is the glory of God, and not our own glory, God, on His side, will not let any thing pass by without glorifying us in Him; Namely, our glorification of God from our whole heart will come back to us.

To give us a marvelous example of this, **St. Augustine** says: [The Lord chose the illiterate and the lowly fishermen to be His disciples.

But behold, the emperor, going to a memorial building for the fishermen in Rome, lays his crown aside, and weeps in awe, more than what fishermen would normally do before the emperor!].

While seeking from us not to glorify ourselves, He pours His glory on us!

❖ See, how He takes away what is ours, to give us what is His; How He grants us His glory!

How He empties us, to give us the fullness; How He make us shaken, to grant us steadfastness.

Sing, therefore, not for the sake of your name, but for the sake of the name of the Lord your God.

Sing, for Him to be glorified.

Live as is befitting; Let Him be glorified! If you do that for the sake of eternity. You will not live in evil.

“Give glory for His praise”. If we let our whole interest be to praise God according to His counsel, he will leave nothing undone by which He would glorify us!

Let us then glorify more and more, and rejoice. Let us cling to Him, and be glorified in Him!

(St. Augustine)

“Say to God, ‘How awesome are Your deeds! So great is Your power, that Your enemies submit themselves to You’” (3)

❖ *“Say to God, ‘How awesome are Your deeds’” (3)* Hear the voice of another psalm, saying: *“Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling”* (Psalm 2: 11); and hear the voice of the apostle, saying: *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Philippians 2: 12). Why *“with fear and trembling?”* He explains it by saying: *“For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (Philippians 2: 13). So, if it is God who works in you, you would, by the grace of God do well, yet not with your own strength. Therefore, while you rejoice, do it with fear, lest what is taken away from the proud, would be given to the humble.

(St. Augustine)

The people praise Him on His great power which they experience, saying: *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”*

(Psalm 46: 1). *“So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory”* (Psalm 63: 2). And on another aspect, *“Inhumiliation, His enemies submit to Him”* (psalm 18: 44; 66: 3; 81: 15).

“Submit themselves to You”; In the Septuagint version it came as *“pretend to submit themselves to You”*; which applies to Pharaoh who submitted to God after every plague under which he fell; but once the plague was lifted up, he got back to how he was, with a greater hardness of heart.

“So great is Your power, that Your enemies submit themselves to You” (3). According to St. Augustine, the lies of the false witnesses concerning the resurrection of the Lord from the dead, constituted a stronger confirmation of His resurrection; And people glorified the power of the Savior, when they remembered His saying to the Jews: *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”* (John 2: 18); and, *“I lay down My life, that I may take it again”* (John 10: 17).

***“All the earth shall worship You, and sing praise to You; they shall sing praises to Your name”* (4)**

❖ Saying: *“All the earth* refers to the multitudes of all the Gentiles who fill the earth.

Saying first *“worship”*, and then *“sing”*, refers to that faith in God has to come first, before prayers and supplication to God in whom we believe.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ See, how you have drawn an image portraying the members of God conforming to the body of which we are an image of God. I shall accept that for some moments until we look into it, research it, and see how it holds by debate. If this gives you pleasure, listen to me, as I did to you. *“God sits in heaven, and measures it by handbreadth”*. Does heaven widen, being the throne of God, then narrows when measured?! Is God limited to a space that could be measured by the palm of His hand?! A Christian should be ashamed to think this way in his heart!... Think instead of heaven as being all the saints. It is written: *“All the earth shall worship You”* (4). If we can so say about the inhabitants of the earth, we could truly say: *“All the creatures of heaven carry You”*; For even the saints who dwell on earth, and walk on it by their bodies, also dwell in heaven by their hearts; It is no wonder that the church reminds them of this fact in the liturgy, saying: *“Lift up your hearts”*, to which they respond, saying: *“We have them with the Lord”*. It is not vainly said: *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on things of the earth”*¹ (Colossians 3: 1-2). As much as their mixing with heavenly things, they would carry God, and would become heaven, being the throne of God; and when they proclaim the words of God, they are *“Heaven that proclaims the glory of God”*².

(St. Augustine)

***“Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His doing toward the sons of men”* (5)**

¹ القداس الإلهي.

² Sermon on NT Lessons, 3: 14.

Some believe that the expression “*Come and see*”, as it also came in psalm 46: 8, implies a call to look inside the heart to behold the kingdom of God; and to look, as well, to the church He established in the whole world, by which He reigned on the Gentiles, and established His kingdom in the hearts of many! Beside this, he who looks at what the Lord has done in the old with His people, like crossing over the Red Sea and the River Jordan, will perceive how He is an awesome God.

❖ All who believe in Him, and who meditate in His works, will perceive how awesome He is.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

2- REMEMBERING GOD’S SALVATION WORKS:

“He turned the sea into dry land; they went through the river on foot, there we would rejoice in Him” (6)

The secret of our rejoicing, according to **St. Augustine**, is that our souls turn from a sea to dry land, on which we go through by foot. In other words, by believing in the Lord Christ our Savior, He turns our souls from being a sea, full of bitterness, disturbances, and storms, into a dry land, perpetually thirsting for the water of the divine love. By such thirst, they cross, together with Christ, over the sea of this world; namely, over every love of the mortal temporal things.

The Jews always remember their crossing over the Red Sea and the River Jordan, as the greatest salvation works of God: “*You divided the Sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters*” (psalm 43: 13); “*He divided the Sea, and caused them to pass through, and He made the waters stand up like a heap*” (Psalm 78: 13).

Drying up the sea for Moses and the children of Israel to go on it on foot; to save them from the bondage of the Egyptians; And letting them go through the River Jordan under the leadership of Joshua the son of Nun; was a symbol of the Gentiles passing through baptism, and enjoying the joy of salvation.

According to **St. Augustine**, the river on which the soul goes on foot, is our mortal body. Our Leader accepted to drink from this river, died, and is risen. That is why, being united with Him, we rejoice passing over death by foot, and enjoying eternity.

He did not say “there, they rejoiced in Him”, but said: “*there, we would rejoice in Him*” (6); the psalmist counts the joy of the people of old in their salvation, as his own joy, as well as that of the congregation in all eras. .. What an amazing unity, an exalted love, and a fellowship that challenges the time!

❖ The sea was the world - bitter, salty, disturbed by storms, and agitated by the waves of persecution. Now, it turned into dry land, thirsty for the divine sweet water. Who did that? He, to whom the Gentiles would say: “*My souls longs for You like a thirsty land*” (Psalm 143: 6).

“They went through the river on foot” (6). The same people who turn into dry land, after having been a sea before, now go through the river on foot.

What is the river? It is all the death of the world. Look at the river! Things come and go, to be replaced by other things I wish the soul never cast herself in it, but stand fast.

How could the soul cross over the pleasures of things that head toward destruction? By believing in Christ, she would go through them on foot, would cross together with Him as her Leader.

(St. Augustine)

“He rules by His power forever; His eyes observe the nations; Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves” (7)

What He did in the old testify to His might, and care for His believers; which are not limited by time or place. God works every day even to the end of time; and works in all the Gentiles, and in everyone’s life.

The psalmist says: *“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; and Your dominion endures throughout all generations”* (145: 13).

Here, we rejoice in Him in the hope of resurrection; whereas in eternity, we rejoice in Him on an eternal level! Hence the psalmist says: *“He rules by His power forever”* (7).

❖ Let us then be partners in His power, by which we would become strong. While He, on the other hand is powerful by Himself; We are enlightened, while He is the Light who enlightens us; If we forsake Him, we would become in darkness; By His warmth, we get warm; by retreating from Him we get cold; and by approaching Him anew, we restore our warmth I wish, therefore, we should beseech Him to keep us in His power, as we rejoice in Him, *“He who rules by His power forever”*.

(St. Augustine)

❖ By saying: *“He rules by His power forever”*, he means that He is the Lord over the time, and everything in it; And that it is in His power to save His believers from the evil of the time

And saying: *“His eyes observe the nations”* means that God cares for all peoples, not only for Israel; namely, as Israel disobeyed, God took His eyes away from them, and observed the Gentiles.

God who cared for the Jews, and provided them with the law and the divine promises of salvation, observes with love all the nations, to provide all humanity with the abundance of His divine gifts.

And saying: *“the rebellious”*, refers to the Israelites who first rebelled against God in the wilderness; Then, when His Son incarnated, they rebelled against Him by their deeds and words; And on His cross they gave Him bitter vinegar to drink; those about whom God said before in a prophecy by His prophet Ezekiel: *“Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me”* (Ezekiel 2: 3).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

As to God’s care for all, the wise Solomon says: *“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good”* (Proverbs 15: 3).

“The rebellious exalt themselves”, means, the rebellious on God cannot exalt their horns on You, and oppose Your will,

3- PRAISING GOD FOR HIS SALVATION OF HIS PEOPLE:

“Oh, bless our God, you peoples, and make the voice of His praise be heard” (8)

It is a renewable call to the nations to enjoy the work and the salvation of God, to get filled with the life of joy and praise.

- ❖ Having been told, O nations, about the wonders that God has done, both in the old, and in the present time, glorify Him, and tell your descendants about His wonders, to make the voice of His praise be heard in the generations to come.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ To the descendants of Abraham, in whom “*all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (Genesis 12: 3), he says: “***Bless our God, You peoples, and make the voice of His praise be heard***” (8). Do not commend yourselves, but praise Him. What is “*the voice of his praise?*” It is, that by His grace we came to be in the goodness we are in.

(St. Augustine)

“Who keeps our soul among the living, and does not allow our feet to be moved” (9)

The psalmist seeks from the nations to consider the actual fact, that the church along all generations, so suffers from persecutions and tribulations, to feel as though its feet are allowed to be moved; Yet God restore her to life, to experience the new resurrected life.

- ❖ God kept our soul among the living; not only when He breathed in the face of Adam and gave him the spirit of life, but also when He gave him His commandment, that by keeping it he would live and his feet would not be allowed to move.

When the Gentiles believed in Christ, their souls became in Him, the True Life; Their feet set fast on the rock of His faith; and they did not move. On them it is said in the Song of songs: “*His legs are pillars of marble set on bases on fine gold. His countenance is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars*” (Songs 5: 15).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Hear the voice of his praise, saying: “***Who keeps our soul among the living***” (9). It was in death, it was in itself where will it be in life except in Him, who said: “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” (John 14: 6)? He meant us to be kept until the end; to live eternally.

(St. Augustine)

“For You, O God, has proved us; You have refined us as silver is reined” (10)

Calling the peoples and nations to have faith in God, and to praise Him, the psalmist confirms to them that, if the people of God has suffered temptations and tribulations, they were allowed by God to refine them with fire, as silver and precious minerals, to rid them of impurities.

It is written: “*I will bring the one third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested*” (Zechariah 13:9). “*I will turn My hand against You, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy. I will restore all your judges as at first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city*” (Isaiah 1: 25-26).

- ❖ As it is with the silver refined in a crucible by fire, so it will be with the soul, she will be refined with sorrows.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

Commenting on the words of the psalmist: “*A fire goes before him*” (Psalm 97: 3), **St. Augustine** says: [If you are you afraid? Then change so as not to fear! Let the

chaff fear; but what can fire do to the gold? ¹]. And commenting on the verse: “*For You, O God, has proved us, You have refined us as silver is refined*” (10), he says: [Not to burn us like straw by fire, but like silver. By using fire, do not turn us into ashes, but cleanse us from defilements²].

- ❖ Do not let the fire do to us like it does to straw, but like it does to silver. By using fire, do not turn to ashes, but be cleansed from defilements.

(St. Augustine)

“You brought us into the net; you laid affliction on our backs” (11)

God sometimes allows for His children to be brought into a net set by the enemy, and to be weighed down in humiliation; but only for a limited time, to chasten and refine them, or to justify and crown them.

That is what dwelt upon the people of the old, when they came out of the land of Egypt, followed by Pharaoh and his army; the sea before them, the mountains on their right and left sides, and Pharaoh and his army behind them; With no escape in sight, they came to be like an animal, fallen into a net.

Saying: “*sorrow and put on our backs*”, indicates the weights they were carrying through forced labor.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Although the way to the kingdom seem narrow and tough for man; Yet, once he enters into it, he will find it wide with no measure, and a place above a place; as testified by those who happened to go through it, and to enjoy it. Men may say along the way: “*You laid affliction on our backs*” (11); but when they see ahead the relief from their sorrows, they will say: “*You brought us out to a place of abundance*” (Psalm 66: 12); and, “*You have relieved me when I was in distress*” (Psalm 4: 1).

Yes indeed, O brethren, The portion of the saints here is this affliction; as they labor in suffering because of their longing for future things; like him who says: “Woe to me, my sojourn on earth has become too long!”; feeling afflicted for the sake of the salvation of others; as the apostle Paul wrote: “*Lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, licentiousness which they have practiced*” (2 Corinthians 12: 21); As Samuel mourned because of the perdition of Saul; And as Jeremiah wept for the sake of the captivation of the people.

Those, when they depart from this world, after so much distress, depression, and sighs, they will get happiness, gladness, and divine exultation, and from them, misery, sorrow, and sighing will go away.

(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)

- ❖ If the nets are set for the birds, but in vain (without goal), as it came in the proverbs (1: 17); And not in vain, “*God brought us into the net*” (11); And if even the sparrow, the most lowly among birds, will not fall into the net “*apart from your Father’s will*” (Matthew 10: 29), I wish we do nothing that would make God bring us justly into a temptation; which is the destiny of him who forsakes God for the sake of the uncleanness of his heart³.

¹ On Ps. 66: 10.

² المؤلف: رؤيا يوحنا اللاهوتي، 1979، ص 62-66.

³ On Prayer 2: 29: 16.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ From all these things, the church suffers several and diverse persecutions, in the persons of her members; and still is. No one in this life can claim to be exempted from such temptations.

(St. Augustine)

“You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but You brought us out to a place of abundance” (12)

A horrible portrait of what would dwell over man for the sake of chastening him, or of justifying him; when it so seems that the wicked ride over his head, namely, have authority on him without mercy; when he sometimes suffer from burning in fire, and other times from drowning in water; namely from the two opposites. But God will eventually turn all those bitterness into sweetness and comfort. *“When you pass through the water, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior”* (Isaiah 43: 2-3); and, *“He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me”* (Psalm 18: 19).

“We went through fire and through water, but you brought us out to a place of abundance” (12). If God allows for us to go through the fire and the water of temptations; they will eventually turn into crowning us. By temptations we would cross over to the divine comfort.

It is amazing how temptations are likened to both fire and water, when God, on His side, allows for His Holy Spirit to dwell in the form of fiery tongues; allows for us to be in His likeness and according to His image, *“a consuming fire”*; to be likened to *“His ministers a flame of fire”*.

(Psalms 104: 4); and allows us to enjoy His Holy Spirit in the water of baptism, where we enjoy the second birth, and come to have the amazing abundance: *“the heirs of God, and joint heirs together with Christ”* (Romans 8: 17).

- ❖ In this life, both the fire and the water are dangerous. Surely, water quenches fire, and fire dries up water; Yet fire burns, and water destroys. We should fear both of them; namely, getting burnt by temptations, and getting destroyed by the water of corruption.

See, fire will not burn you, and water will not destroy you; You pass through fire to water, then pass through water as well. That is why in the sacramental rites, fire is used first, and then you come over to baptism; cross over from the fire to the water, and from the water to renewal.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ ***“You have caused men to ride over our heads” (12)***; means, you have caused them to have authority over us, against our will.

He called “sorrows” (fire), as they burn the heart; and he called “submission” (water) for unceasingly running; according to the saying of God in the prophecy of Isaiah: *“When you pass through the water, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you; for I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior”* (Isaiah 43: 2-3).

“We passed through fire and water” means You saved us from being burned and drowned. This is as though said by the apostles, the saints, and the martyrs who, after entering into snares; namely, in prisons, fire, and water, as we read in their biographies, God brought them out to the eternal comfort, namely, to His kingdom; according to His saying, glory be to Him: “Through much sorrows, you enter into the kingdom of God”.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ **“Lead us not into temptations” (Matthew 6: 13). Does God teach us to pray not to be tempted? Not at all!. For how is it said somewhere else: “An inexperienced person knows only few things” (Sirach 34: 10; Romans 5: 3-4); and in James: “My brethren, count it all joy, when you fall into various trials” (James 1: 2).**

But, praying to God to lead us not into temptation implies, not to let the temptation overwhelm us and sweep us away. For, as the temptation is like a torrential winter flood; those who manage to go through it without drowning, or being swept away by it, would boast of being such clever and capable swimmers. Judas Escharious, for instance, entering into the temptation of the love of money, he did not swim, but drowned, “*hanged himself*”, and perished body and soul (Mathew 27: 5). Whereas Peter, entering into the temptation of denial, was not crushed by it, but swam through it and was saved. Now, think how those saints who entered into temptations and passed through them, thank the Lord for being saved, saying: “*O God, You have proved us; You have refined us as silver is refined; You brought us into the net; You have laid affliction on our backs; You have caused men to ride over our heads. We went through fire and through water, but you brought us out to a place of abundance*” (Psalm 66: 10-12). Being brought out to a place of abundance means they are saved from the temptation¹.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ **“We went through fire and through water, but You brought us out to a place of abundance” (10-12).** Those who intend to have favor in the sight of God, have to go through few tribulations. How could we call the saintly martyrs blessed because of the tribulations they endured for God’s sake, if we cannot endure a fever?!. Say to the afflicted soul: Is fever not better for you than hell?! I wish we are not disturbed by illness, for the apostle says: “*When I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Corinthians 12: 10). Knowing for sure that the Lord “*tests the heart and mind*” (Psalm 7: 9), I wish we endure; be strong; and become disciples of the apostle who says: “*patient in tribulation*” (Romans 12: 12).

(St. Parsnovius)

❖ If you happen to suffer of the high temperature of fever, and intense thirst; while trying to endure such sufferings, remember the punishment to come, namely the eternal fire, and the divine justice, to be stronger before your present situation.

Rejoice to know that God visits you; and put this blessed saying on your lips: “*The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death*” (Psalm 118: 18).

If you are iron, by fire you will be refined from your rust; And even if you lie down ill, being righteous, you will be stronger and stronger.

¹ الأبرار 5، 17.

Remember that it is written: *“If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together”* (Romans 8: 17).

If you are indeed gold, by fire you will become more valuable.

If a thorn in the flesh was given to you by *“a messenger of Satan”* (2 Corinthians 12: 7), think of St. Paul, whom you are counted worthy of the honor of having the same suffering as his.

Are you tempted by fever? What did you learn from it?

The Holy Book says: *“We went through fire and through water, but You brought us out to a place of abundance”* (12). The place of abundance is already prepared there!

If you have tasted the first portion (namely the present tribulations), Anticipate the second (the eternal place of abundance).

And while practicing your virtue, By raising your voice with the words of the prophet David, saying: *“But I am poor and sorrowful”* (Psalm 69: 29), you will become perfect by the tribulations; For the Book says: *“You have relieved me when I was in distress”* (Psalm 4: 1).

Open up your mouth wide, to learn from the experience of such a soul, taking into consideration that we are under the scrutiny of our enemy.

(St. (Mother) Senklitiky)

4- PAYING VOWS IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE:

“I will go into Your house with burnt offerings; I will pay You my vows” (13)

Here, the speaker moves from the pleural tense, when speaking in the name of the congregation, or when the whole congregation partakes of praise together; to speak in the singular tense.

Some believe that the speaker here is the king who enters into the house of the Lord to present burnt offerings he vowed while he has been in trouble. He presents thanksgiving and praise to God who saved His people from tribulation.

According to **St. Augustine**, paying vows means that the believer, while presenting his whole life as a burnt offering to God, confesses that

God is no need of burnt offerings; for they add nothing to Him. If the believer perceives that all what God does is for the believer’s good, he Would be, as though he has paid up the vow uttered by his lips.

❖ What is the burnt offering?

It is the sacrifice that is completely burnt, but by a divine fire.

Every burnt offering is a sacrifice; but not every sacrifice is a burnt offering.

The burnt offerings, therefore, are promised by Him.

It is the body of Christ who speaks; It is His unity who talks Let Your fire burn all what is mine; Leave nothing left for me; . Let everything be Yours.

This happens in the resurrection of the righteous, *“when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’”* (1 Corinthians 15: 54). The victory as a divine fire, when it swallows death, nothing mortal will remain in the body; nothing, worthy of rebuke, will remain in the spirit.

All the mortal life will come to perdition, will go away in the eternal life, for us to be kept from death in life.

That is therefore, the blessing of the burnt offerings.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The vow (euche) is a pledge to dedicate something to the ministry of God. Whereas the prayer (proseuche) is seeking from God for the sake of some good things. Therefore, being in need of some confidence when approaching God, and seeking what is good for us; paying the vow should come first. When we fulfill what is on our side, we will be sure to get what God gives on His! The vow is a pledge to present an offering of thanksgiving; whereas the prayer means approaching God after fulfilling that pledge. It is befitting of man to vow first, then pray; To plant first, then carry the fruit¹.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

“Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble”
(14)

We often cry out to God while we are in trouble, and then forget it when we are relieved of it. What God seeks is not the material vows, but the dedication of the heart to Him. Together with presenting the seen vows, it is befitting of us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service” (Romans 12: 1).

- ❖ The captives who were in Babylon, once they returned to Jerusalem, they entered into the house of the Lord their living God, and offered the burnt offerings, they vowed while in sorrow and tribulation. The blessed apostles and all believers, on the other hand, on entering into God’s spiritual house, the holy church, namely, the Christian congregation, which is the dwelling place of God, they present themselves as burnt offerings, wholly in fire, namely, endure the purifying sufferings, acceptable to Him. The same applies to those who keep their virginity and chastity; they present themselves as burnt offerings, acceptable to God.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“I will offer You burnt sacrifices of fat animals, with the sweet aroma of rams; I will offer bulls with goats” (15)

If the burnt offerings refer to the complete dedication of the heart, when it ignites with the fire of the divine love, the sweet aroma of rams (or the incense of rams), namely raising incense together with a sacrifice of peace offering, refers to the perpetual prayer.

- ❖ God commanded the offering of the animals mentioned, with a condition that they should be without blemish; hence the psalm says: *“burnt sacrifices of fat animals”*. The apostles and their martyr successors, on the other hand, offered to God their souls by doing virtues; and instead of the oxen that plow the earth, they offered their bodies which come from the earth, through testimony, and confession of faith; Others offered goats, namely works and labors of repentance; for people of the old used to offer to purify themselves of their sins.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ ***“Which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble”*** (14) . How sweet is the temptation, most of the time! And how necessary it is! What does the tongue of the speaker in trouble say? ***“I will offer you burnt sacrifices of fat animals (even to the bone marrow)”*** (15) To what does the ‘bone marrow’ refer? I

¹ The Lord's Prayer, Sermon 2.

keep Your love deep inside me, and not on the surface; I love You from my bone marrow; as there is nothing in the body, deeper than the bone marrow. Bones are deep inside the body; and the bone marrow is deep inside the bones.

- ❖ **“with the sweet aroma of rams”**. The rams, being the leaders of the church, it means that the church as a whole is talking; and the rams, in particular, pray for the sake of the flock.

“I will offer bulls with goats” The apostle says that the preachers of the gospel are like “bulls” or “oxen”: *“You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain. Is it oxen God is concerned about?”* (1 Corinthians 9: 9).

How great are the rams; and how great are the oxen!

How about the remnants; those who feel they have probably slid in some sins along the way, were wounded, then were healed through remorse? Will those go on without offering burnt sacrifices? I wish those would not fear; for he added the “goats” as well!

(St. Augustine)

5- A CALL TO ALL THOSE WHO FEAR GOD TO PRAISE HIM:

“Come and hear, all you who fear God, And I will declare all He has done for my soul” (16)

Having paid back the vows he has uttered when he was in trouble, the king, or the psalmist, turns to the people to testify to God before them, that the salvation from the trouble or the tribulation was not by his own strength, or wisdom, or by the counsel of his men, but it was the work of God with him.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the believer thanking God for His work with him, sets forth with his thoughts to those who fear God, who preceded him, to say to them, that God who performed wonders with them in the old, with His love, is still working up till now.

- ❖ The psalmist calls all those who fear God: the early fathers, the prophets, and the righteous, who were before the coming of Christ, to partake of the joy of the Christians for the sake of their salvation.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ **“Come and hear, all you who fear God” (16)** To whom shall we come and hear? . In case you do not fear God, I shall not tell you! he who does not fear God, could not be told! For it is the fear of God that opens up the ears to hear about the way to take. What will the psalmist tell us? The great things that God has done for his soul!

(St. Augustine)

“I cried to Him with my mouth, And He was extolled with my tongue” (17)

The believer cries out with the mouth of his heart, and raises his voice with his inner tongue. The adulteress woman cried out with her heart, and, in inner silence, she poured fragrant oil over the feet of the Savior. And Hannah, mother of Samuel cried out by just moving her lips, with no audible words. The former got the forgiveness of her sins, and the later bore in her womb a blessed child.

“He was extolled with my tongue”. This is interpreted as, “He was extolled underneath my tongue”; namely, if I cry to Him with my mouth, but beyond those cries, I glorify and extol Him in my depths, something that I cannot express with human words.

- ❖ I used to cry out to a stone, to a tree, to a dumb and mute idol; But now, being the image of the Creator, I returned to the Creator I used “*to say to a tree: ‘you are my father’, and to a stone, ‘you gave birth to me’*” (Jeremiah 2: 27); Now I say: “*Our Father in heaven*” (Matthew 6: 9) I shall tell you about all the other things He has done by His grace to my soul.

(St. Augustine)

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (18)

The psalmist does not utter that with pride or self-justification, but, with confidence and trust - that in the simplicity of heart, he seeks God with faithfulness, saying: “*Give ear to my prayer that is not from deceitful lips*” (Psalm 17: 1).

“*If I regard iniquity in my heart*”, meaning, if I recognized iniquity in my heart, and disregarded, encouraged, or was pleased with it.

However loud the cries of man are, unless he avoids iniquity and oppression, God will not listen to his prayer.

- ❖ A brother asked Abba Anthony: [If God blessed the soul that perpetually indulges in reading the holy books, how come that she is still reluctant to enjoy this blessing, and cares for temporary and unclean preoccupations?!]. To this the saintly elder answered: [This is what the psalmist means by saying: “***If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear***” (18). Do not you know that many sins are stirred up in him whose belly is filled with food? These are the sins referred to by the Lord, saying: “*Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man*” (see Mathew 15: 11). Notice here that He means the unclean thoughts, murder, deceit, cheating, adultery, stealing, false testimony, and blasphemy] (ps73: 22- 23).

(The garden of monks)

- ❖ Return to your inner self; be a judge of yourself; and look into your secret place, into the depths of your heart, that no one could see but you and God. If you are not pleased with what you see there of iniquities, and despise it, yourself will become the subject of God’s pleasure.

(St. Augustine)

“But certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer” (19)

Here, the psalmist confirms that God’s response to his prayer is not because of his personal worthiness, or self-righteousness, but because of God’s free mercies. “*Blessed be the Lord, for He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city*” (Psalm 31: 21).

- ❖ “*But certainly, God has heard me; He attended to the voice of my prayer*”. Here, the speaker has reached to resurrection, which we actually anticipate and hope for.

(St. Augustine)

“Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me” (20)

If we, in the time of trouble ask God for relief, It is befitting of us, when we get it, to present thanksgiving and praise to the Lord; and perpetually remember His mercies on us.

Seeking from all nations to shout loud to God, he intends to confirm that this shout should bear a song of praise for His name; meaning, that this shout adds nothing to

the glory of God, but is for the benefit of mankind, to recognize His name, and to enjoy joy in Him.

❖ When you see that your supplication was not turned away, you should be sure that His mercy is not turned away from you as well.

(St. Augustine)

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 66

I JOYFULLY SHOUT TO GOD TOGETHER WITH ALL MANKIND

- ❖ My depths cry out to You: When will all men come to You?
When will earth be heaven?
When will the whole earth shout joyfully to You, O Savior of the world?
- ❖ The shout of the wicked is a curse, for it is to their evil father the devil.
But the shout of Your children is a blessing, for it is presented to You, O
Grantor of blessings.
When will all mankind return to You, to present holy heavenly shouts?
- ❖ If the enemies lie;
Like when Pharaoh did with all his promises to Moses;
Yet the whole earth submits to You.
Instead of lies, they cling to You, O the Truth.
You fill them with Your strength, and satisfy them with Your joy,
Then they will not cease to praise Your name.
- ❖ You, who turned the Red Sea to a dry land;
On which Your people crossed on foot;
Are the same yesterday, today, and forever;
You turn the torrential seas to dry land;
You take anxiety away from us; You calm down the storms and the violent
waves.
You fill our depths with Your exalted peace.
My body, like a torrential river, intends to enslave my soul to its lusts
I wish my body submits to Your Holy Spirit'
I wish it turns to a river that flows with holy waters;
Instead of drowning my soul with its lusts;
I wish its dryness would be taken away, and it turns instead into a fruitful
spiritual garden.
- ❖ Who will let joy overflow over our souls and bodies but you?
I wish you, by Your power, reign inside me, and establish Your divine
kingdom.
- ❖ Your eyes are on me from the beginning of the year to its end.
Your eyes watch over all mankind;
Who deserves to have you look at him, O Compassionate One?
Your looks destroy every cruelty in my depths;
When You look at me, and at Your disciple Peter;
I get out of the court of worldly worries;
And weep bitterly together with him;
Tears of repentance and of hope in You;
I shall perpetually testify that I love You.
- ❖ The wicked, have no other work but to destroy us;

But, with Your fiery Holy Spirit, You bring us forth into the water of comfort;
Let the fires of temptations kindle; and let their water pour to destroy us;
But the fires and rains of Your Holy Spirit,
Will set out of us fiery ministers and fruitful garden;

- ❖ How shall I pay You back for Your work with me, as well as with the whole earth?
Shall I present to You burnt offerings of fiery love?
Shall I vow to live my whole life for You?
My depths. Will always shout for joy to You, together with all the heavenly
creatures;
Glory be to You, O Lover of mankind.

PSALM 67

A PRAYER FOR THE SAKE OF THE EXTENSION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

This psalm includes the blessing by which Aaron and his sons were commanded by God to bless the people (Numbers 6). As it was only presented in Jerusalem, some believe that the psalmist looks forward to the return of the people from captivity to get the blessing of the Lord in Jerusalem.

Its divisions:

1- Our enlightenment by His face	1
2- knowledge, the grantor of life	2
3- A call to the peoples to praise God	3 - 5
4- The increase of fruition	6 – 7

The title:

An invocation and a doxology.

To the Chief Musician. On stringed instruments. A psalm. A song. (Concerning the title see psalms 3, 4, 30).

According to the Syrian version, the title of this psalm came as: [Sung by the people as they crossed over the Jordan together with David'; after the rebellion of his son Absalom against him (See 2 Samuel 19: 11-43)]. And in the same Syrian version it came: [As for us, it is a prophecy concerning the call to the Gentiles; the preaching of the apostles; and the ordinances of the Lord¹].

Some believe that this psalm is a praise of thanksgiving to God, presented after the harvest; sung in the feast of the Pentecost, or in that of the Tabernacles. While others believe that it is sung for the sake of the realization of God's promise to bless Abraham, and to make him a blessing.

1- OUR ENLIGHTENMENT BY HIS FACE:

“May God be merciful to us and bless us, and make His face to shine upon us”

(1)

The psalmist seeks from God to shine upon His people; not as a Judge, for then, no one will be justified before Him; but as a Giver of mercy and blessing. And, on another aspect, he seeks from Him to present to the people a kind of security, and to pour His splendor upon them, being the subject of His pleasure.

❖ *“May God be merciful on us and bless us”* (1). I wish He does not Judge us, but be merciful on us *“Make His face to shine upon us”*. I wish we do not look at Him, sorrowful because of our sins, but joyful in our virtues.

I wish we do not experience Him as a Judge, but know Him as a merciful Father.

I wish He shines upon us with His image (His Son); For the light of the Father is the light of the Son².

(St. Jerome)

¹ Plumer on Ps. 67.

² Hom. 6.

In an ancient Jewish interpretation, the Face of God is the Messiah; the shining Face that proclaims the love and grace of the Father. For through Him, the Father looks at His people, and see them a holy people.

According to **St. Cyril**, God's Face is His only-begotten Son, for, according to the words of the apostle Paul, He is His image and the feature of His Person, And as the Lord Himself says: "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*" (John 14: 9). By His incarnation, and His dwelling among us, He shone over us, and through Him we have recognized the Father, and we enjoyed the divine mercies.

The shining of God's face upon mankind means looking down on them with mercy and compassion; by His splendor He brings joy to their hearts, and pour the flood of His blessings and gifts upon them; For He seeks the salvation of all, even the wicked, and does not wish for the perdition of anyone; He intends to enter into a covenant with all, and for all to enjoy the eternal life.

The face of God, shining upon His people with compassion and mercy, supports their hearts, and pours blessings into them.

❖ "*And make His face to shine upon us*" (1). God does not make His face shine, as though it was not shining before; But He makes it shine **upon us**, that what was hidden, would be proclaimed to us; The way He is, and was hidden from us, would be revealed to us.

Or it could be interpreted as follows: Since You created us "*in Your image; according to Your likeness*" (Genesis 1: 26); And since You made us Your coin, It would not be fitting for Your image, printed on it, to be in darkness; Send, therefore, the ray of Your wisdom to scatter our darkness, to know that we are Your image!

Let us hear the Song of songs, say: "*If you do not know, you fairest among women*" (Song 1: 8). This is said to the church: [If you do not know that your soul is created in the image of God; is saved by the blood of the blameless Lamb; You should know how precious You are; You should think about what you are given].

I wish we say "*Make Your face to shine upon us*", and say it with longing. ... I wish we talk about His face, the way we talk about the faces of kings and emperors; ... For it is actually the holy face of the Father in His image.

The wicked, however, who does not know that he is the image of God; In order for God's face to shine upon him, he should say: "*For You will light my lamp; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness*" (psalm 18: 28). I am in the darkness of sins; but with the ray of Your wisdom, You will scatter my darkness, for Your face to be revealed; And in case there would be any distortion on it, You will reform the face You have created.

(**St. Augustine**)

2- KNOWLEDGE, THE GRANTOR OF LIFE:

"That Your way may be known on earth; Your salvation among all nations" (2)

The way of God is His commandment through which we enjoy encountering and seeing Him. That commandment, He presented to all nations to enjoy His salvation, the eternal life with its glories.

According to **St. Athanasius** the apostolic, the Holy Book is the way of God.

And the Lord Christ Himself says: "*I am the way* (John 14: 6)... *No one can come to the Father except through Me*". And to let us know that the Father is the Way leading

us to the Son; He says: “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*” (John 6: 44).

In psalm 65, the psalmist sings: “*You visit the earth and water it; You greatly enrich it*” (Psalm 65: 9). Here, he reveals the divine care and the heavenly visitation, by the coming down of the Word of God in flesh, and invites the nations and peoples to enjoy His salvation work. It is a Messianic psalm that portrays to us the harvest of the evangelic call that embraces the whole world with the spirit of unity.

- ❖ “*That Your way may be known on earth*”. That we, on earth, would come to know it. “*On earth as it is in heaven*” (Mathew 6: 10). That He before Him, Whom the angels worship in heaven, those on earth would worship as well¹.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ “*Your salvation among all nations*”. That was how the psalmist sang before the coming of the Savior; and what filled the heart of Simon the elder with joy when he carried the infant Jesus on his arms, and praised Him, saying: “... *for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples*” (Luke 2: 30-31).

- ❖ I wish we know Your way which leads to You? I wish we know where we are, and where we are heading; something we cannot do in the darkness! ... We ask our souls, not to learn it on our own, but from the gospel, where the Lord Christ says: “*I am the Way*” (John 14: 6).

Lest you may go astray, He adds: “*and the Truth*”. Who would go astray with the Truth? It is only He who forsakes the Truth!

The Truth is Christ; The Way is Christ; Go along that way.

Do you fear lest you die before gaining it? He says: “*I am the Life*”. It is as though He says: What makes you afraid? By Me, and to Me you walk; and in Me you will find comfort.

(St. Augustine)

3- A CALL TO THE PEOPLES TO PRAISE GOD:

“*Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You*” (3)

As Christ the Way becomes known in the earth, and all the peoples who walk along it enjoy the salvation; the psalmist calls on them to walk with the spirit of joy, praise, and singing; as the life of joy in Christ gives a sense of security.

The word “*peoples*” came in pleural, for the gate of faith is opened before all the peoples of the world. The repetition of the verse is to draw the attention to that what he talks about is a very great issue indeed: All the peoples of the earth worship with the spirit of joy and gladness.

- ❖ Now, listen how he collectively says: “*Let all the peoples praise You*”; Walk along the way together with all the nations; with all the peoples, O children of peace, children of the (catholic) church; Walk along the way and look forward!
- ❖ Even those who fear the thieves, sing along the way; How much more you would feel safe while singing in Christ! There are no thieves along this way, unless you go astray from the way; for then you would fall into the hands of thieves!

¹ Hom. 6.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The repetition of the saying “*Let all the peoples praise You*” causes men to be more active, and motivates them to give thanks, and to confess the goodness of God.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth*” (4)

Some believe that this psalm was sung during the feast of the harvest (the Pentecost), or the feast of the tabernacles. While some others believe that it proclaims the fulfillment of the divine promise to Abraham that he will be a blessing, and by him all nations shall be blessed.

The reason why all the nations will praise God, is that they have enjoyed the life of joy and gladness. Reading the writings of the early fathers who came from the gentiles to faith in the Lord Christ, we can perceive the extent of their joy for finding the Truth, For they felt that they were in the darkness, then entered into the divine light; that they were dead, then enjoyed resurrection; that they have been in hell, then were called by God, not only to come out of it, but also to enjoy sonhood to Him, instead of the old animosity.

- ❖ After the appearance of God’s Face on earth, and the knowledge of His Way, the believers rejoice, and praise His work, for He led the nations to the land of the meek, namely, to the dwelling place of the righteous.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*For You shall judge the people righteously*” (4). For wherever justice is, there will be no joy but fear for the sinners!

- ❖ “*and govern the nations on earth*”. What nations? Those who used before to walk along the wrong way, You made them now walk along Your straight way; ... You made them know Your way on earth, and walk along one way, and not along several ways; ... to come to You; the One Way -- Jesus Christ -- begotten from You. ... He who thinks that we blaspheme when we say that the Way is the Son, through whom we go to the Father; let him listen to what the Way Himself says: “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him*” (See John 6: 44). ... The Son leads to the Father, and the Father leads to the Son; For they are One nature and one essence¹.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ As this confession (the praise) does not lead to punishment; hence he adds: “***The nations be glad and sing for joy***” (4). If the thieves, after confessing, cry before people, I wish the believers, after confessing, rejoice before God.

Why are nations glad, and why do they sing for joy? Because of the confession itself.

Why? Because God is Good for those who confess.

He seeks confession to save the humble.

He condemns him who does not confess, to punish the proud.

Because of this, be sorrowful before you confess; and when you do, be glad; By that you will be sound.

(St. Augustine)

¹ Hom. 6.

“Let the people praise You, O God; Let all the people praise You” (5)

- ❖ The psalmist calls all the peoples to repent and confess the goodness of God. Saying: *“all the peoples”* is a prophecy that everywhere a sacrifice of praise and prayer will be offered to God, not just by the Jews, and not only in Jerusalem.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

4- THE INCREASE OF FRUITION:

“Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God shall bless us” (6)

Some marvel how could it come in the psalms that we exhort ourselves to bless God, and seek from God to bless us? St. Augustine clarifies this issue by saying that in either cases, the benefit comes back to us and not to God. God, by the riches of His grace pours blessing on us; and, enjoying it, we stand grateful to Him, and by His grace *“we bless Him”*; Namely, (we testify to Him), ... Blessing be Yours, O Grantor of blessings. ... God blesses us by His work in us, to set us a unique vineyard, a building, or a holy temple. And once we so become, we praise, bless Him, and testify to His continuous blessings on us.

- ❖ Remember, beloved brethren, that in the two psalms 103 and 104, we exhort ourselves to bless the Lord, and by a pious song we say: *“Bless the Lord, O my soul”* (Psalm 104: 1) ... And in the present psalm it is well said: *“God be merciful to us and bless us”* (1). Let our souls bless the Lord, for the Lord to bless us.

When God blesses us, we grow; And when we bless the Lord, we grow. Namely, in both cases, the benefit is ours;

For blessing the Lord adds nothing to Him; and reviling Him takes nothing away from Him.

He who reviles the Lord decreases.

Let us then sing these words; yet, not with a barren piety, nor by an empty voice, but with a faithful heart.

God the Father is called *“A vinedresser”* (John 15: 1). And the apostle says: *“You are God’s field (vine), you are God’s building”* (1 Corinthians 3: 9). How can we be both? We are the Lord’s vine, for He plants us to produce fruition; And we are the Lord’s building, because He dwells in us ... This is realized by the grace He grants us.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ What is the ‘fruition’? *“All the peoples confess (praise) You”*. They were before an “earth” full of thorns and thistles; Then came the Hand of Him who took those thorns away, and the earth started to confess, ... *“for the earth shall yield her increase”*. ... Could it yield her increase without the rain falling on it? ... Could it yield her increase without the mercy of God coming down on it from up high? ... Hear the words of John the Baptist about the Lord who rains on it, saying: *“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 3: 2).

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ *“The earth shall yield her increase”*. The earth is St. Mary, the Mother of God, who came from the earth, from dust, from Adam, to whom is said: *“You are dust, and to dust you shall return”* (Genesis 3: 9). That earth has yielded her increase. What she lost in the garden of Eden, she found in Her divine Son....

In the Song of songs it is said: *“I am the rose of Sharon, a Lily of the valleys”* (Song 2: 1). She, (the earth, St. Mary), first produced a rose. Then this rose became a fruit to eat, to eat her body ... *“The earth will yield her increase”*. It yielded a grain of wheat, that fell down to earth and died, to produce an increase of fruition. ... The fruit multiplied in the head of grain; ... One grain of wheat fell down to earth, and from it a fruitful harvest came forth¹.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ The prophet says “earth” to mean mankind living on it; as it is said to man: *“From earth you came, and to earth you shall return”*. That nominal earth produced fruition, namely, produced upright faith, and good works befitting of it, to earn the blessing from God for presenting to Him what would please Him.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him” (7)

According to **St. Cyril** the Great, God blessed Israel by choosing the twelve disciples from the tribes of Israel, to preach to the world.

- ❖ The blessed disciples were chosen almost from every tribe of Israel, to become bearers of the Light to the world, to present the word of life.

(St. Cyril the Great)

Having received faith, the peoples of the world forsook idol worship and its abominations; came to bear the fear of God, and to taste His love as well.

- ❖ He who thinks of God’s judgment will do good works (and will fear God); to be worthy of earning His blessing.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ *“And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him”* ... Fear is for the beginners, but love is for those of perfect faith. For *“All things work together to those who love God”* (Romans 8: 28). Fear concerns the little souls; while love concerns the perfect.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ He rains, and with the rain He thunders.... to receive Him when He rains, and to fear Him when He thunders,

- ❖ *“The earth yielded her increase”*. This, I say, happened when the Lord rained through His mouth, and through His clouds, by sending the apostles to preach the Truth. The earth produced her yield with abundance; and behold, the harvest fills the whole world.

The fruition of the earth started first in Jerusalem, and from there the church began. There, the Holy Spirit came down and filled the saints gathered together with one accord in one place. There; miracles were performed; they were filled with the fullness of God’s Spirit and *“they began to speak with other tongues”* (Acts 2: 1, 4).; They received the rain of the Spirit with fear; and by their confession they yielded an abundance of fruition... An extremely exalted kind of fruition.

(St. Augustine)

¹ Hom. 6.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 67

SHINE WITH YOUR LIGHT ON ALL

- ❖ Our souls perpetually shout loud;
How could we pay You back, O Father, for Your amazing ordinance?
You have sent Your only-begotten Son, by whose light He poured light on us
His cross gave us the daring of love;
We see You as a Father, compassionate on us, and not as a Judge seeking our condemnation.
- ❖ Your Son came, Your splendid Face, came down.
For our sake He became the Way, by which we may come to You;
By whom we come to know Your divine love;
By whom we come to enjoy the heavenly glories
- ❖ His coming opened the gates of faith before all nations;
The peoples set forth as though out of hell;
To cast themselves into Your divine bosoms;
Instead of the darkness, they came to be in the heavenly light;
Instead of the grave and death, they came to enjoy the resurrected life;
Instead of the depression and despair, their life was filled with joy and exaltation;
“The peoples praise You, O God; All the peoples praise You”.
- ❖ Your only-begotten Son carried us to You;
He granted us His righteousness and holiness;
We do not fear judgment any more;
But anticipate the day of His second coming with joy and gladness;
For it will be the day of our heavenly wedding;
The day of our coronation and our eternal joy.
- ❖ Your incarnation sanctified our earth;
By Miriam Your Virgin Mother, our earth produced roses.
She is earth; yet She carried You;
She carried You, who neither heaven nor earth can limit;
Behold, the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley. Have produced a unique Fruit;
By the Holy Spirit, O the divine Word You came down, and incarnated from her;
You became a grain of wheat, to die, and to be buried in the earth;
And once You are risen, You let us rise together with You;
Glory be to You, O who blessed the whole mankind.

PSALM 68

THE KING, THE CONQUOROR IN HIS CHURCH

There was a controversy among scholars as to the occasion of writing this psalm. Some believe that it was written by David to commemorate the victories over the enemies of His country as a whole; others believe that it was written to commemorate certain victories mentioned in 1 Chronicles 19: 6 – 19; 2 Samuel 12: 26-31, while others believe that he wrote it to be sung during moving of the ark of the covenant from the house of Obed Odom, in Kirjath Jearim, to Jerusalem¹.

This psalm is the fourth and the last of the series of the psalms of praise (65 to 68), sung by the prophet David when his soul was shaken with joy, for God, the Conqueror in His church; as the procession of exultation set forth to move the ark of the covenant from the house of Obed Odom to the city of David (1 Samuel 6: 12-15). David's heart, together with his mind and all his energies, was moved to see God the Conqueror, working in His church along the eras, to bring her forth to the eternal heavenly procession. As He worked in the past, He will continue working in the present, and in the future, until He grants her the conquest over the darkness and all the hosts of the evil enemy.

While celebrating a church and a public procession, David, saw God (the King) leading His people through Moses and Aaron, to liberate them from the bondage of the Pharaoh, and to help them pass through the wilderness and all its troubles, temptations, and wars, to bring them forth to the land of comfort, the promised land.

That is concerning the past, But concerning the salvation work of God, the prophet David, by the eye of prophecy, saw the Lord Christ, the Word of God, crucified, resurrected, and ascended to heaven, to bring us forth, through the sufferings, death, and burial, to the power of His resurrection, and to the deposit of the heavenly glory. It is therefore, a Messianic psalm that reveals the salvation presented by the Lord Christ to the whole world; It prophesies, as well, about the receiving of faith by the Gentiles, the resurrection of the Lord Christ from the dead, and His ascension to the heaven of heavens; as well as about the privileges of the church of the New Covenant. The apostle Paul quoted some of the verses of this psalm in his epistles, and considered them to be realized in Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 4: 8-13),

As to the future, by an eschatological view, David saw the ultimate procession of conquest, when the King Judge comes in His glory over the clouds to embrace His church, to bring her forth into the bosom of His Father, and to enjoy the perfection of the eternal glory; while the enemy utterly collapse, and his kingdom is destroyed.

This celebratory and eschatological Messianic psalm of praise of the church, had its influence on the people of the old, who used to sing it in the feast of the harvest, and to commemorate the coming down of the law on mount Sinai. It is a festal and liturgical psalm that refers to the gifts of the Lord Christ glorifying His church.

Features of this psalm:

a- It starts by the words the prophet Moses used to say whenever the ark of the covenant depart under the cloud: *“Rise up, O Lord!, Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You”* (Numbers 10: 35). Men of the Old Covenant

¹ Plumer, Ps. 68.

probably saw in the movement of the ark, the power of the resurrection of the Lord Christ. The church nowadays still recites this prayer in the litany of the assemblies; as though the secret of the blessing of the people and the assemblies is the resurrection of the Lord, the Conqueror over the darkness and evil.

b- It presents to us a living portrait of the church, exultant by the Spirit, for her enjoyment of dwelling of her Christ the Conqueror in her; the Christ of the fatherless, the widows, the needy, the shackled in chains, and those condemned to be buried as though in graves; to set out of them the fiery chariot of God, that knows no spirit of failure nor of despair, but that of power and of dominion. She is a church of praise, blessing God who grants her authority, and set from her rulers, and spiritual mighty men of valor; And in her, the voice of power, glory, blessing, and majesty, is heard. In short, he portrays the perfection of the beauty of the church, and her strength, by saying: *“How Awesome is God among His saints”*.

c- Some believe that it is rather difficult to interpret this psalm, on account of that, it is packed with symbolic and allegoric expressions.

d- It represents a marvelous prophecy about the Lord Christ, The church quotes some of its verses to be used in the praise, sung during the month of Koiahk, that speaks about the coming of the Lord Christ and his salvation work, in preparation for the feast of Nativity.

e- For the first time, the book of psalms uses the title ‘Shaddai’ or ‘Yah’, namely, the (Almighty).

Its general frame:

1- The Lord makes us arise together with Him	1
2- The Lord grants us the conquest	2
3- The Lord grants us the heavenly joy	3
4- The Lord grants us His dwelling in us	4 - 9
5- The Lord leads us by Himself	7 - 8
6- The Lord works by His Holy Spirit in us	9
7- The Lord grants us His divine commandment	10 - 11
8- The collapse of the enemies, and our ascension together with the Lord	12 - 14
9- The Lord sets us as holy mountains	15 - 16
10- The Lord sets us as a divine chariot	17
11- Exultant captives	18
12- Glorified captives	19 - 23
13- Great singers of praise	24 - 31
14- A call to all the nations to enjoy the divine gifts	32 – 35

The title:

The glory of God in His goodness to Israel
To the Chief Musician. A psalm of David. A song

In the Syrian version it came as: A prophecy about the ordinance of Christ, and a call to the nations to faith.

If David appointed Chief Musicians, he, himself was counted as ‘the leader of all musicians, or of all singers of praise to God’. It was a title which king David was very proud to carry.

Although there were designated groups of singers of praise in the Old Covenant, yet singing praise was not confined to them, but it was befitting of the king, priests, Levites, and all the people to partake of singing praise to God. In several occasions the prophet and king David calls all the earth, nations, and peoples to shout praise to God.

It is a psalm of praise that reveals the joy of the church for her conqueror Groom, who accompanies her all the way, precedes her, dwells in her, lifts her up to His heavens, the end of the way, and realizes for her the ultimate victory, when He brings her forth to the deposit of the eschatological life, while she still is in her continuous strife on earth.

Some believe that this psalm is an inspiration by the Spirit of God to David the prophet and king, who did not seek to become a king; Even after the prophet Samuel anointed him a king in secret,. Yet, as much as the hosts of darkness worked with all might to keep him away from reigning, God who chose him a king, kept on turning the continuous tribulations and oppositions, into strong pushes, not to receive the throne over Judah or Israel, but to see God Himself precede him to reign over the hearts of men. The psalmist sees himself as a dove, given wings covered with the word of God, the pure silver, and feathers covered with gold.; namely, with heavenly features. What preoccupied David's heart, was not for his kingdom to be well established, but for God to reign and to dwell among His people, to set out of them a heavenly chariot, partaking of the songs of the heavenlies.

The prophet David, with the eyes of prophecy, saw the Son of God ascending to heaven, carrying those He redeemed by His blood, as spoils to place into the bosom of God the Father, to enjoy the fellowship of the eternal glory.

1- THE LORD MAKES US ARISE TOGETHER WITH HIM:

“Let God arise, Let His enemies be scattered; Let those also who hate Him flee before Him” (1)

This praise concerns the resurrection of the Lord Christ, who grants us to arise together with Him, and to carry His conquest on the devil and all the hosts of darkness; and presents to us the conquest over the last enemy, namely, death.

The psalmist quoted this verse from the prophet Moses, as it came in the book of Numbers: *“Whenever the ark set out, Moses said: ‘Rise up, O Lord! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You”* (Numbers 10: 35). The Jews used to sing this verse whenever the priests moved the ark, to depart together with it; As it symbolized the presence of God, or to the shining of the Lord Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, over those who sit in the darkness. Like when the shadows and the darkness of the night are scattered before the rays of the sun, So will evil be scattered, and darkness flee before the Sun of righteousness

According to **St. Augustine**, the enemies here are those who deny Christ, who could not oppose Him, nor endure to appear before Him on the great day of the Lord; when they would say to the mountains to fall over them, and to the hills to cover them before the face of Him who sits on the throne. Whereas the true believers will enjoy His presence among them, as the source of their happiness, joy, and protection.

It is therefore befitting of us, before any movement we make, to seek from the Lord to precede us, to hide behind, and in Him; As we are not a party in the battle, whose two sides are God and the devil. We have no personal enemies, and we do not seek a revenge against anyone, but we seek the intervention of God Himself, and His leadership of the battle against the devil.

- ❖ David said this when he brought the ark of the covenant to the place he prepared for it; And he and his successors used to say it, whenever they moved it from one place to another, as it came in the tenth chapter of the book of Numbers; in which the word “*Arise*” is a call to God to hasten to deal with the enemies, namely, with the non-believers and the devil.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ It is possible to interpret this psalm in a narrower and a wider way. The narrower way, is that it refers to God Himself, how He is risen from the dead, and scattered all His enemies, the devil and his hosts, namely, the Jews.

And the wider way to interpret it, applies to all of us, when, in our afflictions and weakness, we cry out: “*Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord?*” (Psalm 44: 23, 26); the same way, the disciples awoke the Lord in the boat, saying: “*Lord, save us! We are drowning*” (Matthew 8: 25).

(St. Jerome)

In time of tribulation, when we cry out, we see our Christ, risen from the dead, proclaim the splendor of the glory of His resurrection in us; whereas the wicked, not enduring His presence, flee before His face; Our affliction, then turns into an experience of encounter with the resurrected Christ, and into a conquest against evil.

Now, How will God scatter His enemy along all generations? He does not need to enter into a material kind of war, nor to prepare substantial military troops; but before his mere presence the enemy cannot endure, but flees and scatters.

2- The Lord grants us the conquest:

“As smoke is driven away, So drive them away. As wax melts before the fire, So let the wicked perish at the presence of God” (2)

The psalmist uses two analogies for the enemies opposing the Truth: the smoke before the wind, and the wax before the fire. If the wicked assume that they can enter into a battle against heaven and earth; By confronting the heavenly hosts, they will be scattered like smoke by the wind; And by opposing the church on earth, they will melt like wax before the fire. The wicked assume that, the fire of their envy and hate of God and His pious, can destroy His holy name, and bring those who fear Him to perdition. They do not perceive that their fire cannot touch God, nor His saints, but would turn back to destroy them, and would make them like smoke to be scattered before the wind. They do not perceive that they are like wax that would melt before their own fire.

- ❖ The enemies and haters are the devils. They are enemies because they stand against God and His creatures; and they are haters because they hate everything good. And on account of how fast they are driven away, the psalmist likens them to smoke and wax.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

God blows like a stormy wind that scatters the wicked like smoke; while brings joy to the hearts of the righteous, makes them exultant, and let them enjoy gladness, and the deposit of the kingdom of paradise. The wicked are likened to smoke, because they corrupt the spiritual insight by their deceptive heresies and dogmas. They provoke the spirit of corruption and evil; and work on taking the enlightenment away from the heart by their erroneous thoughts and corruptive seductions. The Holy Spirit, who dwelt upon the disciples on the day of the Pentecost, while gathering together in the upper room, like

a rushing mighty wind; will scatter this smoke, and will restore to the heart its inner insight, to behold the kingdom of joy inside it.

The wicked fear to encounter God, as a stormy wind, while the believers rejoice and exult in Him, remembering the day of the Pentecost, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, they got in the sacraments of baptism and the holy anointment (the Meron) working in them.

❖ To rejoice that they are tired and rejoice before God, they do not rejoice so in front of people as if they are empty pride, but to one whom does not sin to consider grant them. *“let them rejoice exceedingly”* there is no longer rejoicing in horror, as happens in this world, as long as human life is an experience on the ground.(see job7: 1).

(St. Augustine)

❖ Smoke vanishes in the air leaving no trace of its prior existence; so it will be with wax when it melts before fire.

When the kingdom of God comes, all the things that had authority on us will scatter, as the darkness scatters before the light; lusts will come to end; death will vanish; corruption will be no more; and life will have the authority, with no opponent.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

The wicked tremble, and do not endure before the divine presence, like wax before the fire. Whereas we see in that consuming fire the secret of our exultation; when we remember how He dwelt on the church with His Holy Spirit like fiery tongues; by which the believers turned into ministers like flames of fire; carrying a fiery heart that all the water in the world could not quench.

The presence of God and the work of His Holy Spirit pours joy upon the righteous, fills them with exultation, and brings them forth to the enjoyment of gladness. In other words, they experience joy, exultation (praise), and paradise. The procession of divine conquest is the procession of the church, that, by praising God with joy, and experiencing the deposit of the eternal kingdom of paradise with joy and praise; she comes to enjoy the conquest of Christ her Head, over the hosts of darkness.

The encounter with God, while turning the life of the wicked into terror, mourning, and continuous wailing, it turns the life of the righteous into a spiritual gladness, a perpetual praise, and a fellowship with the heavenlies.

3- THE LORD GRANTS US HIS HEAVENLY JOY;

“But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God; Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly” (3)

There is no joy greater than that enjoyed by the believers on the great day of the Lord, when they encounter the Lord face to face. And experience His practical divine love in the most exalting way; when they enter as an exultant procession together with the heavenly Groom; when they are received by the heavenly hosts, who marvel, how these creature of dust could reach such exalting level of honor; and how could they abide in the bosom of God the Father, and enjoy the eternal glories!

❖ According to the prophet, the wicked perish, but they are not wiped out of existence They are denied beholding the face of God; Whereas the righteous rejoice and exult before God, for seeing His majesty and glory; because the spirit in them is the fruition of love and peace.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ it is befitting of us to rejoice with those whom we see practice some work worthy to be written in heaven; whether it is a work of righteousness, love, peace, or mercy. And likewise, we are committed to rejoice together with those who turn back from sin, forsake behind them the darkness of ignorance, and come to the light of Truth and the forgiveness of sin¹.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ The wicked are not worthy to behold God; whereas “*the righteous become exceedingly glad*”; those who keep their innocence from iniquities, rejoice in the Lord.
- ❖ “*They are glad, and rejoice before God*” It is a sign of great confidence. That (man) rejoices in the Lord; Like the steward (Luke 16: 1-3) who invests his master’s wealth well, and does not waste his goods, is worthy to encounter the Lord with gladness.

(St. Jerome)

This joy is expressed with singing praise on the harp of the spirit. As according to St. Jerome: [Praise to God is realized by the good work; when the ears, mouth, eyes, hands, each practices its work in harmony with all the other members of the body, like playing a melody on the strings of a harp].

Experiencing the presence of God the father, amid her sufferings, the church, will count herself fortunate to partake of the passion of her Savior, to be worthy to enter with Him into the joy of His resurrection, and to enjoy the power of His conquest, Her life will turn into a continuous praise, and a fellowship with the divine Groom.

- ❖ He will praise God, who lives for God; He will sing to His name, he who works for His glory.

(St. Augustine)

Having perceived the power and activity of the weapon of praise, the psalmist says: “*Sing to God; sing praises to his name*” (4). We present praise, not as an empty reaction, nor as a show before others, but as an internal life, that touches our personal relationship with God; and as an experience of the power of His name.

4- THE LORD GRANTS US HIS DWELLING IN US:

“Sing to God, sing praises to His name; Extol Him who rides on the clouds, by His name YAH, and be exultant before Him” (4)

The Word of God came down from heaven to us to proclaim His name ‘YAH’, namely, (He who exists or dwells among His people); Exists with them, being the Way, through which He brings them forth to the exalting glories. In Him we walk, to Him we go, and with Him we abide and rest forever. His dwelling in us turns our life into a symphony of unceasing joy and rejoice.

In some versions, this verse came as: “He who rides in the desolation or on the (land of sunset)”; either word refers to the dwelling place of the devil, where the Sun of Righteousness does not shine; where, according to the book of proverbs : “*the lamp of the wicked will be put out*” (Proverbs 13: 9); and, as the Jews believed, the dwelling place of the devil. It is as though God heads with His fiery chariot to destroy the devil for the sake of the salvation of his believers.

¹ *Commentary on Rom. 12: 15.*

Heading to the desolation (or to the land of sunset), He is also heading to the Gentiles who lived for long in the darkness, to shine His light upon them, and to turn them into the children of Light, who praise Him, and rejoice in Him.

In the old days, the way of a victorious king, coming back from battle, was prepared for him to enter with triumph into his capital. On one aspect, to give Him the honor befitting to Him; and on another aspect, to take every precaution to protect him from any unseen danger.

There were likewise, great preparations taken for the movement of the ark of the Lord.

Here, he refers to the Lord Christ – YAH, or JEHOVAH – who came to the world as though riding through a desolation; as the world has lost the fruition of virtue, and came to be barren like a desolation. The fathers, the law, and the prophets, in particular St. John the Baptist, prepared the way, for the world to recognize the Person of the Lord Christ, and His salvation work (Isaiah 40: 3; Malachi 3: 1; Matthew 3: 3). And among the preparations for His coming were praise and shouting with the spirit of joy and rejoice.

❖ He who treads upon the worldly things, and presents to God befitting glorifications from a shining heart, is said to sing praise to His name, by all his bodily senses. Saying that God rides, refers to the fact that He is present by His Might in the Ark of the Covenant, like a King riding His chariot, heading toward His enemies to fight them.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

According to **St. Augustine**, praise to God should not be merely by words, but by living a life in harmony with the will of God. He also believes that it is befitting of the believers to prepare the way for the Lord in the “*desolation (or the land of sunset)*”; namely, among the Gentiles, to come and reign upon them. They will surely endure much trouble and sufferings; but they will be praising God and rejoicing before Him.

Our spiritual praise, coming from the depths of the heart, interpreted as the holy mind, and the spiritual behavior, prepares a way for the Lord, to turn ‘*the land of sunset*’ into a divine chariot. According to the scholar Origen, the Jews, having known God in the dawn of their life, were counted as ‘the land of sunrise’; whereas the Gentiles, who knew Him in the fullness of time, were called ‘*the land of sunset*’. It is as though the psalmist calls God here, “He who rides on ‘*the land of sunset*’”, namely, who sits on the hearts of the Gentiles as His throne.

According to **St. Jerome**: [Unless the sun of defilement sets on us, “*the Sun of Righteousness, with the healing in His wings*” (Malachi 4: 2) will not shine on us.

And according to father **Onesimus of Jerusalem**: [He rides on ‘*the land on the sunset*’, namely on the repentant sinners who keep away from the devil who transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11: 14) (as though he shines upon them); as it is written, “*the lamp of the wicked will be put out*” (Proverbs 13: 9). By keeping themselves away from the devil, and forsaking his works, they receive the sweet yoke of Christ, and His light burden. Those are ‘*the land of sunset*’ on whom Christ rides, and who, according to St. Cyril, are so called, on account of that they have forsaken the garden of paradise in ‘the land of sunrise’, and became in darkness; But having repented the works of the darkness, they became the chariot of God, and their way became a return to paradise; as the Lord Christ said to the right-hand repentant robber: “*Today, you will be with Me in paradise*” (Luke 23: 43). And according to **St. Athanasius and St.**

Eusabius, God riding on the ‘*land of sunset*’ refers to His incarnation, hiding the light of His Deity, and receiving the likeness of a servant.

In short, riding on ‘*the land of sunset*’ refers to:

- a- The Gentiles receiving faith in a later time.
- b- The sinners receiving the Sun of Righteousness after rejecting the devil, who proves to be a deceptive sun that is soon put out.
- c- The incarnation of the Word of God, hiding His Deity and liking us in everything except for sin.

❖ By such singing of His praise; namely, by living such a life (in the Lord), according to the words: “*My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your words*” (Psalm 119: 139), you make a way for Christ; as, by the beautiful legs of those who preach the good news, a way is opened in the hearts of believers.

(St. Augustine)

Now, Who is He, to whom we sing praise? And for whom we open a way by our virtuous life and testimony? He is the Leader and the Defender of the suffering, the driven out, and the broken; He, who intends to make glad all mankind in the East and the West, all the nations, tongues, and peoples; and in particular the fatherless, the widows, the needy, and the shackled.

“A Father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation” ((5)

God is called Father of the fatherless, and Defender of the widows, because however great is the care of humanity for them, it will never be sufficient to satisfy their needs, and to protect them against tribulations and persecutions. God, alone, is capable of realizing all that, either directly, or through humanity or nature.

In case the believer shouts for conquest against the hosts of darkness, he will exult in God who dwells in him; being the Father of the fatherless, and the Defender of the widows. Man, having isolated himself from his heavenly Father, and come to be adopted by the devil as his son, lived so long as an orphan; and having lost his unity with the heavenly One, he came to be a widower, the way a bride loses her groom.

His dwelling among us takes away our orphanhood and widowhood, to make us enjoy the spirit of adoption to God, and the union with the heavenly Groom. In short, the believer became a holy temple, namely a dwelling place for God, His son, and heavenly bride.

❖ His enemies, namely, the non-believers, tremble before the presence of our Lord. To Him Likewise, the demons tremble; those who said: “*What have we to do with You , Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?*” (Matthew 8: 29). By saying “*Father of the fatherless and Defender of the widow*”, he refers to the extent of the care of God, as it should be done by us.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Having said before: “*Let God arise*” (1) ; then said: “*Prepare a way for God, riding on ‘the land of sunset’*” (4); Lest the listeners may assume that God moves from one place to another, he added: “*God in His holy habitation*” (5); which conforms to what our Lord, glory be to Him, says in the gospel of the St. John the Evangelist: “*No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man who is in heaven*” (John 3: 13); meaning that God is not limited by a certain place, nor

moves from one place to another, but abides in His holy habitation; Although He came down to earth in flesh, yet He did not separate from the Father and the Holy Spirit.

It is said: *“Heaven is His holy habitation”*; and as it also came in the prophecy by the prophet Micah: *“For behold, the Lord is coming out of His place; He will come down, and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire”* (Micah 1: 3-4).

Jerusalem is His holy habitation as well, because of the presence in it of the old temple of His old law.

Finally, the dwelling of our Lord in flesh, His passions and the rest of His salvation works, and His holy habitation, is the living body, He has taken from the holy Virgin, united with the deity, and made it a temple for His Deity.

And is as well, the church of the Christians, the place of God, on account of His presence in her by His body, grace, and Might; according to His promise, saying: *“I will dwell in them and walk among them”* (See 2 Corinthians 6: 16). And each one of the believers, if he purges himself from the defilements, will be a place of God.

According to **St. Athanasius**, the saying of the prophet: *“God in His holy habitation”* means that, although He came down to earth incarnated; and although He descended into the depths of Hades to save those bound in it, yet He again ascended up to heaven, where He is known to be, by all nations; as everyone when he prays, usually lifts up his hands toward heaven.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ It is said that He has revealed to them a glimpse of His Deity; when He proclaimed to them that He is God who dwells among them¹.

(St. John Chrystotom)

❖ Now, I present this message to be the first and greater testimony to God’s care for you, lest you may be swallowed by grief. You are in no need for a human hand, but for that of the Almighty, and for the wisdom of *“the Father of mercies, and God of all comforts”* (2 Corinthians 1: 3); about whom it is written: *“He was torn but He will heal us; He was stricken but He will bind us up”* (Hosea 6: 1).

You were enjoying honor while your blessed husband was with you; as well as the subject of his care and zeal; Yes indeed, you have enjoyed what is to be expected from a good husband. But now after God has chosen him for Himself, He will take his place for you. This, I do not say on my own, but is also said by the blessed prophet: *“God relieves the fatherless, and the widow”* (Psalm 146: 9); and *“He is the Father of the fatherless, and the Defender of the widow”* (Psalm 68: 5)².

(St. John Chrysostom in a message of condolence)

❖ I can provide you with another testimony to make sure that God is called “Father of mankind”, albeit not by nature; as according to the prophet Isaiah: *“You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, (and Sarah did not deliver us)”* (Isaiah 63: 16).

¹ *Eutropius and the Vanity of Riches, Hom.*

² رسالة تعزية إلى أرملة شابة.

And if the psalmist says: “*God is Father of the fatherless, and a Defender of the widow*” (5), Is it obvious that He is so called, not that He gave birth to them, but for the sake of His care for them, and His protection of them?!

But although we call God the Father of all mankind, yet not by nature; He is though the Father of Christ alone, by nature, and not through adoption.

Concerning mankind, He is a Father in a certain period of time; but concerning Christ, He is His Father before time; as He Himself said: “*Now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was*”(John 17: 5) ¹.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ When you persecute the fatherless, you are persecuting Me; for I was once denied every human help And As God is the Father of the fatherless (5), you make Him angry when you oppose Me. When you intend to tread upon your friend under your feet; Yes, and by your words, you disregard the statutes of friendship; But, taking this into consideration, God commands us, not only to love our neighbor like ourselves, but He even wants us to call Him “Love” ².

(Hesichius of Jerusalem)

God calls Himself a Father of the fatherless and a Defender of the widows; And when we accept by our own free will, the orphanhood through the death of our ancient father – the devil (John 8: 44) and his wicked works; and get united to our Christ his opponent, we receive

God the Father as our father, who takes care of us, and brings us forth into His heavens as our father’s house; and we would have the daring even to enter into the throne of God, as our Father’s throne. When we reject the union with the devil, and our souls become widowed, as far as he is concerned; and become prepared for her heavenly Groom, who brings her forth into His secret place, we would be the subject of care and pleasure of God the Father, being “*the Defender of the widows*”.

❖ The devil, giving birth to the one who submits to him, he would become as though his father, and a husband of his soul. But if that one repents,, he would become a fatherless and a widow, as far as the devil is concerned; and God would be his Father and the husband of his soul.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ If you intend to pay a visit to someone, you would be better off if you give this honor to the fatherless, the widows, and the needy, more than to the rich and the famous. As God Himself says that He is “*A Father of the fatherless and a Defender of the widows*” (5)and, “*Defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together*’, says the Lord” (Isaiah 1: 17, 18) ³.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Someone may wonder: What is the connection between calling God “*Father of the fatherless, and Defender of the widows*”, and the proclamation that “*He is in His holy habitation*”? (5)

² Homilies on Job 9: 6: 27.

³ Homilies on 1 Timothy, hom. 15.

- ❖ Out of those fatherless and widows, namely, those denied the fellowship in the hope of this world, God will build a temple for Himself; as the psalmist adds: *“God is in His holy habitation”* (5).

(St. Augustine)

“God gives the desolate a home to live in; He leads out those who are bound into prosperity; but the rebellious live in a parched land” (6)

In an interpretation by **St. Augustine**, it came as: [God lets those of one mind dwell in one house]. What the saint sees here is that the psalmist refers, not to those who live in isolation from the people, but to those united in mind, mood, and nature, whom God gathers together, dwells among them, and sets out of them a temple for Himself. It is as though, there is no temple that God sanctifies like the unity between believers.

- ❖ Having one mind, we live in one house; And be worthy of having God come and dwell among us This is the holy house of God; something sought by most people, the place where prayer is heard, namely the church God does not dwell in any place, but in one that is honored; and He, likewise does not dwell in all those who are in his house (he does not dwell in the vessels of dishonor). But His holy dwelling place is those who have one mind, and one behavior in the house.
- ❖ To prove that it is by His grace, He builds for Himself that place, and not for the sake of prior worthiness of those people, out of whom He sets a dwelling place for Himself, Just read what follows: *“He leads out those who are bound (with strength)”* He loosens the heavy chains of sin by which they were shackled, and, hence, were unable to keep His commandments; and provides them strength that was not in them before they have His grace.
- ❖ The grace of Christ leads with strength. By what strength, other than that by which they would strive against sin, even to death? Out of every kind of people, He sets out those qualified to become His holy place; those who, once their chains are loosed, they arose to life. Remember how he loosed by His command, the chains of that woman who had a spirit of infirmity for as long as eighteen years, whom Satan has bound, (Luke 13: 16); and how He overcome Lazarus death by His voice (John 11: 45). He who has done so with the bodies, can do more amazing things with the persons themselves; and can set those of one mind and one nature to dwell in one house; And can lead those who are bound with strength, those who were as though dwelling in graves.
- ❖ God builds for Himself a temple, out of the fatherless and the widows; namely, out of those denied the fellowship in hope in this world. That is why the psalmist adds: *“God is in His holy habitation”* (5) those of one mind, are the holy habitation of the Lord.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Do you think that you can abide and live, if you apostate from the church, and build for yourself other dwelling place? When it was said to ‘Rahab’, who was given the image of the church: *“So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head”* (Joshua 2: 19). We also find the secret of the Passover lamb to include nothing else in the book of Exodus, but that the slain lamb, should be eaten in one house, referring to the church. The book says: *“In one house it shall be eaten ; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house”*

(Exodus 12: 46). The body of Christ, and His sanctuaries, should never go outside; and there should never be any other house for the believers but the one church. The Holy Spirit refers to this house, and to the united family, and means it by saying in the psalm: “*God gives the desolate home to live in*” (6) ¹.

- ❖ In the house of God, in the church of Christ, all men keep on living with one mind and one soul, in harmony and simplicity.
- ❖ They keep on praying together, proclaiming by their consistence and conformity of prayers, that God let those who have one mind live in one house; and into this divine house, He lets only those who have conformity in their prayers enter.
- ❖ God commands us, His children, to be peace-makers, and to have one mind in His house and wants us, being born again, to keep on in God’s peace; and having the one Spirit, to have the one heart and one mind, as well.

God does not receive the sacrifice of an adverse; but commands him to leave the altar, and go first reconcile with his neighbor He finds pleasure in the prayers of the peace-maker.

(Cyprian, the martyr)

Dwelling in the contrite hearts of His people, He proclaims His kingdom, namely, His dwelling place among them, and sets out of them one house in harmony; having “one image”, “the image of the Son of God”, namely, likening Him, though with a diversity of talents and abilities.

St. Clement of Alexandria confirms that the goal of the Savior in His teachings of men, is to make them like Him.

- ❖ “*God in His holy habitation*” (5). God perpetually dwells among His saints; Wherever sanctity is, there will be “*the holy habitation of God*”. God dwells in those men of one way, those who choose one way of life, and hold fast to it. Yes, the righteous is indeed consistent; he decides, once and for all, to live a virtuous life. About the sinner, on the other hand, is said: “*The fool changes like the moon*” (Sirach 27: 11)....

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ As God lets those of one mind live in one home; hence love could perpetually be there undisturbed, among those of one mind and one goal; they, together, will accept and reject the same things.

(Father Joseph)

What does he mean by saying: “God lets the “desolate” live in one home”?

a- Some believe that ‘the **desolate**’ here refer to (the deserted), like the divorced woman or the widow, who has no place to go. God, with

His love, cares for such kind of people.

b- Some others believe that ‘the **desolate**’ here, are those who suffer a kind of wretched nature, that no one like to live together with them.

God is compassionate toward such people, and will set home for them, to put their souls at peace.

c- By ‘the **desolate**’, he probably means those who isolate themselves from the society, and lead a life of solitude.

¹ *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, 8.

d- He may also refer to those who fall into captivity, who, being deprived of their own land and home, feel a deadly sense of loneliness.

e- The Israelites who lived in Egypt under conditions of forced labor; then walked for forty years in the barren wilderness, deprived of social life; will eventually settle down, together with their children in the promised land, where they will make up for their long deprivation.

f- This verse, some believe, reveals the role of God in choosing the right spouse; as He cares to set the holy family; once man submits his life in His hand.

“He leads out those who are bound (the captives) into prosperity”. God created man to enjoy freedom. If he sometimes allows for some of His children to fall into captivity, or prison, yet He is the One to set the captives free, as He did with Joseph, and with His whole people, when He set them free from the servitude of Pharaoh.

“But the rebellious live in a perched land”. He who rebels against God, and denies himself the gift of the water of the Holy Spirit; his depths would dry up to become a perched land without fruition; and he would find no inner comfort, nor food to satisfy the hunger of his soul, or water to quench her thirst.

God condescends to make His people a dwelling place for Himself, dwells among them; and with His love, sets for them a house, which is His kingdom to live in. What an exalted mutual love! God desires to dwell among His people; and grants them the opportunity to desire to dwell in His kingdom.

Here, by the “desolate”, he may be referring to those who live a life of (solitude), forsaking everything for the sake of God; and with the spirit of love live in one house, namely, and the monastery. Or to the (captives), enslaved by sin, and captivated by the devil; that the Savior liberates from the bonds of evil. Or to the (rebellious), who, thinking of rebellion as a kind of freedom, deny themselves the house of God, their Father, to dwell among the tombs, under the authority of death, and the hosts of darkness.

❖ Saying “desolate”, he may also refer to the Jews among whom He, Himself, has been, whom He let live in a house, namely, in Jerusalem.

But according to **St. Athanasius**, they may be those who avoid every worldly desire, and live a life of virginity for God alone, innocent of any doubt. Whom He let live in a house, namely, in the kingdom of heaven forever..

As to saying *“leads those who are **bound** (the captives)...”* he may be referring to the Israelites who were bound by servitude in Egypt, as though dead dwelling in graves while alive, whom He set free by His mighty power; despite their consistent rebellious behavior against Him and His prophet; And also to those bound by the devil in Hades, whom our Lord set free (by His Manhood); namely by taking on Himself the image of man, through His incarnation, and canceling death.

By those **bound**, he may also refer to those shackled by sins, rebellious against God by their abominations, who dwell among the tombs of the mind, and alienate themselves from the eternal life. And also to the idol worshippers, about whom it is written in Isaiah: *“That You may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth’; to those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves’”* (Isaiah 49: 9); And, *“I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house”* (Isaiah 42: 6-7).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

It was said about a prisoner who was set free after a long time, unjustly put in prison; that while on his way home, surrounded by exultant relatives and friends, he suddenly stopped before a shop of a pigeon merchant, purchased all his stock of pigeons, then opened the cages and set them all free. When he was asked to explain his action, he said that he who tasted the bitterness of prison, cannot endure to see any creature in a cage!

It is a well known fact that birds and beasts in cages, die in half their normal life span, even if they are kept in golden cages, and however plenty they are fed. So are probably any creature including man who perceive the concept of freedom.

God has taken upon Himself to set free those bound, not only to let them practice their humanity that was so destroyed by humiliation; to count their liberation as though coming out of a tomb; but also to grant them Himself “power and might”.

❖ God, Himself, by His might, sets free those bound by sin, and shackled by the devil; as when He loosed a woman who had a spirit of infirmity, whom Satan has bound eighteen years (Luke 13: 11-13).

God is sweet by His nature, but it is the “**rebellious**” sinners who move Him into bitterness, namely, who make God bitter to themselves. Although God does not change His nature, but the sinners, themselves, make God their bitterness; “they dwell among the tombs”, as the Lord said: “*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and uncleanness*” (Matthew 23: 27).

While the saint is the temple of God, the sinner makes a tomb out of himself.

(St. Jerome)

5- THE LORD LEAD US BY HIMSELF:

“O God, when You went out before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness” (7)

After talking about the divine procession, the procession of the Conqueror King in His church; the psalmist starts to present a practical example lived by the people of the old, when God liberated them from the bondage of Pharaoh, and set them forth in the wilderness by a strong hand and a mighty arm, to bring them to the promised land; the symbol of the heavenly Canaan.

The Head of the church ascended to His heavens, to let His body, (His church) as well, ascend together with Him:

1- He says “*When You went out*”; as the people could never have gone out without God going ahead of them, and leading the way by Himself. As it was written about the church: “*Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?*” (Song 8: 5). He opens the way before her, goes out together with her, accompanies her, moves along with her, being “*the First and the Last*”; Namely, He lets her lean upon Him all the way until its end. According to **St. Jerome**: [This conforms to the events of history, when God went out before His people when they came out of Egypt (Exodus 13: 21).

According to **St. Augustine**, God’s going out is not an actual movement from place to place, as much as it is to reveal to His believers His amazing work for their sake, and their enjoyment of His possibilities in all their movements.

- ❖ When You went out, O God, before Your people, to bring them out of the land of Egypt, and let them pass through the wilderness of Sinai, there came to be: shuttering wind, clouds, voice of horns, manna coming down from heaven, beside the spiritual food, namely the divine law; and a diversity of signs, that made the inhabitants of the earth tremble for fear when they heard about the great things You have performed for the sake of Your people.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ His going out is perceived by His works; yet not to all men, but only to those who know how to see them. I do not mean those works obvious to everyone: like the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all what in them; but I mean those works by which “*He leads the captives to prosperity*” like terrified men living among the tombs; and lets them live in a house. Such is His going out before His people, namely, before those who perceive His grace.

(St. Augustine)

2- God carries His people on His shoulders, like a mother carrying her infant child, or a shepherd carrying his tired sheep, provides them with all their needs until they pass through the wilderness of this world, and enjoy dwelling together with Him in the eternal glories.

If the wilderness of this world is called the “*valley of tears*”, He came down to accompany us through it, to let us forget our tears by our fellowship with Him, and the perpetual debate of love with Him. Our presence with, and in Him, turns our wilderness into the deposit of the heavenlies.

3- According to **St. Augustine**, the wilderness is the Gentiles, through which He passed to proclaim His love for all mankind. [The wilderness is the Gentiles that did not know God, got no law from Him, no prophet came to dwell among them, and to tell them about the coming of the Lord].

“The earth shook, the heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel” (8)

In the Old Covenant God brought them forth out of the land of bondage to the Promised Land – Canaan, by a strong hand and a mighty arm; and provided them with all their needs; rained on them the manna from heaven, and also the quail. In the New Covenant, the Savior carries them to His heavens.

4- Going out with us in the wilderness of this life, the earth shook, the heavens dropped rain, and the mountains were moved out of our way.

That was what the prophetess Deborah sang, out of a practical experience she lived (Judges 5: 4, 5).

Our body (our earth) shook, as Jerusalem did with the entrance of the Lord Christ (Matthew 21: 10); and the way the upper room did with the coming of the Holy Spirit, “*as of a rushing mighty wind*” (Acts 2: 2); so that bodily lusts would have no more authority on us; but our emotions, feelings, and senses would become sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God.

Our souls (heaven) dropped the rain of the heavenly grace of God, to turn into a fruitful garden, to sing to her Groom, saying: “*Let my beloved come to His garden, and eats its pleasant fruits*” (Song 4: 16).

All obstacles would collapse on our way, crossing over to heaven; that even the mighty mountains would not be able to stand in our way.

5- According to **Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, this talk refers to the preaching of the gospel, as the Lord Christ came out of His own people and went forth to the wilderness of the Gentiles; When the Jews, having rejected the grace poured on them from heaven, namely, having rejected the divine concepts of the prophecies of the prophets; they shook as earth, and their house, forsaken by Christ, collapsed and became desolate,

That was what did happen, as well, with the crucifixion of Christ, when the earth quaked, and the rocks were split; to proclaim that it was He, Himself, who shook the earth with His appearance in Sinai.

He also says that the earth of the Gentiles shook, to receive faith in the Savior, and to reject the idol worship; when the apostles dropped over them the rain of preaching the gospel.

❖ Shaken the earth, as it affected terrestrials' faith...

❖ ***“When You marched through the wilderness, the earth shook”*** (7, 8). The wilderness is not the Gentiles that did not know God, having received no law from Him, nor did prophets ever dwell among them to prophesy about the coming of the Lord.

“When You marched through the wilderness”, when You were preached to the Gentiles, when the earthlies were provoked to faith, *“the earth shook, and heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God”*.

Here, man could probably remember the time when God marched before His people, the children of Israel, as a pillar of clouds by day, and the splendor of fire by night (Exodus 13: 21); When *“heavens dropped rain at the presence of God”* (8); *“And You, O God, sent a plentiful rain, whereby You confirmed Your inheritance”* (9). As God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, when He gave him the law; the manna was therefore, the plentiful rain, He poured upon His inheritance, namely, upon His people, the only people on earth, whom he so fed.

All those things happened to them as a symbol, *“until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away”* (Songs 2: 17).

(St. Augustine)

6- According to **St. Jerome**: [Sinai refers to the temptation; as God dwells among those tempted, and those who conquer in temptations; whereas among the lustful, He never dwells].

7- He drops on us the heavenly manna, a sign of His pleasure with His people, His inheritance, and His portion, lest they become weary on the way.

6- THE LORD WORKS BY HIS HOLY SPIRIT IN US:

“You, O God, sent a plentiful rain, whereby You confirmed Your inheritance when it was weary” (9)

In the Septuagint version it came that God, through His divine compassion, granted His disturbed people, the manna as a free gift, despite their violent nature, Yet God with His love for humanity, that he intended to make as his inheritance, He did not forsake His people in the wilderness weary, but dropped on them fresh manna, and quail; and brought forth water from the rock. It is as though He turned all the energies and possibilities of nature, to the account of His people, to mend their ways, and not to

forsake them in their weakness. He used heaven (the manna), the air (the quail), and the earth (the rock) to serve His believers.

When we receive God as our inheritance, He, in turn, will receive us with joy to be His living inheritance, and moves every thing to our account and to our edification.

❖ “*An (optional) rain You, O God, designated to Your inheritance*”. The prophet says “rain” about the manna He dropped on the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. And He calls it “optional”, as it was given to them as a daily provision; according to their own request; and on account that it was not something natural, but through an amazing work of God. As to saying “*which You, O God, designated to Your inheritance*”, it refers to the fact that it was not something general like regular rain, but designated specially to the people of Israel, who, at that time, were God’s own inheritance.

The teaching of the Holy Book of God, being “optional”, is also like dew dropping upon a fleece of wool (see Judges 6: 37); designated by God for His inheritance, namely, for His believers.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem

According to **St. Augustine**, As God rained manna to sustain His people, His inheritance, He now rains on His church, the faith in the Savior, as a gift from God, and not according to works, “*lest anyone should boast*”, except of God who works in us (Ephesians 2: 8-10).

Now, He rains on his church, what is greater; He grants her the heavenly Manna – the delivered Lord’s body and blood, so that every one of her members would confess, saying: “I was weary, Yet You prepared it” (9); Namely, I, by myself, am a dry land and a barren wilderness; but by the rain of Your grace, my wilderness turned into Your garden; and instead of my dryness, I became satisfied with the fruition of the Spirit; and instead of my corruption, I am prepared for the eternal heavenly wedding.

According to **St. Augustine**, the weakness (weariness) here, refers to the law, given to the ancient people, God’s inheritance, like rain coming down from heaven. He says: [The law could be described as weak, not that it is weak in itself, but on account of that it made men weak, having threatened punishment, but did not help with grace]. **St. Augustine** continues his commentary, by confirming that God did not forsake His inheritance in weakness, but delivered Himself to them. [You, O God, consummated Your inheritance; In themselves, they are weak, but by You, they became perfect].

You rained on Your people the heavenly Manna to satisfy their bodies, granted them the law to help them; Yet, by the law they discovered their weakness, perceived their helplessness, and felt the need for You to consummate them; As You are Rich and Capable of making Your inheritance rich, and of pouring Your goodness on them!

7- THE LORD GRANTS US HIS DIVINE COMMANDMENT:

“Your congregation dwelt in it; You, O God, provided from Your goodness for the poor” (10)

Some believe that the talk here concerns Israel, who, after living in the land of bondage in humiliation and poverty, God made them dwell in the promised land, securely, and superbly; He sustained them in the wilderness, provided them with the Manna and the quail; and sustained them in the promised land that flow with milk and honey. They are the rational flock of sheep that enjoy the care of God, who goes before

His people to bring them forth into His green pastures, and to the waters of the Holy Spirit, that give comfort; By His goodness or his sweetness, he fulfills all their needs.

❖ ***“Your (flock) dwelt in it”*** (10). Submitted to You, and not to themselves; they need You, and are not self-satisfied. Finally, he consummates his talk, saying: ***“You, O God, provided from Your goodness for the poor”*** (10). He became weak so as to become perfect; he confesses that he is needy, to get provided. That is the “goodness”, about which is written: *“The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase”* (Psalm 85: 12); to be able to practice the good work, not out of fear of punishment, but of love for righteousness.

(St. Augustine)

Bringing His people forth to His pastures, God also grants them strength; He grants them the conquest and victory over their enemies; and provides them with plentiful spoils that would bring joy to the whole congregation; And He grants them the joyful strength of preaching His wonders as a beloved Leader.

“The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it”
(11)

Together with giving the promised land to His people who were in bondage; God grants them, as well, what is greater: His word to preach!

The word of God, that would not be valued by a price, is given as a free gift for the believers to enjoy, and to practice with the spirit of strength, together with joy and exultation.

The word “*company*” who proclaimed it, came in Hebrew, in the feminine tense; in reference to the praise of Deborah (Judges 5) by a divine inspiration, being the word of God that provokes the spirit of preaching good news and joy. Women and girls had their role in praising and shouting the songs of conquest, as did Miriam, Aaron’s sister, together with other women (Exodus 15: 21); As they celebrated David’s great victory (1 Samuel 18: 6); And when the Lord Christ, risen from the dead, sent two women to bring the good news of His Resurrection to His disciples (Matthew 18: 10). By putting it in the feminine tense, he probably meant that every soul is committed to testify to the work of her Shepherd and Leader before the others.

In the Septuagint version, though, it came in the masculine tense: “*those who proclaimed it*”, namely the preachers; who, according to **St. Jerome**, refer to the apostles; whom the Lord granted a great power to preach the gospel.

According to **St. Augustine**, the Lord Christ established His church, being His beautiful house; and chained the devil and his hosts, taking away his spoils, to give them to His congregation in His house.

❖ How beautiful is the house built by Christ for himself, namely, the church. He shackles the devil with spiritual chains, by His conquest over death, and by His ascension from Hades to heaven. He shackled him by the secret of His incarnation; and took away his vessels, namely the sons of disobedience, in whom he worked (Ephesians 2: 2), and in whom, for their lack of faith, he provoked to consummate his will.

Those vessels, the Lord cleansed by the forgiveness of sins, and sanctified the spoils He took away from the enemy, who was chained and cast away. He consecrated them for the beauty of His house.; made some apostles, some prophets, some shepherds, and some teachers; for the work of ministry, for building of the body of Christ The

beauty of the house where the spoils were divided; kindled the heart of him who cried out saying: “*Lord, I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells*” (Psalm 26: 8).

❖ The Lord gives a “Word”, namely, gives food to His flock who dwell in it.

(St. Augustine)

According to **St. Gregory of Nyssa**: [He who gives the commandment, also gives the strength to keep it. Commanding us to “*search the holy Scripture*” (John 5: 39); even if we are unable to perceive the greatness of their concepts, we are committed to be persistent as much as we can, and He will certainly grant us the understanding, and a great strength to preach His word¹.

8- THE COLLAPSE OF THE ENEMIES, AND OUR ASCENSION TOGETHER WITH THE LORD:

“Kings of armies flee, they flee; and she who remains at home divides the spoil”
(12)

Here he talks about the armies of the enemies, whether in the wilderness or in the promised land; who, despite their long experience in wars, they flew in terror before them, who have long suffered servitude, and had no experience in war at that time.

He refers here to great kings of reputation and military experience, who flew before Israel, or were killed by them (See Psalm 135: 10-11; 136: 17-20; Joshua 8: 2; Judges 1: 7-7; 4: 24; 1 Samuel 30: 24).

As to “*she who remains at home*”, he means the women; who were not allowed to fight together with men, but were committed to stay at home.

“Though you lie down among the sheepfolds, yet you will be like the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers of yellow gold” (13)

As slaves, the Israelites used to live in humiliation among the sheepfolds, and had no houses to settle in. Now, God, by His exalting care, made them like a dove flying toward heaven, with wings covered with silver, and feathers of yellow gold; beautiful, magnificent, rich, and capable of flying.

Who is she, that dove with wings covered with silver, and feathers of yellow gold, but the church of the New Covenant, who, having enjoyed the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, and His leadership, she came to be a meek dove, who carries the features of her Groom, the meek Lord Christ. As to being covered with silver, silver refers to the purified word of God (Psalm 12: 6); And her feathers refer to the believers, who like light feathers, fly toward heaven; carrying the heavenly features, referred to as gold.

In a talk about Abraham, **St. Ambrose** says that, although Lot, his nephew, was rich in flocks, herds, and tents (Genesis 13: 5), yet he was not as rich as Abraham in silver and gold (Genesis 13: 3); As he has not yet enjoyed the word of God, nor the fellowship in the features of the heavenly Christ.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, that dove, amazing in her shape, is the ‘mercy’ that flies together with the one who practices it, to bring him forth to heaven and sets his soul as a queen.

❖ The *mercy*, being the most magnificent among the great arts, protects those working with it. Mercy is beloved by God, perpetually stands beside Him, well prepared to ask

¹ Cf. *Homilies on Ecclesiastes, 1*.

for the benefit of those who desire, if they do not misuse her. Great is her power, even for those who sin; she crushes the chains, scatters the darkness, quenches the fire, kills the worms, takes away the clattering of teeth; and opens the gates of heaven. Like a queen, no one of those standing at the gates, would dare to enquire about her identity, but everyone would instantly receive her with great reverence and honor; She even makes the preachers like the Lord, who says: “*Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful*” (Luke 6: 36). She is exultant, and, flying with her golden wings, she gives pleasure to the angels. Being said to have “*wings covered with silver, and feathers yellow with gold*”, the peacock, although beautiful, yet would be like a crow, if compared to her. How beautiful and worthy of every admiration, this dove is, always looking upward, and always surrounded with the glory of God! She is a virgin, with golden wings, Joyfully standing beside the divine throne. And when we are condemned, she hastens to fly revealing herself, to save us from punishment, and to protect us by her wings. God loves her more than the sacrifices, and often talks about her¹.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ The eyes of the soul were likened to two doves, because now, she understands the divine book, not through the letter, but through the Spirit, and perceives the divine secrets in it. As the dove mostly refers to the Holy Spirit, the perception of the law and the understanding of the prophets in a spiritual way, will be ours when we have the two eyes of the dove.

And in the psalms, the soul longs to have the two wings of the dove (Psalm 68: 13) to fly toward the understanding of the divine secrets, and to have comfort in the bosoms of wisdom².

(The scholar Origen)

Looking at the beautiful church of Christ, that divides the spoils she has taken away from the hands of the devil and the hosts of darkness, the psalmist now talks to those spoils, that rest comfortably among the folds; namely, between the books of the Old and the New Covenants, enjoy the divine promises, and the work of salvation, to become the wings of the church, the one beloved dove,

Her wings are covered with silver, namely with the word of God; while her feathers, by which she flies up high, are of gold, namely, the heavenly life.

- ❖ What are the two wings themselves, but the two commandments of love (to love God, and to love one’s neighbor), “*on which hang all the law and the prophets*”? (Matthew 22: 40). And what is the light burden, but the love realized in these two commandments? For what seems difficult in a commandment is light for the one who loves.

(St. Augustine)

“When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was white as snow in Zalmon” (14)

The Psalmist compares the armies of the opponents who fled away, and their women and girls who were captivated in humiliation, to the believers who set forth from between the folds to live in a land that flow with milk and honey; He compares the

¹ *Homilies on Hebr.*, 32: 7.

² *Origin: Comm. On the Songs of Songs, book 3: 1 (ACW).*

heathen kings, scattered by the Almighty God, to the believers who came to have the splendor of the snow of Zalmon.

Like the hills of Zalmon which are normally dim and naturally dark; but they turn beautiful once they are covered with snow, the field of battle become dim and dark, when the wicked kings stir up wars, but become the subject of gladness and joy for the people of God, when their conquest is realized.

Like when the Lord Christ transfigured, His garments became as white as snow, so will be the church of Christ, that are normally dim and dark, but with the reflection on it of the splendor of the Son of Righteousness, and of the virtues, which are actually the fellowship in the divine nature, namely in the features of the Lord Christ, she will glitter as white as snow

❖ By being baptized in the River Jordan, the Lord Christ established the (rite) or the form of the salvation baptism (see Matthew 3: 13-17). The word “Jordan” means (descent or going down); Down into the Jordan, the Lord Christ went, purifying the inhabitants around the Jordan from sin. As the word ‘Harmon’ is interpreted as (the way of the lamp or the light), the one disturbed, following the good counsel, has to come out of (Egypt), and follow the way of light, the way of Christ. As did the Canaanite woman, who came out from among the idol worshippers, to find Christ, and to say to Him: *“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David”* (Matthew 15: 22). And as did Moses, who came out of Egypt, became a prophet, then sent back to save the souls of the people from the land of anguish (See Exodus 2: 11; 4: 17) – The Lamp that lighten the way is as well, in the body of Christ; hence David says: *“Your word is a lamp to my feet”* (Psalm 119: 105); *“A lamp that gives light to every man”* (See John 1: 9).. The way of the lamp is the gospel that shines in the darkness, namely, the world; hence it is also written: *“It was white as snow in Zalmon”* (Psalm 68: 14 LXX); namely in the shadow for the word ‘Zalmon’ means (shadow) ¹.

St. Ambrose)

9- THE LORD SETS US AS HOLY MOUNTAINS:

“A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan; a mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan” (15)

After talking about nations, which, although have long experience in wars, and have mighty kings, yet they collapsed before the people of God at that time; Here, he compares between Mount Zion and the other mountains, cherished by the surrounding nations. Mount Zion, although small and low, compared to those high mountains, like the mountain of Bashan for example; yet it exalts above all those mountains, on account of that God chose it as His dwelling place; Mount Zion refers to the church of the New Covenant (Hebrew 12: 23).

The mountain of Bashan refers to the heathen nation, which, with envy and hatred, they boast against the people of God. Although it would not be compared with the mountain of Bashan, famed for its height, beauty, and fertility, Mount Zion is exalted through God’s choice of it; As it is said by the prophet Isaiah: *“It shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many*

¹ Prayer of David 4: 4: 14.

peoples shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the Lord of Jacob' (Isaiah 2: 1-3).

The mountain of Bashan, in spite of the fact that God did not chose it to be His holy mountain, on which to establish His temple; yet, because of its great height, beauty, and fertility, testifying to the work of God, the Mighty Creator, it is called "A mountain of God",

"Why gaze in envy, O mountains of many peak, at the mountain where God chooses to reign, where the Lord Himself will dwell forever" (16)

The mountains of many peaks, referring to the nations, boast against Mount Zion, the holy mountain of God.

The Hebrew word translated as "gaze", is translated by some as (jump). It is as though the mountains surrounding Mount Zion, the mountain of God, no longer able to endure being silent, they jump around it scoffing; and wondering how God would choose such a small and humble mountain, and disregard the haughty and fertile mountains around it!

The word "gaze" probably means that the eyes of those mountains concentrate on that mountain, trying to find something that would justify such a divine choice! This reminds us of how the apostle Paul calls the disciples, apostles, and preachers, as mountains chosen by God, saying "*God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to put to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should boast in His presence*" (1 Corinthians 1: 27-29).

❖ Get rid, O man of God, from such an ugly spirit; Do not be a burnt and a desolate mountain; But rather be a holy and strong one (16), where God likes to dwell; In you, "*the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands*" (18); Sweet fragrance of your incense would ascend up to heaven among the saints; Become a help to the earthlies; A strong conqueror in war; In you what is written would be consummated: "*The mountain of the Lord's house shall be exalted above the hills*" (Micah 4: 1); And "*The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the tops of the mountains*" (Isaiah 2: 2). Be in this honor, O you who strive, to earn the crown of joy from the Lord for the sake of your labor, while sitting in your humble cell.

(St. Abba Paula of Temoah)

10- THE LORD SETS US AS A DIVINE CHARIOT:

"The chariots of God are tens of thousand, even thousands of thousands; The Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place" (17)

Again he talks about God's care for His people in the old; when the Egyptian army perished in the Red Sea, not by human might, but by huge numbers of chariots sent by God to overcome them.

The figure 'thousand' normally refers to heavenly possibilities, as well as to an uncountable number; 'tens of thousands', and 'thousands of thousands, meaning 'millions'.

"*The Lord among them*", namely, dwells in Zion, the way He appeared before on Mount Sinai, and gave them the law on the hand of Moses.

The enemies of Israel used to terrify them by their chariots (Exodus 14: 7; Judges 4: 3; 1 Samuel 13: 5; 2 Samuel 8: 4; 10: 18). Yet, how could their chariot confront those of God?! When Elisha's prayer was heard, and the eyes of his servant were opened, "*Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha*" (2 Kings 6: 17).

- ❖ They refer to a great number of saints and believers, who, bearing God, they would become, chariots of God; dwells in them, leads them, and brings them to the ultimate end; "*Christ, the Firstfruit, afterwards those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end*" (1 Corinthians 15: 23-24). That is the holy church following Him; tens of thousands "*rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer*" (Romans 12: 12). To give the reason why they rejoice, he says that the chariot of God, is in them; And says: "*in Saini, in the holy place*"; namely, the Lord is in them, in the commandment, for "*The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good*" (Romans 7: 12).

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ **An unseen power destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea; a power called by the text "chariots and horses"; which are assumingly, a host of angels, mentioned by the prophet Habakkuk, saying "O Lord, You rode on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation" (Habakkuk 3: 8); and by David, saying: "The chariots of God are tens of thousands" (17) ¹.**

- ❖ The King who came of the seed of David, set man to be a stronghold secure from falling; which David built by grace, enforced by shields, not lying on the ground, but seen hanging on the tower, together with spears that fill the hearts of the enemy with fear, to keep him from attacking the tower. I assume that this tower with the shields and spears hanging on it, refer to the angelic guards. the mighty men fighting on our side are tens of thousands, even thousands of thousands; The Holy Book usually refers to great numbers by thousands; as said by David (17); and, "*The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of shekels of gold and silver*" (Psalm 119: 72) ².

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

- ❖ Let those who talk against the ascension as something impossible, remember that, if an angel took Ezekiel by a lock of his³, the Spirit lifted him up between earth and heaven, and brought him in visions of God (Ezekiel 8: 3); It would, therefore, be rather possible for the God of the angels and the prophets, by His own power, to ascend on a cloud from the Mount of Olives,

You can remember such wonders, but let the prominent place be given to God, the Maker of wonders; For, if those were lifted up, God is the One who lifts everything and everyone up.

If Enoch was "*taken*" (Genesis 5: 24), Jesus ascended (Acts 1: 9).

¹ عظة 3 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

² عظة 7 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

³ جاء في حزقيال 8: 3 "ومد شبه يد وأخذني بناصية رأسي ورفعني روح بين الأرض والسماء فأتى بي في رؤى الله.

If Elijah, “was taken by a chariot with horses of fire, and went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2: 11); “the chariots of Christ are thousands of thousands (Psalm 68: 17)¹.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

11- EXULTANT CAPTIVES:

Here he goes back to address the Lord Himself, saying:

“You have ascended on high, You led captivity captive; You received gifts among men, even among the rebellious – that You, O Lord God, might dwell there”
(18)

The chorus of singers used to sing this praise whenever the ark of the covenant reached the top of Zion, and put in its designated place; a praise that sounds like a military song, sung when there is a conquest on enemies. As the conqueror usually took his place high on the chariot, while the defeated kings and leaders were chained to its rear end, and follow on foot behind the conqueror. It was also the custom of the victorious kings to scatter pieces of silver on the multitudes who receive them with the spirit and shouts of joy; as well as on the defeated rebellious marching behind the chariot, as a kind of scoffing and ridicule².

“That You, O Lord, might dwell there”. Many victorious kings, after the celebrations, used to dwell for some time among their people to let them enjoy the spoils of victory, and to realize some sort of stability after the disturbance, and the huge expenses of the battle.. The Lord, likewise, dwells among His people, to proclaim His care for them, and to give them of the goodness of His conquest, namely, the fellowship in His resurrected life, and the enjoyment of the deposit of His ascension to heaven.

God shackled the devil and his angels as though with chains, and granted His people the authority over them, so as not to fear them, nor be preoccupied with them; but to be exultant by the resurrected life, and sitting in the heavenly places.

❖ The apostle referred to this, clarifying it in his talk about the Lord Jesus, saying: ***“But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men’”*** (Ephesians 4: 7-8) He gave gifts to men, sending to them the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

(St. Augustine)

“You received gifts among men”. According to **St. Augustine**, the Son, having become Man, received His Holy Spirit as a gift to our account; although He is His own eternal Spirit. And we, being His body members, getting this Holy Spirit, He counts it as though He received Him Himself; the same way when we are persecuted, He counts it as though He, Himself, is the one persecuted; saying to Saul of Tarsus: ***“Saul, Saul, why are You persecuting Me?”*** (Acts 9: 4). If He, says: ***“Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me”*** (Matthew 25: 40), Why then. you doubt that He receives in Himself the gifts received by His members?

“You led captivity captive”. We should not marvel that those captivated by the devil are liberated by the Lord Christ, to become captives of the divine love, in joy and gladness in the kingdom of God; that those who were captives to the account of the

¹ مقال 14 :25

² Adam Clarke Comm.

kingdom of darkness find their pleasure to become captives by love of the kingdom of light.

- ❖ Why would captivity not be rejoicing, if men are caught for the sake of a good cause? Being said to Peter: *“From now on, you will catch men”* (Luke 5: 10). *“Having been set free from sin, they become slaves of righteousness”* (Romans 6: 18); its own children. As He, Himself, is in them, He gives gifts to men, and receives gifts in them. That is why, in this captivity, in this servitude, in this chariot, under such a yoke, there are no thousands of men grieving, but thousands rejoicing, for the Lord is in them, in Saini, His holy place!
- ❖ Goodness is a gift from God, as according to the apostle James: *“Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the father of lights”* (James 1: 17). And as John the Baptist proclaims: *“A man can receive nothing unless it has given to him from heaven”* (John 3: 27). It is from heaven, that when Jesus ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men (Psalm 68: 18; Ephesians 4: 8). If their good worthiness are divine gifts, God will not crown your worthiness as being your own, but for it is His gifts¹.
- ❖ Remember what the psalm says: *“God has gone up with a shout”* (Psalm 47: 5). Remember what came in another psalm of the talk among the divine hosts, saying to one another: *“Lift up your heads, O you everlasting gates”* (Psalm 24: 7); Remember the psalm, saying: *“He ascended on high, and led captivity captive”*² (18); and other things previously mentioned; because of the false claims of the Jews³.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Through His passion, the Lord ascended on high, led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men (18; Ephesians 4: 8); And He granted His believers the authority to tread upon the serpents and scorpions, and upon every power of the enemy; namely, the authority upon the leader of apostasy⁴.

(St. Erinaos)

- ❖ *“He has the power to lay His life down, and has the power to take it again”* (John 10: 18) He dies, yet He grants life (John 5: 21); and by His death He brings death to destruction; He is buried, yet He is risen; He descends to the lower parts of the earth, yet to bring souls up (Ephesians 4: 8-9; Psalm 68: 18); He ascends on high; and He will come again to judge the living and the dead⁵.

(St. Gregory the Nezienzen)

12- GLORIFIED CAPTIVES:

“Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up, the God of our salvation” (19)

The Hebrew word ‘amos’, translated here as *“bears us up”*, means (supports us or helps us to bear our burdens); His care and gifts are unceasing, day after day; His mercies are new every morning; He is God of our salvation who bears our daily burdens,

¹ *Grace & Freewill, 15.*

² عا 9: 6 "الذي بنى في السماء علاليه".

³ مقال 14: 24.

⁴ *Adv. Haer 5: 24: 2: 20: 3.*

⁵ *Theological Oration 3 (29): 20 (On the Son).*

until we come to enjoy the eternal glory. Blessed be the Lord who keeps on working up to the end; captivates men every day, and receives in them – as members of His body – what He presents to them.

- ❖ He does that every day up to the end, He leads captivity captive, and receives gifts in men.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The other titles of God are divided into two distinct groups: the first group concerns His power; and the second concerns His ordinance of the world with His divine care Of the obvious examples of the titles concerning His power: *“The God of hosts; the Lord God the Almighty”* (Amos 3: 13; Revelation 4: 8); *“The King of glory”* (Psalm 24: 10); *“The king of kings, the Lord of lords”* (1 Timothy 6: 15); and, *“The Lord of hosts”* (Isaiah 1: 9; Romans 9: 29) *“be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen”* (1 Timothy 1: 17).

Concerning His divine ordinance: *“God of our salvation”* (Psalm 68: 19, 20); *“The Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs”* (Psalm 94: 1); *“God of peace”* (Romans 15: 33); *“God of righteousness”* (Psalm 4: 1); *“God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”* (Exodus 3: 6); *“God of Israel”* (see Romans 9: 6, 11, 26; Galatians 6: 16); and, *“Who have seen God face to face”* (Genesis 32: 30)¹.

(St. Gregory the Nezianden)

“Our God is the God of salvation, and to God the Lord belong escapes from death” (20)

Man often feels that there is no escape from the way of death; being a sure destiny of all mankind. Yet, life and death are in the hand of God, *“and to Him belong escapes from death”*. As the people enjoyed exodus from the land of bondage to the promised land; By the cross, He brings us forth from Hades to paradise; and carries us from the world to live in the heavenly places.

“But God will shatter the head of His enemies, the hairy crown of the one who still goes in his trespasses” (21)

Here, he probably refers to Absalom who rebelled against his father David, who has been very proud of his long and beautiful crown of hair; which eventually became for him like the rope of strangulation, when it caught in the branches of the terebinth tree, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, ending up with his death (2 Samuel 18).

“The Lord said, ‘I will bring them back from Bashan, I will bring them back from the depths of the sea’ (22)

According to St. Augustine, the word “Bashan”, meaning (confusion), and also (dryness); the Lord hears the cries of those in the midst of confusion, or of those suffering from dryness and famine; He comes back to them even if they are in the depths of the sea, to grant them peace, and true satisfaction. Sin that corrupts the heart, and brings it forth to famine, would never hinder the return of God to the sinner, to carry him back, and to embrace him in His exultant chariot, about which we have already spoken. He is the Savior of mankind; the Grantor of conquest over the devil, his hosts, and his evil works.

Concerning saying: *“I will bring back from Bashan”*, there are three views:

¹العظة اللاهوتية الرابعة رقم 30 عن الابن، 19.

a- The Lord remind His people of how He saved them from Og, king of Bashan, and his armies (Numbers 21: 32-35).

b- He mentions examples of the dangers they have confronted, of which were falling under the authority of Og, king of Bashan; and the dangers they faced in the Red Sea; from all of which the Lord did not forsake them in their anguish.

c- The talk here, is not directed to the people of God, as much as it is directed to their enemies; that even if they escape to the high mountain of Bashan, or hid in the depths of the sea, from there God will bring them back to punish them.

God, in His care for His people, and for their salvation, bring them back, even if they are in far places like Bashan, or where it would seem impossible like the depths of the sea. He cared for them when they were suffering under bondage in the land of Egypt, crossed with them through the depths of the Red Sea; and cared for their salvation when they entered into battles against Sihon and Og, kings of Bashan.

“You may bathe your feet in blood; and the tongues of your dogs may have their portion from your enemies” (23)

It has been the custom among certain peoples, that when they had conquest in battle, they used to wash their feet in the blood of their slain enemies, as a sign of their ultimate victory (2 Kings 9: 36; Isaiah 63: 1-6; Jeremiah 15: 3). According to some, that was far less horrible than drinking the blood of the slain, which portrays unimaginable fierceness and persistence on the cruelty of heart.

The believers, on the other hand, go back with their memory to the night of the exodus of the people of God from the land of Egypt, when the lintel and the two doorposts of their houses were painted with the blood of the lamb, according to the command of God, to keep the destroyer angel from entering their houses and killing their firstborns. They see in the blood of the Lord Christ, the true Lamb, a conquest over the devil and his evil hosts, purification from sins, and an enjoyment of the everlasting salvation.

“And the tongues of your dogs may have their portion from your enemies”. This reminds us of what happened to the wicked Isabel, and her man Ahab, king of Israel

About the chastisement of the wicked Egyptians on their evil, disobedience, and opposition of the divine truth, it came in the book of Revelation: *“The angel thrust his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the winepress of the wrath of God. The winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs”* (Revelation 14: 10-20).

❖ ***“You may bathe your feet in blood” (23)***; Cleanse the feet of your spirit, and the steps of your mind, with the sure confession of the cross of the Lord. Bathing your body in the blood of Christ, you cleanse the iniquities, and bear the death of Christ in your body, according to the words of the apostle, saying: *“always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus”* (2 Corinthians 4: 10) ¹.

(St. Ambrose)

13- GREAT SINGERS OF PRAISE:

“They have seen Your procession, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary” (24)

¹ Exposition of Luke 5: 105-106.

This portrays what used to happen whenever they came with the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem after their conquests in battle; when the heart of David, the psalmist and king, danced, and his inner depths shouted for joy, seeing the procession of victory under the leadership of God Himself; the ark of the covenant representing His presence among His people, and His leadership of them.

The singers of praise used to receive the procession of victory, with songs that glorified God, the Grantor of salvation; the girls, came out with tumbrels in their hands; and all the people, young and old, joined the procession blessing God, the Grantor of conquest.

Here, the psalmist, together with the whole congregation, praises the Lord God of all; Yet, not disregarding the touches of personal love, and the special relationship between himself and God; he says: “*my God*”, “*my king*”. What preoccupy him, is not the conquest itself, as much as the ways of the Lord, God of the impossible, the Holy God, the Conqueror of darkness, corruption, and evil.

“*Into the sanctuary*”: He praises God, the Holy One, who descends to lead His people in their battle against the devil, sin, and darkness; turns the field of the battle into divine sanctuaries; and turns the earth into a holy heaven.

❖ “*They have seen Your procession, O God*” The procession, or the (feet), of those who are with You during Your coming to the world, as though they are the chariot of clouds, very close to Him, being His saints and believers; according to the Scripture: “*Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds*” (Mark 13: 26) Those are “*Your procession*” of those, by whose (feet) the grace of the New Covenant is proclaimed; Hence it is written: “*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things*” (Romans 10: 15; Isaiah 53: 7; Nahum 1: 15). That grace, and those feet are hidden in the Old Covenant; but when the fullness of time has come, it gives pleasure to God to proclaim among the nations, sending His Son (Galatians 4: 4); “*They have seen Your procession, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary*” (24).

(St. Augustine)

“*The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; Among them were the maidens playing tumbrels*” (25)

A magnificent portrait of the procession of the perpetually victorious church of Christ, preceded by the thanksgiving congregation, praising the Good Lord, who turns the afflictions and the battles into gladness and unceasing feasts; followed by the musicians, who, led by the Holy Spirit, play on the strings of their bodies, senses, emotions, thoughts, and all the energies of their Spirit, and soul, to produce a holy symphony that proclaims love toward God. Those are the congregation, physically and spiritually holy, in whom, and by whom, the Spirit of God works, as precious musical instruments. Whereas in the middle of the procession are the maidens playing tumbrels; who are the heart of the church that dance with joy and exultation for God’s salvation work. In short, the whole procession is one of shouting, exultation, and unceasing heavenly joy.

This seemingly, out of the ordinary portrait, which occurs when there is a battle that ends in conquest, and the legions of soldiers turn into a religious procession, led by priests and Levites; a procession preceded by the Ark of the Covenant. is, as actually, a procession experienced by the believer, who daily enjoys new conquests, and his depths

set forth from glory to glory, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God, in the heavenly Jesus Christ, who unceasingly brings our hearts up high to the heavenly glories.

The word “singers”, in the Septuagint version, came as ‘rulers’, who, according to **St. Augustine**, refer to the apostles who precede the congregation, singing the joyful tidings of the gospel, playing on the musical instruments of the good works, to praise and glorify the Lord.

Those apostles, together with the maidens playing the tumbrels, namely, the ministers, practice the honorable ministry through submitting their bodies to the account of the kingdom of God.

“Bless God in the great congregation, praise the Lord in the fountain of Israel” (26)

The religious procession of conquest is set, not only in the tabernacle of the meeting, or in the temple, but also in the congregations, who, according to **St. Augustine**, are the churches that bless the Lord, playing on the timbrels, namely, on the chaste bodies that produce spiritual tunes. They are the congregations coming out from the fountain of Israel; namely, from the fountains of salvation, that set out of humanity a holy people of God.

The believer sees the living leader, as one of a holy congregation, whose senses, emotions, thoughts, etc. have no other work but to glorify God by some way or another. Sees the true Christian home, as a holy assembly, where the Lord Christ dwells. And the holy assembly, as the church that embraces the believers, from Adam to the end of time, that turns, on the great day of the Lord, into a heavenly procession on the clouds, setting forth in the company of the heavenly Groom, together with the heavenly hosts, exultant for the glorified bride.

According to **St. Jerome**, “*the fountain of Israel*” here, refers to the fountains of the Savior that flow with the evangelic teaching, according to the saying of the Lord Christ Himself (John 7: 37-39) ¹.

“There is little Benjamin, their leader, the princes of Judah and their company, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali” (27)

The Son, having become our Representative, and our Bearer in Himself, the Father set, and lifted Him up; for us, as members of His body, to be set and lifted up in Him and by Him, to heavens.

Here is a description of another aspect of that joyful procession, of which he mentions four tribes as representatives of the church of the Old Covenant, united with the church of the New Covenant.

a- He starts with the little Benjamin, the royal tribe during the reign of the first king of Israel – Saul the son of Kish. Then, because of the wicked things done by Saul, that tribe lost its royal status, and could have perished altogether (Judges 19: 21). Yet among this same tribe there were saintly men, who God could never forget because of the evil of the majority. Although Benjamin became little, yet God mentions them as participants of the procession, to open the gate of hope before everyone in every era, and not to despair on account of the evil done by his family or his society!

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist, by the eye of prophecy, sees the apostle Paul, the preacher among the Gentiles, who describes himself as “*of the tribe of Benjamin*” (Philippians 3: 5).

¹ *Commentary on Isaiah 4: 12: 3.*

In the Septuagint version, it came, “Benjamin that is in ecstasy”; Having talked about the exultant church that blesses God in an ecstasy of joy, enjoys the vision of God and the recognition of His secrets. She is the New ‘Benjamin’, namely, the daughter who sits on the right hand of her heavenly Father as a queen; on account of that the word ‘Benjamin’ means (the son of the right hand).

b- *“Their leader, the princes of Judah”*. As ‘Judah’ means (confession’ or (thanksgiving), the church confesses the goodness of God, who chose her a heavenly queen. Although Judah, took the place of ‘Benjamin’ as the royal tribe, and got the authority and reign. Yet the two tribes join together to partake of the procession of salvation, with the spirit of love, humility, and unity, on an eternal level.

c- *“The princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali”*. ‘Zebulun’, meaning (a dwelling place), seeking to dwell in heaven, she rids herself of all the temporal things. And as ‘Naphtali’ meaning (spacious), she bears the feature of her Groom, the true love, and her heart would become spacious for God to dwell in, as a lover of all humanity. Although the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were so far from Jerusalem, to have a significant role in the life of the people of Israel; yet the psalmist mentions them as representatives of all the tribes, or of all the people. God does not disregard the work of any man or of any congregation.

“Your God has commanded your strength; strengthen, O God, what you have done for us” (28)

The psalmist ended his talk to the people by invoking the spirit of peace in them. As God issued His command for their strength and glory; they are, therefore committed to present a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to Him for His care.

Now he addresses his talk to God, to thank Him for what He has done for His people before, and for His divine command to the account of the glory of His people at present. Then, he asks Him to consummate His work, not that God is not faithful in putting His promises into effect, but because man sometimes forgets God in the time of comfort, after getting an abundance of His blessings.

❖ Knowing well that, by his own efforts, he cannot guarantee the increase of his success; the blessed David raises to God renewed prayers to guide him in his work, saying: “Guide, O God, the work of our hand”, and, *“Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us” (28)*¹.

(St. John Cassian)

“Because of Your temple at Jerusalem, Kings will bring presents to You” (29)

With the spirit of prophecy, the psalmist talks about the Gentile nations who will come to faith, to become members in the church, and to present gifts to God. He talks about heathen kings and rulers who will believe, like the great king Constantine; and talks, as well about every believer who come from the Gentiles, who will become a king through being united with the King of kings, and the Lord of lords.

❖ *“Abraham became nations”*, namely, his faith moved forth to the nations and kings of the world, who became believers, submitted to the authority of the Lord Jesus, about whom it is written: ***“Kings will bring presents to Him” (29)***. This is not something against reason; For the descendants of Abraham will not only become kings, rank-

¹ *The Institutes, 12: 14.*

wise, but will become kings, by not being enslaved to sin, nor under the authority of death¹.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ What presents would be more acceptable to God, than the sacrifices of praise?!

(St. Augustine)

“Rebuke the beasts of the reeds; the herd of bulls among the calves of the nations, till everyone submits himself with pieces of silver. Scatter the peoples who delight in war” (30)

Who are the beasts of the reeds, whom the psalmist asks God to rebuke, but the crocodiles, and other wild aquatic and Amphibians beasts, who are symbols of those who intend to devour the church, and of the opponents of the gospel of salvation; among both the Jews and the Gentiles, who find pleasure in opposing the Truth, and in entering into war against the children of God?! He beseeches the Lord to scatter them, namely, to corrupt their plots, as He did with that of Saul of Tarsus, when He led him to the Truth, to become a preacher, after being a blasphemer, slanderer, and persecutor.

The devil cannot endure to see the church of Christ, enjoy strength and power; and to see her members become kings and priests, who present acceptable gifts, namely, songs of thanksgiving and fellowship; he hastens to provoke on them the wicked opponents like beasts of the reed, bulls and calves from among the nations.

❖ By calling them bulls, because of the pride of their arrogant, and untamable necks, he refers to the heretics; And by saying “*the calves of nations*”, I assume he refers to the souls that are easily swayed away to follow those bulls; The heretics cannot lead all the people, among whom there are serious and steadfast men; about whom it is written: “*I will give You thanks in the great congregations*” (Psalm 35: 18); Yet they manage to lead astray the calves they find among those peoples; “*For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts*” (2 Timothy 3: 6-7).

(St. Augustine)

❖ Seeing by the spirit of prophecy how we should be, concerning those wild beasts, like the inhabitants of heaven; and saying: “*Rebuke the beasts of the reed*” (30). the blessed prophet David actually, does not refer to the woods, shaken by the running around of the wild beasts, and terrified by their roar; but to the woods about which is written: “*We find it in the fields of the woods*” (Psalm 132: 6); in which, “*The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree; He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon*” (Psalm 92: 12). Out of such a wood, will come the food of the heavenly Word (the Logos); Into which Paul entered as a vicious wolf, and from which he came out a shepherd of sheep, for “*their line has gone out through the earth, and their word to the end of the world*” (Psalm 19: 4).

But now, the fury of the lions, the jumps of the leopards, the deception of the foxes, and the snatching of the wolves, against us, have come to an end by the Holy Spirit. Great is therefore, the grace that turned the earth into heaven; And, instead of going around before, like wild beasts in a wood, “*our citizenship is now in heaven*”.(Philippi 3: 20).

¹ On Abraham 2: 10: 77.

(St. Cyprian)

- ❖ **“Rebuke the beasts of the reed”**; namely, rebuke men who write iniquities, talk lies against the Lord, and raise their voices against the Most High¹.

(St. Jerome)

“Envoys will come out of Egypt, Ethiopia will hasten to stretch out her hands to God” (31)

By saying “hasten”, translated by some as (go ahead of), the psalmist refers to the Gentiles who preceded the Jews, to become the bride of Christ, the church of the Gentiles, which, once consummate, the Jews will come to believe in the Lord Christ in the fullness of time, according to the saying of the apostle Paul (Romans 11: 25-26).

St. Augustine sees in Egypt and Ethiopia, a reference to the Gentiles as a whole, from which will come the ambassadors of Christ to preach the joyful word of the gospel, and to hasten to stretch out their hands to God, proclaiming their faith in works.

- ❖ He said nothing more than **“Ethiopia will hasten to stretch out her hands to God” (31)**; Namely, by believing in Him, she will come to Him together with her children, namely, her works.
- ❖ The apostles were not chosen, to preach the Christian faith. from Israel alone, but from the Gentiles as well,

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ **“Ethiopia will hasten to stretch out her hands to God”**. By that he refers to the holy church, who describes herself in the Song of songs: **“I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem”** (Song 1: 5); ‘Dark’ by sin, and ‘lovely’ by grace; ‘dark’ by nature, and ‘lovely’ by salvation; ‘dark’ by the dust of her past works, then became ‘lovely’ after being crowned by the adoration of conquest².

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ The bride could be “dark and lovely” at the same time. But be aware that, without presenting a true repentance, your soul will be described as ‘dark and ugly’, on account that you are ‘dark’ with your past sins, and ‘ugly’ because you persist on doing them. Whereas, if you present a true repentance, although your soul will still be ‘dark’ because of sin, Yet, on account of your repentance, she will have the Ethiopian beauty; as it came in the Holy Book, when Aaron and Miriam spoke against their brother Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married (Numbers 12: 1). Now, the New Moses, as well, has taken for Himself an Ethiopian wife; and His commands came to us; Let Aaron, the Jewish priest, and let Miriam, representing his assembly, let them talk; As the new Moses does not give much weight to their talk; for He loves His Ethiopian wife, about whom the prophet says: **“From the far depths of the river they give you presents”** (8); and also: **“An Ethiopian will precede the hands of Israel before God”** (31). The way the Holy Book truly says in the New Testament that the woman with a flow of blood preceded the daughter of the ruler of the Synagogue (Matthew 9: 18), the Ethiopian woman has been healed of her sin, while Israel is still sick, **“for through their fall, they provoked the Gentiles to jealousy, and salvation has come to them”** (Romans 11: 11).

¹ Letter 108 to Eustochium, 23.

² On the Holy Spirit 2: 10: 112.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ Now, let us try to interpret the saying of the apostle Paul, that all Israel will be saved with the entrance of the fullness of the Gentiles. If the major part of Israel have fallen, yet *“there is a remnant according to the election of grace”* (Romans 11: 5); a remnant, about which God said in Elijah: *“I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal”* (1 King 19: 18).

In an interpretation of the meaning of this remnant, the apostle Paul says: *“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace”* (Romans 11: 5). There was, therefore, a remnant of salvation in Israel, even if it was cast away.

The apostle did not say: [when all nations are saved, all Israel will then be saved], but said: [*“Hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved”* (Romans 11: 25, 26)]. Israel then, will be saved, not after all the Gentiles are saved, but when *“the fullness of the Gentiles”*¹ are saved. (the expression: ‘fullness of the Gentiles’, means the part of the Gentiles that reaches a level of fullness, namely, of perfection)... Who can reckon, by his mind, the time remaining until all the nations come to worship God?! As it is written: *“From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, My worshippers, My scattered people, will bring Me offering”* (Zephaniah 3: 10); and as psalm 68 says: *“Ethiopia will hasten to stretch out her hands to God”* (31). When will the time come for “the Word of God” to give the command to all the kingdoms of the earth, saying: *“Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth; Oh, sing praises to the Lord God”*? (32)².

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ The angel of the Lord called Philip on his way, concerning the very pious Ethiopian eunuch, saying to him: *“Go near and overtake the chariot”* (Acts 8: 29). Teaching the eunuch and baptizing him, he went to Ethiopia as an apostle of Christ. Then *“the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, and passing through, he preached in all cities till he came to Caesarea”* (Acts 8: 40)³.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

14- A CALL TO ALL THE NATIONS TO ENJOY THE DIVINE GIFTS:

“Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth; Oh, sing praises to the Lord” (32)

The desire of David’s heart, the Chief Singer, is to see the whole world turn into a chorus of singers of praise to God. Calling the whole world to faith, he asks them to shout, and to sing to God their Savior; for he, whose heart turns into a chorus of singers, would have definitely received faith.

“To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, which were of old! Indeed He sends out His voice, a mighty voice” (33)

Having ascended to the heaven of heavens, the Lord sends out His mighty voice, capable of drawing, even the opponents, to believe in Him, and to attach to Him, to enjoy the deposit of heaven.

¹ يقصد بتعبير "ملء الأمم" الجزء الذي من الأمم والذي وصل إلى درجة "الامتلاء" أي إلى درجة الكمال.

² عظائم للعلامة أوريجينوس على سفر إرميا ترجمة جاكلين سمير كوستي، 4: 5.

³ مقال 17: 25.

- ❖ The Groom says: [It is not enough to get up from your fall on the ground, but you have to make progress in doing good, and reach the end of the way in virtue]. We can learn that from the event of healing the paralytic in the gospel (Matthew 9: 6). The Lord Christ did not just tell him to take up his bed, but commanded him to go; which, in my opinion bears a sense of progress toward perfection. There is power in that command; as indeed the voice of the Lord is a mighty voice (33). *“For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood firm”* (Psalm 33: 9). See also what the Groom says to His bride: *“Rise up my love, and come away”* (Song 2: 10); and the bride, right away receives the power of the Word of God, rises up, approaches Him, and comes close to the light. And seeing her, the Word of God testifies to her, saying: *“My beloved spoke, and said to me, ‘Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away’* (Songs 2: 10)¹.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

In the Septuagint version it came as: *‘To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens eastward’* (33). According to St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian, the Lord Christ who came from the East, looks at the world, which, consequently, is drawn toward the East, longing to hear His divine voice.

- ❖ Unless one believes in His resurrection and ascension, he would not be able to understand these words about Christ. Yet, does not He, by adding the term “eastward”, means that same location, where He resurrected and ascended in the East? Hence, on the heaven of heavens, He sat on the right hand of the Father; according to the saying of the apostle: *“He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens”* (Ephesians 4: 10).

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ It is so realized to us that our Lord Jesus Christ is sitting, with His Manhood, on His throne in the East, with His face toward the world; that everyone who prays toward the East, and worships between His hands, prays and supplicates to his mercy².

(St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian)

“Ascribe power to God; His majesty is over Israel, and His power is in the clouds” (34)

When the world hears the voice of the Savior, the Lord benefits nothing, as He is in no need for our worship, which comes back to us; and the new Israel, namely, the church would be filled with the shining and the splendor of God; and the power of the Savior would be proclaimed in His saints, who are likened to the clouds.

“Awesome is God in His sanctuary, the God of Israel, He gives power and strength to His people. Blessed be God” (35)

God sets out of His believers a holy temple, that bears His splendor in it; and grants it power and heavenly possibilities, so that all would become a chorus to praise God the Savior of the world.

- ❖ *“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil To You be the majesty, the power, and the glory, forever”*. God grants power to him who obeys Him, as is written: *“He gives power and strength to His people”* (35).

¹ عظة 5 على نشيط الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

² تفسير تك 2: 7-8.

(St. Steven of Thebes)

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 68

THE PROCESSION OF CHRIST ASCENDING UP TO HEAVENS

- ❖ Seeing Your amazing procession, the heavenly creatures receive You with awe and exalted exultation.
You alone, who is from heaven, can bring us forth to Your heaven;
That where You dwell, You let us, members of Your body, dwell together with You.
You receive us as holy chariots, that ascend, and no one can stand on their way.
As You are the Leader of the whole procession.
The devil and his hosts would stir up, but, like smoke before the wind, they would be scattered.
And like wax before the fire, they would melt.
- ❖ You lead Your heavenly procession; and the fatherless would find in You a Father to them;
And the widows, and the persecuted, would find in You a just Judge.
You set out of them chariots of fire; make them a holy temple;
And bring them forth into the higher Jerusalem;
Where You set for those cast away a home to settle down;
And for Yourself a dwelling place to find comfort.
You loosen the shackles of the captives and set them free;
You captivate them with Your love, and the riches of Your grace;
Instead of the dark and gloomy captivity of the devil, they will be captivated by Your righteousness, and will be filled with joy.
Carrying Your sweet yoke, they will partake of the praise of the heavenlies.
- ❖ Down on Your people of the old, You poured manna;
And now You pour on them Your Holy Spirit, a Leader and a Sanctifier;
Your Spirit grants them an exalted beauty;
They fly as though by the wings of a dove, covered by the silver of Your word;
And its feathers bear the heavenly features;
Pouring on them an exalted splendor, instead of their dark nature, they become like snow.
- ❖ By Your amazing procession, You reveal Your ways to Your believers.
Coming to recognize Your secrets, they are filled with joy and exultation.
And they will never cease to play music together;
They will play with their spirits, bodies, minds, emotions, and feelings.
Their whole being will exult to You in every way;
Glory be to You, O the amazing Leader of the procession.
- ❖ Your procession is amazing, embracing Your believers, who You have chosen by Your love!
You make out of them mountains for Yourself, like Mount Zion, adorned by Your holy house.
In themselves, they have nothing to boast;

But Your thirst for the, and Your longing to dwell in them is the secret of their splendor.

❖ How amazing You are, O Holy One!

You came down to me; encountered me; who is buried in the tomb of my sins!

For my sake, You received passion, death, and burial;

By Your might, You are risen, and destroyed all the powers of the devil;

Bringing me forth to the procession of Your conquest, I shall perpetually live by the gladness and power of Your resurrection!

❖ You sent to me Your Holy Spirit, a Leader of Your church;

Like a rushing wind, He scattered my evil like smoke;

To make me enjoy a true sight of the secrets of Your love for me;

And like a fire, You consume all the thorns of sins;

And kindle in them fires of love, that the whole world cannot quench.

❖ How amazing You are in Your leadership!

Your presence destroys evil, and makes Your believers glad!

By Your presence, the darkness is scattered, and our souls exult and sing Your praise.

Teach me how to sing to You by the psalms;

How to utter them with my tongue, how to sing them with my heart and mind!

And how to practice them with all my body members.

❖ If the enemy deceived me by his false role,

If he filled me with darkness, and caused me to become a 'land of sunset'!

I reject his deceptive light; and accept Your leadership;

Shine on me, I pray, O Sun of Righteousness; Occupy my heart, to become for You 'a land of sunrise'.

Shine, O heavenly Groom, in my inner man!

❖ O Leader of the procession of conquest;

O Father of the fatherless, Defender of the widows, and Liberator of the captives;

I have rejected the fatherhood and the fellowship of the devil;

Come to me; I am an orphan, a widower, and a captive!

Come, Let me dwell among those who are in need of You;

To make me a sanctuary, bearing the spirit of holiness, love, and unity.

Liberate my soul from the chains of sin; Set me free from the tomb of my iniquities;

Go ahead of me, O the Resurrection; let me go together with You.

❖ Let me, together with You, cross over the wilderness of this life;

Let the old man in me shake like a dry land;

Rain on my soul the work of Your grace to become a new heaven;

Go along with me through Sinai, full of temptations and sufferings;

Until I come to enjoy the heavenly Canaan.

- ❖ Rain on me an abundance of Your grace;
That amazing rain You have designated for Your children, Your inheritance;
You alone, know the poverty and dryness of my life;
You alone, grant me Your heavenly rain – the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ From heaven, You have rained the law on Your people;
It proved weak, as it threatened punishment, and did not present grace!
As for us, we are so weak, yet in You, we came to be Your complete heritage;
For You delivered Yourself a Grace to us, O Grantor of the heavenly gifts!
- ❖ O sweet Leader, Mighty King of hosts;
By Your sweetness You made me rich;
And by Your Spirit, You granted me the strength to preach Your works;
To bring forth a multitude of spoils to Your house.
- ❖ Grant me, O my Leader, to lie among the portions;
To rest among Your divine promises;
To become in Your sight like a pure dove;
To fly by the wings of love up to the branches of the tree of the cross;
To let my depths have the heavenly features.
- ❖ Grant me authority, and set me a king;
Let me, by Your Holy Spirit, know how to control my body;
Let me deliver to You all my body members, as tools of righteousness that
work to the account of Your kingdom.
- ❖ Grant me to enjoy the evangelic life of the church;
To come to be like a dove that flies with purity and simplicity toward the
heavenlies;
And like a mighty mountain that bears the fruition of the Spirit;
And as a fiery chariot that never ceases to strife spiritually against the
darkness.

PSALM 69

SCREAMS OF A CAST- OUT

This psalm is considered the second one after psalm 22, as far as the number of quotations taken from it are concerned in the books of the New Testament. It is considered as a Messianic psalm that refers to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ and to His salvation work.

Yet, there is a controversy among the scholars, is to whether it is a prophetic psalm, written by the psalmist David to prophesy the coming of Christ, and the realization of His salvation work; or it is symbolic, on account of that David, being a man of suffering, talks about himself as a symbol of the Lord Christ.

Quotations in the New Testament:

a- Psalm 69: 4 in John 15: 25

b- Psalm 69: 9 in John 2: 17; Romans 15: 3.

c- Psalm 69: 21 in Matthew 27: 34, 48; Mark 15: 23; John 19: 28-29.

d- Psalm 69: 25 in Acts 1: 16, 20.

According to Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus: It is a prophetic psalm, talking about the passion of Christ, and the ultimate destruction of the Jews because of it.

Its features:

1- Many scholars see a kind of analogy between it and psalm 22.

2- In the Hebrew text, it is characterized by a beautiful style of writing, and by its poetic nature.

3- This psalm represents a personal lamentation of a bitter soul, because of the multitude of violent opponents; but like most of the other psalms of its kind, it ends with a praise of thanksgiving to God, and a great joy in His salvation; starting from verse 30 to its end.

4- This psalm was mostly sung in the collective worships, to give comfort to the suffering souls; to kindle the hearts to jealousy on the house of God (9), and to endure the suffering for the sake of God (7, 9).

Its divisions:

1- A lamentation from the heart	1 – 12
2- An urgent plea for salvation	13 – 21
3- Seeking punishment on the evil opponents	22 – 28
4- A praise of conquest	29 – 35

The title:

An urgent plea for help in trouble.

To the Chief Musician. "Set to the lilies". A psalm of David.

The expression "Set to the lilies" came in psalms 45, 69, and 80.

According to **St. Augustine**: Psalm 45 is the psalm of the secret place of the king; It is the psalm of the heavenly wedding between the Lord Christ and His bride, the church; Of the King and the queen, sitting on His right hand; And of the Savior and His people, redeemed by His blood.

Psalm 69 is the psalm of the cross, on which Christ endures death for the sake of His bride.

And psalm 80 concerns the vine moved by the Lord from Egypt – the land of bondage – to the promised land, planted by His right hand.

The three psalms concern the church, the bride, and the queen, to whom her groom gave as a dowry, His precious blood; whom He planted by Himself, and taken care of. That bride described by the Groom: “*Like a lily among thorns, so is My love among the maidens*” (Song 2: 2).

1- A LAMENTATION FROM THE HEART:

“Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck” (1)

The psalmist starts by describing his condition as someone in the middle of a sea of afflictions and troubles; someone drowning, and swallowed by whirlpools and violent waves.

Those were the same feelings of the prophet Jonah inside the belly of the great fish, saying: “*For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas All Your billows and Your waves passed over me*” (Jonah 2: 3).

In another place, the psalmist says: “*He drew me out of many waters*” (Psalm 18: 16).

According to **St. Augustine**, the Lord Christ alone, by His own free will, received death. As for us, although we do not receive it by our will, yet we endure it with perseverance, on account of that, it is the only way to get attached to Him; It is befitting of us to drink the bitterness presented by the Jews to Christ during His passion. Indeed, the temporal pleasure may be enjoyable, and the temporary temptations may be bitter; but we disregard both for the sake of the sweetness of the everlasting life.

❖ He says that the water came up to His neck; for those multitudes, to whom he refers to as waters, were capable of realizing the death of Christ Crying out like He is suffering against His will, is only because the Head here represents the suffering members. He suffered because He intended to; whereas the martyrs did not. He told Peter about his future sufferings, saying: “*When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish*” (John 21: 18). Although we desire to approach Christ, yet we do not wish to die. That is why, by our own free will, or by perseverance, we suffer, for there is no other way before us (except suffering), to get attached to Christ.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Do not trust in things that perpetually flow like a torrent flood, and that would not let you stand fast. No one can stand on water, but all would find it more secure to stand on a solid rock. The spiritual things in this life are like rocks; hence the psalmist says: “*Set my feet upon a rock*” (Psalm 40: 2); while the temporal things are like water and mire; hence he says: “*the waters have come up to my neck; I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing*” (1, 2). I wish we can take that into consideration, to be able to reach the appearance of Christ¹.

(St. John Chrysostom)

The prophet David was not someone who weakens before temptations and afflictions; but this psalm reveals the extent of troubles he faced, that he felt as though he was about to drown.

¹ *Homilies on 2 Tim., 9.*

The Lord Christ, with His undeniable incarnation; as far as His Manhood is concerned, and with His love and humility, He truly suffered to carry our sufferings, and to share our troubles; which the New Testament has proclaimed, and made prominent, to confirm the truth of His incarnation. He prayed, saying: *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”* (Matthew 26: 39); And, *“Now, My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour”* (John 12: 27); And about Him it was written: *“Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers, and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear”* (Hebrew 5: 7).

“I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me” (2)

The psalmist portrays himself as a man in a whirlpool of a river or a sea of mire, steadily going down, no firm place to put his feet on, or to sit for a while to think how to act. He was in need of an outside help.

According to **St. Augustine**, the persecutor, and the persecuted, are both of mire, as it is written: *“The Lord formed man from the dust of the ground”* (Genesis 2: 7); yet the first, because he has lost the righteousness, has become deeper mire; Whereas the anguish has turned the one persecuted into an image and a likeness of God, namely, after being mire. he becomes like gold,

❖ Thanks to His mercy, He who came to the depth of the sea, and let Himself be swallowed by a great fish, but vomited Him on the third day (Matthew 12: 40; Jonah 2: 10). He came down to the same depth where we were cast as well, where we met our destruction; there He came by Himself; suffered the waves of the shouts of men, saying: *“Crucify Him, crucify Him!”*; and with the increasing violence of the storm, He went down to the depths of the sea. The Lord endured suffering on the hands of the Jews, of which He did not suffer, nor let Peter suffer when they both walked on the water (Matthew 14: 25).

(St. Augustine)

“I am weary with my crying; My throat is dry; My eyes fail while I wait for my God” (3)

The psalmist proclaims that his eyes failed while waiting for someone to rescue and save him from what He is going through, beside the intense sorrow that dwells upon his soul; something that would also happen with the heart, mind, and the body as a whole. And in another situation he says: *“My eyes waste away with grief, Yes, my soul and my body! For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; My strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away”* (Psalm 31: 9).

According to **St. Augustine**, the Lord Himself kept silent during His trial; according to another psalm, saying: *“I am like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth there is no response”* (Psalm 38: 14); and to what came in Isaiah: *“He was oppressed and He was afflicted; yet He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth”* (Isaiah 53: 7). So how could He say here: *“I am weary of my crying; my throat is dry”* (3)?

He said: *“My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me”?* (Psalm 22: 1); But how loud was His voice, and for how long were His cries, to have his throat dry? For

long, He cried out, saying: “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites*” (Matthew 23: 13), to His saying:

“*Woe to the world because of offenses*” (Matthew 18: 7); For long, He cried out, that many of His disciples said: “*This is a hard saying; who can understand it?*” (John 6: 60). He said all those words, but His throat became dry concerning those who did not understand Him.

Concerning saying: “*My eyes fail while I wait for my God*” (3), He does not refer to the eyes in his head. Having particularly come to reconcile the world with the Father; how could his eyes fail from hope in the Father?! The talk here, according to St. Augustine, concerns the eyes in his body, namely in His members; It is the voice of His members, and not of the Head.

❖ Unless you become a servant, you are committed to wail upon yourself, saying: “*I am weary of my crying; my throat is dry*” (3); lest it would be said to you, as it was said to “*that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required*” (Luke 12: 47, 48). The greater the knowledge we take, the more danger we are in.

(St. Steven of Thebes)

Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head. They are mighty who would destroy me. Being my enemies wrongfully. What I did not steal, must I now restore (4)

The whole psalm came portraying the sufferings that dwelt upon the prophet David, not on account of any crime he committed, but of the envy of the wicked against him. He suffered for the sake of God, because he took the upright way of life. So was the Lord Christ, who was wrongfully oppressed, instead of what Adam and his descendants should have endured.

In His farewell talk, the Lord said to His disciples: “*If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin, but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father*” (John 15: 24-25).

Number-wise, his enemies were more than the hairs of his head; and possibility-wise, they cherished and boasted their might as well.

But what grieved his heart is that what has dwelt upon him was without cause. If he did them something wrong, he would readily apologize or restore it; but it is just for mere hatred and envy buried deep in their hearts.

They pay His love back with animosity, and as he said somewhere else: “*They reward me evil for good, to the sorrow of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth*” (Psalm 35: 12, 13).

David was wrongly accused when Shimei the son of Gera came out, cursing continuously and throwing stones at him, saying: “*Come out! come out! You blood-thirsty man, you rogue! The Lord has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a blood-thirsty man*” (2 Samuel 16: 7-8);

The Lord Christ has unjustly endured the sufferings on our behalf; as according to Isaiah: “*Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He*

was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisements for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we were healed” (Isaiah 53: 4-5). And St. Peter says: “For Christ only suffered once for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3: 18).

By His own free will, the incarnate Word of God chose to fulfill the divine justice in Himself, for sins, transgressions, and iniquities, He did not commit, but it was Adam and his descendants who did. In Him the law was fulfilled, although He never broke the law; in order to bring back those who have gone astray to the righteousness, which He is its Source.

So, if David has suffered without cause, because of the envy of some against him, the Son of David has suffered on behalf of the whole humanity, to fulfill her debt, and to present to her His righteousness and holiness.

The psalmist says about the Lord Christ, that His enemies were more than the hairs of His head. The Lord was crucified on Mount “Golgotha”, meaning (place of the skull) (Matthew 27: 33), from which His hair was uprooted by those who hated Him without cause. So now, being members of His body, let us be hated by the world hate, yet without a cause; and let us not hate it back!

❖ Now, O Christian, If the world must hate you, Why do not you let it hate you without a cause?!

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*What I did not steal, must I now restore*” (4). Unjustly enduring death, Christ paid back what Adam should justly have. The later stretched his hand to a sweet fruit; whereas the Former stretched His to the bitter cross. The one stretched it toward the tree of death, and the Other stretched it toward the tree of salvation. One rose himself high against God and fell down; whereas Christ humbled Himself to raise all mankind. Adam brought death forth on everyone, whereas Christ restored life to them all¹.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

❖ Glory be to the High One, who mixed our minds with His salt, and our souls with His leaven.

Glory be to Him, whose body became bread to give life to our death!

Glory be to the Judge who was judged;

Who made His twelve disciples judge the tribes; And the illiterate rebuke the literate of the Gentiles².

❖ The nations came forth to watch His afflictions!

Glory be to the only-begotten Son of the Good One, who was rejected by the sons of the no-good!

Glory be to the only-begotten Son of the Righteous, who was crucified by the sons of the wicked!

Glory be to the One who loosened our bonds, and was bound for our sake!

Glory be to the Beautiful One, who restored us to His image!

Glory be to the Good One, who did not look at our ugliness!

Glory be to Him who planted His light in the darkness!

¹ Sermon 112: 1.

² مقتطف عن التسبحة الثانية من تسابيح الميلاد بتصرف.

4) Glory be to Him who took away the filthy garments away from us (Zechariah 3: 4)!

His body became bread to greet our death!

Praise be to the Rich who paid back on our behalf what he did not borrow (Psalm 69: 4; Luke 16: 6)!

Praise be to Him who wrote against Himself a instrument, by which He became indebted¹!

❖ Glory be to Him who by carrying His yoke, He broke the chains by which the enemy shackled us!

Praise be to the Rich who paid back on our behalf what he did not borrow (Psalm 69: 4; Luke 16: 6)!

Praise be to Him who wrote against Himself a instrument, by which He became indebted!

Glory be to the hidden Vinedresser of our minds! Whose seeds fell on our land, enriched our minds, and produced hundredfold in the treasure of our souls!

Blessed be “the Shepherd” who became a “Lamb” for the sake of our reconciliation!

Blessed be to “the Branch” who became a “Cup” for the sake of our salvation!

Blessed be to “the Bunch”, who became the “Medicine” of our life!

Blessed be to “the Farmer” who became “Wheat”, to be planted, and a package to be cut off!

Praise be to Him who bore the curse on our behalf by His crown of thorns!

Praise be to Him who put death to death by His death!

Praise be to Him who rebuked the death who has overcome us!

(St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian)

❖ On another aspect, concerning the Lord Christ “*No guile was found in His mouth*” (1 Peter 2: 22; Isaiah 53: 9). He who showed every righteousness and humility, did not come under such kind of suffering out of worthiness, but it was forced on Him, to fulfill in Himself the prophecies of the prophets; as the Spirit of Christ has sung beforehand, saying:

“They reward Me evil for good” (Psalm 35: 12)

“What I did not steal, must I now restore” (Psalm 69: 4).

“They pierced My hands and My feet; they counted all My bones; they looked and stirred at Me” (Psalm 22: 16-17).

“They gave Me gall for My food; and for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69: 21)

“They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast a lot” (Psalm 22: 18).

He endured all that, not for any evil He committed, but for the prophecies of the prophets to be fulfilled in Him.

(The scholar Tertullian)

❖ It is obvious that “hair” sometimes refer to virtues, and other times to sins. Talking about his sins, the prophet says: “The uncountable hair of my head”¹

¹ التسبحة الثانية.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

“O God, You Know my foolishness; and my sins are not hidden from You” (5)

Some may wonder: how can the prophet David count what dwelt upon him as oppression; and say, though he has stolen nothing, yet he still must restore it (4); Yet here, he confesses His foolishness and sins?!

a- If what dwelt upon him from his enemies was not because of some sin or evil he has committed against them, Yet, he could not be justified before God; as it could have been a chastisement from God for some sins he committed in secret.

b- As far as the Lord Christ who is blameless and sinless, is concerned; the sufferings, crucifixion, and death, He endured, were not for some sin He has committed, but was an atonement for our sins. He refers what we did to Himself, to pay the price in His body on the cross. He delivered Himself a sacrifice on our behalf, according to the words of the apostle: *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Corinthians 5: 21).

c- Some consider this psalm like all other psalm or prophetic books, to prophesy about the Lord Christ in certain expressions; Yet not every psalm or any chapter of the prophets refers to the Lord Christ.

St. Augustine says, is not in Christ, God's power and wisdom, a bit of folly and sin, but her is the Voice of the members of his body that is us. Voice Repentance with recognition for our sins and forgive us our sins.

“Let not those who wait for You, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed because of me. Let not those who seek You be confounded because of me, O God of Israel” (6)

According to **St. Augustine**, this is the voice of the Lord Christ, the Head, who says to His believers: *“You believe in God, believe also in Me”* (John 14: 1). And it is as well, the voice of the church as a whole, that truly says: *“Let not those who wait for You, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed because of me”* (6).

“For I endure scorn for Your sake ; Shame has covered my face” (7)

Here, the psalmist confirms that what dwelt upon him was not because of some fault he did, or an evil he committed against someone, but for the sake of God Himself. That may be true concerning David, as well as concerning the Lord Christ, and those who believe in Him.

❖ The psalmist says: ***“For I endure scorn for Your sake” (7)***. If you endure scorn for a sin you have yourself committed, you endure for your own sake, and not for God's sake. According to St. Peter: *“For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God”* (1 Peter 2: 20).

❖ So it is befitting of a Christian not to be ashamed when he is insulted for the sake of Christ; when those to whom Christ is an offense say to him: ‘O you, servant of the Crucified! Worshipper of Him who died an evil death! Who honor the Slain! If you get ashamed, You are then dead, and are worthy of being wiped out of the book of life. Just consider the clear words of the Lord: *“Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 10: 33; Luke 9: 26)

(St. Augustine)

¹ Sermon 120: 2.

“I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother’s children” (8)

What grieves the heart of the psalmist is to see his own country men, disregard him and count him as a stranger; but it would be more bitter to see that done by his mother’s children, namely his very close and beloved relatives. *“You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son”* (Psalm 50: 20); *“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me”* Psalm 27: 10);and, *“My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my kinsmen stand afar off”* (psalm 38: 11).

- ❖ Why has he become a stranger to the members of the Synagogue Why did they dare to say: *“We do not know from where he is?”* (John 9: 29) *“Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up”* (9); Meaning, because I persecute in them their iniquities; Because I endure with perseverance those I rebuke; because, seeking the glory of Your house, I have beaten by the whip those who unfittingly behaved in Your temple (John 2: 15).

(St. Augustine)

“Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me” (9)

The psalmist was full of zeal for the house of the Lord, the divine commandment, the salvation of every soul, and the holiness of life.

***“My zeal has consumed me, Because my enemies have forgotten Your words”.*(ps119: 139).**

- ❖ Notice that there are two kinds of zeal: a kind full of love, and another full of hatred. To the first kind the following words refer: *“Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up”* (9); And to the second kind the words refer, saying: *“For their envy of people; Yes, the fire of Your enemies shall devour them”* (Isaiah 26: 11) ¹.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The Lord, Glory be to Him, drove those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves from the temple twice: at the beginning of His preaching (John 2: 12-17), and again just before His passion (Matthew 21: 12); by which what is written *“Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up”* (Psalm 69: 9) was fulfilled.
- ❖ We can follow the lead of our Lord Christ if we practice everything for the sake of the common cause, and not just for our own benefit. The apostle Paul says: *“For even Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written: ‘The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me’* (John 15: 3). I wish no one seeks just what is his, but what is the others’ as well. For what is for the benefit of the others is for our benefit; as we are all one body, and members of one another².

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ Because, when the Savior said: *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me”* (John 6: 38); the Jews were stirred up and condemned Him to death as a blasphemer. That is why the psalmist puts himself in the

¹ City of God 20: 12.

² Homilies on St. John, 15: 3.

Lord's place, and says: "*The reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me*" (Psalm 69: 9)¹.

(Father Ambrosiaster)

(10) "*When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that became my reproach*"

Together with weeping with humiliation before God, the psalmist chastened his soul by fasting; He says: "*I humbled myself with fasting*" (Psalm 35: 13).

According to **St. Augustine**, the Lord Christ Himself was fasting, namely hungry and thirsty, when He was forsaken by those who believed in Him.

❖ He was hungry for men to believe in Him; and was thirsty, when He said to the Samaritan woman: "*Give Me a drink*" (John 4: 7). Yes He was thirsty for faith of those about whom He said: "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do*" (Luke 23: 34). What did those for whom He thirst present to Him? They presented to Him Vinegar 'Vetus', which was also called 'old' With no intention to get renewed, they gave Him the 'old man' to drink But He would rather fast than to receive the bitterness And through that fasting, He received reproach, and became rebuked.

(St. Augustine)

❖ He who does not fast will be exposed, become naked, and wounded. If Adam chose to cover himself with fasting, he would have not become naked (Genesis 3: 7). Nineveh got saved from perdition through fasting. And the Lord Himself says about the demons: "*This kind do not come out except by prayer and fasting*" (Matthew 17: 21; Mark 9: 29)².

(St. Ambrose)

❖ Being greatly interested in your thoughts, I think you should clothe yourself with the weapon of fasting, singing together with the prophet David: "*I chastened my soul with fasting*" (Psalm 69: 10); "*I have eaten ashes like bread*" (Psalm 102: 9); and, "*But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth*" (Psalm 35: 13 – Volgata). Eve was driven out of paradise because she ate from the forbidden fruit; whereas Elijah, on the other hand, after fasting 40 days he was borne on a chariot of fire to heaven³.

(St. Jerome)

"I also made sackcloth my garment; I became a byword to them" (11)

As a sign of sorrow, the Jews used to weep, fast, wear sackcloth, and sometimes they put ashes and dust on their heads. The psalmist says: "*You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness*" (Psalmist 30: 11). "*But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting*", (Psalm 35: 13).

❖ "*I also made sackcloth my garment*"; meaning, I delivered my body to them to breathe their anger; I hid my Deity from them. My body is 'sackcloth' because it is mortal, to have sin condemned in the body.

(St. Augustine)

¹ Commentary on Paul's Epistles Rom (15: 3).

² Letter 44.

³ Letter 130 to Demetrias, 10.

“Those who sit in the gate speak against me, and I am the song of the drunkards” (12)

The courts of justice were usually held at the gates of the city (Job 29: 7-17; Deuteronomy 25: 7; Joshua 20: 14; Ruth 4: 1-2; 1 Kings 22: 20; Lamentations 5: 14); So that he who intend to get into the city, would be investigated, in order to keep the city free of oppression.

David, the prophet and the judge, came to be as though unjustly tried, or ridiculed by those who set themselves as judges to try him.

As to the Son of David, His trial, whether before civil or religious courts, represented a disgrace against the human nature who intended to condemn the divine Judge of the whole world.

The irrational drunkards, as well, found in those trials a chance to scoff, and saw in David an object to scorn and derision..

See **St. John Chrysostom** that alcohol is "ethnic Dates" extracted from dates

❖ My brethren, he who fears God would remember the word said by the apostle Peter: *“Your adversary, the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5: 8). If he could not devour him through diverting him toward evil, he would try to corrupt his life – if possible – through rebuking people, and giving ear to the slanders and reviles of the vicious tongues; and falling accordingly in his trap..

Being unable to corrupt the life of someone innocent, the devil would try to destroy him through letting him fall into cruelly doubting his neighbor, and hastening to condemn him; by which he would manage to let him fall into his trap, and hence to devour him.

Who could know or talk about all the tricks and snares of the devil?! I can here only refer to three of his tricks against which God warned us on the mouth of His apostle:

(1) *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has unrighteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”* (2 Corinthians 6: 14).

(2) Do don't receive a backbite of defaming tongues ...

(3) Do not have unwarranted doubt, against any minister of God, remembering the words of the apostle: *“Judge nothing before the time until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the counsels of the hearts; and then each one's praise will come from God”* (1 Corinthians 4: 5). It is said as well that, while the outside things concern you; the hidden things concern the Lord your God.

It is obvious that when such things happen in the church, they would bring sorrow to the saints and believers. I wish God Himself be our comfort, He who commands us to grieve, and not to be lukewarm in love because of such evils, but to persevere up to the end to be saved.

I beg you not to add to my sufferings by your unwarranted doubts toward any one; and not cause the pains of my wounds to get any worse. I can easily endure the reproaches of those who find pleasure in their evil ways; those about whom it is said on the tongue of Christ Himself: *“I became a byword to them, those who sit in the gates speak against me; and I am the song of the drunkards”* (12). It is easier for me to endure their reproaches, than to have them from those who learned how to pray, and have hope in faith and resurrection.

- ❖ If it was not for Your abundant mercy, O Lord, What would we do for the sake of the multitudes of our iniquities?! Why the mercy? For the forgiveness of sin And why the truth? For the fulfillment of the divine promises!

(St. Augustine)

2- AN URGENT PLEA FOR SALVATION:

“But as for me, my prayer is to You, O Lord, in the acceptable time; O God, in the multitude of Your mercy, hear me in the truth of Your salvation” (13)

When all enemies have joined force against him, and everyone ridiculed him; the psalmist found no one to whom he could raise his complaint, except to raise it to the divine throne, whose door the oppressors and the unjust could never close before the oppressed. It would stay open, and the time would perpetually be *“an acceptable time”*. God would never close the doors of His mercies in certain times; for it is always His pleasure to listen to the cries of the oppressed and the persecuted. God wishes to listen to them, not for the sake of their worthiness, nor of their fervent supplications, but for the sake of the multitude of His mercy, His care for the salvation of all, and their enjoyment of the divine truth.

“Thus says the Lord: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you’ (Isaiah 49: 8; 2 Corinthians 6: 2).

“Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near” (Isaiah 55: 6).

“Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; Let me be delivered from those who hate me, and out of the deep waters” (14)

We have already seen that, while the ‘mire’ refers to the wicked, who apply the pressure of persecution on the righteous to let them drown; the righteous, on their side, seek from the Lord to support their souls, lest they fall into the mire, and get defiled by evil.

The wicked present unjust accusations in an attempt to distort the image of the righteous, and to let him look as though he is sinking deep in the mire, and is surrounded by hatred on all sides, that they accept nothing less than his death and getting rid of him.

- ❖ *“And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking” (Luke 5: 7).*

The disciples’ nets got so filled with fish through a miracle, to make them trust that their preaching work will never be in vain, while casting their nets on the multitudes of heathens and those who have gone astray.

Notice here, Simon and his fellows, unable to draw the net, how they stood in awe and silent, and how *“they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them”*.

This means that many have helped the saintly apostles in the field of their preaching task, and are still actively helping them.

The net is still cast, and Christ is still filling them with those who would minister to Him, among those who are sunk in the stormy seas of the world; those who pray and say: *“Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; Let me be delivered from those who hate me, and out of the deep waters” (14).*

(Pope Cyril the Great)

“Let not the flood water overflow me, nor let the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit shut its mouth on me” (15)

He had already proclaimed that his body has reached down to the deep waters; Now he seeks from God, not to let his soul be swallowed up in them; namely not to let it fall under the authority of the wicked, so as not to partake of their evil.

The psalmist sees that the sorrows, the anguish, and the persecutions, have all joined forces against him; torrent floods have overflowed him, and the depths and the gates of the pit have opened their mouth to swallow him; No one can save him from them, other than the One who dwells in heaven¹.

❖ Let examine the groom Cheeks And listen to the bride that speak about ***“His cheeks are like a bed of spices, Banks of scented herbs”*** Means that the text cheeks resemble Cup of drinking vessels are not profound and high praise is the analogy. If you praise a person a kind of open learning simple pure such immediate, the depth cannot be sin. According to the Prophet ***“Let not the floodwater overflow me, Nor let the deep swallow me up; And let not the pit shut its mouth on me.” (ps69:15)***

❖ ***“Let not the pit shut its mouth on me” (15)***. The pit, receiving the miserable sinners who have not repented, shuts its mouth from above, and opens it from below. In it, there will be a spacious road, yet there is no more freedom of breathing, as there is pressure from above to down below².

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

❖ ***“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls”*** (1 Corinthians 10: 12). Those who has fallen and lost his steadfast standing, has only one thought in his mind, which is to stand up again; whereas he who is still upright, should not judge him who has fallen, of being less than him, but should fear instead lest he should also fall, perish, and go to a lower level, too deep for his call for help to be heard. The righteous would say: ***“(I wish) the deep would not swallow me up; and the pit would not shut its mouth on me” (15)***.

(Mother St. Senkletiki)

“Hear me, O Lord, for Your loving kindness is good; Turn to me according to the multitude of Your tender mercies” (16)

The only refuge for the psalmist became the good and multitude of God’s mercies.

“Turn to me, and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted” (Psalm 25: 16).

❖ ***:Hear me, O Lord, for Your loving kindness is (sweet)”*** he presents this as a reason for hearing him; for sweet is the mercy of God God’s mercy would be sweet for him who falls into affliction. About the sweetness of God’s mercies, the Book also says: ***“Like the rain in the time of draught, so God’s mercy is good in the time of affliction”***.

Even bread would not taste good for someone not hungry; That is why, if the Lord allows for us to be in trouble, He is so merciful not to take away his help, but flares in us the longing for it.

(St. Augustine)

“And do not hide Your face from Your servant, for I am in trouble; Hear me speedily” (17)

¹ عظة 14 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

² Sermon 206: 3.

God's face to be hidden, destroys the soul; for, as God is the source of her life, she is always in need of His divine care, and of the enjoyment of fellowship with Him. Being like a death to the soul, the psalmist cries out seeking help, not for taking away the unjust accusations, and the afflictions, but for the restoration of God's face to Him.

❖ I am in trouble, my sorrow is increasing, let it be followed by Your mercy.

(St. Augustine)

“Draw near to my soul, and redeem it; deliver me because of my enemies” (18)

In the time of trouble, man often feels as though God has forsaken him, and delivered him to his adversaries or to the afflictions. That is why the psalmist cries out to God to draw near to his soul, to redeem it, namely, to save it. For the sake of his enemies, who have put him in a position where human possibilities could not help; the psalmist ask God to be his only Savior. God's intervention with His mercies and grace, is the practical way to let the enemies perceive that their wisdom, possibilities, and authority, are nothing before God.

In another situation, the prophet David cries out, saying: *“How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God... Lest my enemy say, ‘I have prevailed against him; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am shaken”* (Psalm 13: 1-4).

“Draw near to my soul, and redeem it; deliver me because of my enemies”. **St. Augustine** sees this supplication as strange; for salvation is either hidden or public; God did not rescue the bodies of the brothers, mentioned in (2 Maccabees 7), from the fire of their persecutors, as He did to the three young men, mentioned in the book of Daniel (Daniel 3: 26). He rescued the first group in a secret way, and the second group publicly.

According to **St. Augustine**, if we apply this to the Person of the Lord Christ; He saved Himself in a secret way, descended to Hades to consummate His mission toward those who were captives; Whereas, for the sake of His adversary enemies, He saved His body, as well, risen from the dead, ascended to heaven; and His body has seen no corruption.

“You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; My adversaries are all before You” (19)

The Holy Book often refers to the reproach of the cross, which is in truth, God's power for salvation. Being bound -- as the body of Christ -- to the Crucified -- the believers are afflicted by the world; being accused of reproach, shame, and dishonor. To distinguish between these three, **St. Augustine** looks at the **reproach**, through the degrading words directed against the believers; at the **shame**, through accusing them of being without conscience, or that their behavior contradict with it; whereas he looks at the **dishonor**, through their claim that their behavior causes the face to blush!

According to **St. Augustine**, the only crime of the Christians -- the body of Christ -- that would bring on them the reproach, shame, and dishonor, is nothing but, they are Christians!.

The prophet David suffered much from king Saul, as well as from his own rebellious son Absalom. Whereas, concerning the reproach, shame, and dishonor, addressed to the Lord Christ; He is said to be: *“A worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.*

All those who see Him mock at Him; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 'he trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him' (Psalm 22: 6-8); And, "For the joy was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrew 12: 2).

"My adversaries are all before You" (19). You, O God, knows everything, what the wicked enemies do in secret, is seen before Your eyes.

David felt like a helpless lamb surrounded by countless wolves.

"Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none" (20)

Even to the women who wept when they saw the suffering of the Lord Christ, He said: *"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children"* (Luke 23: 28).

As affliction, and feeling injustice break the heart, and cause illness of the body, the medicine would be the presence of a kind-hearted comforter to partake of one's sufferings. Yet, who can enter the heart of the one who suffers, and comfort him, like God, the loving, and compassionate?

Some scholars believe that the fast death of the Lord Christ was because of the extent of His sorrow and anguish, that broke His heart. But the actual truth of His death – whatever the causes are – refers to His own authority to put His soul, and to take it (John 10: 18). He actually received the physical sufferings through His own free will, for His love of mankind, and for the sake of the salvation of the world.

Having incarnated, it is said about Him:

"Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His Spirit" (Matthew 27: 50; Mark 15: 37; Luke 23: 46).

"Now, at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?', which is translated as, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Mark 15: 34)

"And (looked) for comforters, but I found none". Although all the adversary forces have gathered together against Him, there was no comforters around. One of His own disciples betrayed Him, another denied Him, and all the others forsook Him in His bitter moments. Even, earlier in the garden, His disciples could not watch one hour with Him. In the book of Isaiah, He says: *"I have trodden the winepress alone; and from the peoples no one was with Me"* (Isaiah 63: 3). And on the cross, as He carries our sins, the incarnate Son of God, felt as though the Father has hidden His face from Him.

Of such a unique portrait of forsaking, the prophet David never suffered.

❖ With the eyes of prophecy, the prophet, looking at the suffering Jesus, and seeing Him coming from Edom with garments dyed red, he asked Him: *"Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?"* (Isaiah 63: 2). To this, Jesus responds, on the tongue of His prophet, saying: *"I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me"* (Isaiah 63: 2).

"I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none" (Psalm 69: 20).

"Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, as a raging and roaring lion; For dogs have surrounded Me; the assembly of the wicked has enclosed Me" (Psalm 22: 12, 13, 16).

“I looked, but there was no one to help; and I wondered, that there was no one to uphold” (Isaiah 63: 5).

Oh, My Lord, You have trodden the winepress alone Your precious blood has been shed, and there was no one to defend, nor to show compassion!.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

❖ Those who meet us along the way – those who come from the East, from Armenia, or from anywhere in the world – whenever they see us, their tears flow like a river; they wail and moan while accompanying us!

I tell you this to let you know that I have a multitude of people who love me, and partake of our sufferings; something that give us much comfort. Because, otherwise, the situation would be difficult to endure, about which the prophet, say: *“I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none”* (Psalm 69: 20).

What a great comfort for man to find the whole world partake of his sufferings.

We also find in the memory of sufferings, a source of continuous joy.

Thinking this way, Take away from yourself the cloud of grief; and continue writing to me concerning your health.

Take into consideration that both the joyful and the sorrowful things in this life, will pass away. If the gate is narrow, and the way is rough, it is just a way! And if the gate is wide, and the way is smooth, it is, as well, just a way! (See Mathew 7: 13).

If you see much oppression done to us, If you see them have the authority over the capital, and enjoy the processions of honor, say again and again the following verse: *“Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction”* (Mathew 7: 13). You should rather wail over them, and moan for their sake.

Rather, they cry. And suggesting for them!

They do iniquities in this world; and instead of thinking about their sins, they enjoy honor from men. Once they depart from this world, they, Together with their honor, will pass away, and be no more¹.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ If heat liquidates the wax, coolness will solidify it again. If commendation makes the soul loose its good stature, it is positive that rebuke and insult, would bring it up to the top of virtue. The book says: *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kind of evil against you falsely for my sake; Rejoice and be exceedingly glad”* (Matthew 5: 11, 12). And, *“You have relieved me when I was in distress”* (Psalm 4: 1). And, *“I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none”* (20). In the Holy Book we find many verses of this kind of benefit to the soul.

(Mother St. Senkletiki)

“They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (21)

This did not happen to the prophet David; but literally did with the Lord Christ when He was crucified, as it came in the holy Scripture.

Some believe that this was given to the Lord twice, and probably three times: (Matthew 27: 34, 48).

¹ Epistle 8ad Olympias PG 25: 607 – 608.

Drinking wine was popular among the Roman soldiers; while drinking wine mingled with gall was popular among the Jews. It was the custom to give it to appease the unbearable suffering of crucifixion. But here, in the psalm, it came, not as a kind of compassion on the Crucified, but as scoff and denigration, as is obvious in Luke 23: 36.

'Gall', in the Hebrew version of the Holy Book, was mentioned 11 times, eight of them to give the taste of bitterness; once to mean (poison), once to mean (venom), and once to mean (hemlock), a plant from the fruit or roots of which, poison was produced (not from the liver of animals) (See Deuteronomy 29: 18).

Talking about the fasting of the Lord Christ, we said that He was hungry and thirsty for people to believe in Him for the sake of their salvation. Yet, in His thirst, they gave Him vinegar, meaning (old). He sought the renewal of humanity, so that through faith they would bear His image; but they persisted on giving Him vinegar, namely, their same old way of life.

❖ In My thirst, they gave me vinegar; namely, I was longing for their faith, but I found in them the 'old' and not the new man.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The prophet David, also referred to the cross, saying: "*They pierced My hands and My feet*" (Psalm 22: 16).

He did not say: 'They (will) pierce', but said: "*They pierced*"; "*They counted all my bones*" (Psalm 22: 17);

"*They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots*" (Psalm 22: 18).

"*They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink*" (Psalm 69: 21).

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Despite coming for the sake of salvation of all; the Jewish people rewarded Him with evil. When Jesus said "*I am thirsty*", He who gave them water out of the solid rock; seeking fruit from the vine He planted -- by nature, the saintly fathers, but her heart is like Sodom, "*For their vine is the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah*" (Deuteronomy 32: 32) -- that vine presented to her Lord a sponge filled with vinegar on a reed, "*They gave Me gall for My food, and vinegar for My drink*" (Psalm 69: 21).

Here you can see how clear and pure the prophecy is! Is that how you should reward your Lord, O vine?! Is that how you should offer Him?! True was what the prophet Isaiah said, wailing on you: "*My well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes; briars and thorns*" (See Isaiah 5: 1, 2, 6).

Have you seen the crown with which the vineyard adorned My head?! What am I supposed to do? I shall command the clouds not to rain on it; For the clouds are the prophets, who were taken away from them, and became for the church¹.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ The Lord Christ kissed Judas back; not that He teaches us to pretend, but to confirm that He did not intend to flee away from the traitor; He did not deny Judas offering

¹ مقال 13 : 29.

Him his commitment of love. It is written: “I was a man of peace with those who hate peace”¹.

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ It is written: “*They also gave Me gall for My food, and for My thirst they gave Me vinegar*” (21). We know from the gospel how those things happened. They first gave Him gall, which he tasted and spat. Then, while on the cross, in order to fulfill the prophesies, He said, “*I thirst*” (John 19: 28), “*they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a hyssop, and put it to His mouth. When He received it He said, 'It is finished'*” (John 19: 29-30). Which means that all what was written about Him has been realized².

(St. Augustine)

3- SEEKING THE PUNISHMENT ON THE EVIL OPPONENTS:

“Let their table become a snare before them, and their well being a trap” (22)

This verse, and the three following ones (23-25), according to St. Augustine, constitute a prophecy, written in such a way that seem as though He wishes evil for His enemies. But, actually, the Lord Christ never prayed against His enemies, but always for their sake (See Luke 23: 34).

Their food was no more an object of pleasure and gladness, but have become like a trap to catch them; the way wild animals are caught by setting baits for them. What they assume as food for their sustenance, would become a snare for their perdition; and what they think is for their peace, would be for their fall. When the Jews thought they became more secure after crucifying the Lord Christ, they actually became as though in a trap from which they could not escape.

In His hunger and thirst for their faith and love, wishing to deliver Himself to them as an eternal life, instead of offering Him food and drink, they gave Him gall and vinegar. They denied faith in Him, and set a hidden trap to get rid of Him. As for Him, He grieved for their sake, because a snare is set for them; in their food, that was to swallow Him and His believers alive, according to the words of the psalmist:

“Then, they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us” (Psalm 124: 3).

By saying, “*before them*”, He intends to proclaim that He wishes for them to discover the danger confronting them, to confess their fault, and avoid falling in the trap which they have set for themselves.

- ❖ It would seem to those of little understanding that some of the written texts contradict the statutes set by the Lord Christ, Himself, who commands love for the enemies. In the Old Testament, many such supplications came; as for example: “*Let their table become a snare before them*” (22); “*Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow*” (Psalm 109: 9); and other phrases in the same psalm, that prophesied about Judas.

In the New Testament as well, certain texts came that seem contradictory to the commandment of the Lord and of the apostles:, saying: “*Bless those who curse you*” (Matthew 5: 44); as for example when the Lord of Glory cursed the cities that did not

¹ Exposition of Luke 10: 63: 64.

² Tractates on John, 37: 9.

receive His word (See Mathew 11: 20-25); and what came on the tongue of the apostle, about a certain person: “*May the Lord repay him according to his works*” (2 Timothy 4: 14)¹.

(St. Augustine)

“*Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see; and make their loins shake continually*” (23)

“*Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God should shine on them*” (2 Corinthians 4: 4). This text was quoted by the apostle Paul in his talk about the Jews who rejected the gospel (Romans 11: 10). Those who opposed the Lord Christ and His church, would lose the spirit of understanding and knowledge, and would become spiritually blind.

The word “*loins*” in the Septuagint version, came as (backs). As man’s strength is in his loins or back, if they are weak, he would be unable to perform any work, his back would be bowed, and would seem almost paralyzed.

❖ That means that he wishes their comforts and goods turn to be for their perdition; and that they would be open to the attacks of everyone².

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Like when Joseph’s brothers were struck with envy, and they turned their backs and not their faces to the brotherly love; So were the miserable Jews, who preferred envy to love toward the Source of salvation who came down to them; about whom it is written in the psalm: “*Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see; and make their (backs) always weak*” (23).

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

❖ The darkness (which happened during the crucifixion), has been a clear sign to the Jews, that the minds of those who crucified Him were clothed in spiritual darkness; “*Hardening in part (a partial blindness) has happened to Israel*” (Romans 11: 25); They were cursed by David. in his love for God, saying: “*Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see*” (23).

Even nature mourned its Lord, when the sun darkened, the earth quaked, and the rocks were split. The temple itself seemed as though clothed with sorrow, when the veil was torn in two from top to bottom.(Matthew 27: 51); which God meant, on the tongue of Isaiah, saying: “*I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering*” (Isaiah 50: 3)³.

(St. Cyril the Great)

❖ The unworthiness of the shepherd, almost always, goes hand in hand with the unworthiness of his flock. In case the shepherds lack the light of knowledge as a result of their personal sin; their flock, accordingly, stumbles because of ignorance. For that, Jesus, the Lord of glory says: “*If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch*” (Matthew 15: 14; Luke 6: 39). And the psalmist prophesies: “*Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see*” (23). The leaders are actually eyes, occupying the

¹ Sermon on Mount, 1: 21: 71.

² In Rom, homily 19.

³ In Luc. Ser. 153.

highest ranks, and are supposed to clarify the way; while those following their lead, because they are connected to them, they are accordingly called 'loins' or 'backs'. Once the 'eyes' are darkened, the 'loins' or 'backs' are bowed. When the leaders lose the light of knowledge, those who follow them bow under the yoke of their sins¹.

(St. Gregory the Great)

- ❖ After laboring to perform a certain task, and seriously getting preoccupied doing it, we usually relax and have rest. But the evil sinners, after doing horrible iniquities, would never be able to relax; as about them is said: "*Their backs are always bowed*" (23). Those who do not attach themselves to Christ, would not be able to raise themselves up to the heavenlies; Likewise, those whose death is very evil;. But he, who dies together with Christ, and is buried together with Him, will not only find comfort, but he will find resurrection as well (see Romans 6: 4). About such a man, it is truly said: "*The Lord will sustain him on his sickbed*" (Psalm 41: 3); especially if he is a martyr².

(St. Ambrose)

***"Pour out Your indignation upon them, and let Your wrathful anger take hold of them"* (24)**

***"Let their habitation be desolate. Let no one dwell in their tents"* (25)**

This is a prophecy about the horrible punishments that would dwell upon them because of the divine wrath.

That was proclaimed by the Lord Christ when He wept and lamented upon Jerusalem, saying: "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate*" (Matthew 23: 37-38).

Quoting this phrase, St. Peter applied it to the traitor Judas, saying: "*For it is written in the book of psalms: 'Let his habitation be desolate, and let no one live in it'*" (Acts 1: 20).

***"For they persecute him whom You have struck, and talk of the grief of those You have wounded"* (26)**

It is very difficult to apply this to the prophet David, but is actually realized concerning the Lord Christ, about whom it is said: "*He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him*" (Isaiah 53: 3-4). And, "*And someone may say to Him: 'What are these wounds in Your hands?' Then He will answer: 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends' Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; Then I will turn My hand against the little ones*" (Zechariah 13: 6-7). The Lord Christ, the Shepherd was stricken, and His sheep were scattered³.

Someone may wonder why should they be blamed, if they persecute whom God has struck, and add wounds to whom God has wounded?!

As far as the Lord Christ is concerned, what have dwelt upon Him, has been according to His pleasure, and to that of the Father, to suffer and to be crucified for the

¹ Pastoral Care, 1: 1.

² Prayer of David 3: 3: 7.

³ Plumer, Ps. 69.

sake of the salvation of the World. But as for the others, what they did was not for the sake of a good cause, but because of their envy and grudge.

Concerning the believers, God sometimes allows for them to be chastised for the sake of their edification, or for their justification. But concerning the others, they abuse it to practice their hatred.

❖ The disciples were not only confused, but were extremely worried. It was difficult for them to perceive how could He rise from the dead; or how He, who has performed such a multitude of signs to the account of the people, would be delivered to death and disgrace?! Yet, that conform to what the prophet said: *“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered”* (Zechariah 13: 7); and to what David says to the Father: *“They persecute him whom You have struck”* (26) The Father gave consent to the choice of the Son to suffer that way. He allowed for Him to suffer pain, He who has the authority to appease pain. This is obvious from what He said concerning Pilate’s authority over Him: *“You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above”* (John 19: 11); namely, unless the Father allows for Me to suffer¹.

(St. Cyril the Great)

“Add iniquity to their iniquity, And let them not come into Your righteousness”
(27)

Falling into iniquity, man would find himself swept over to another iniquity; every sin pushes him to another sin. Or as the fathers of the wilderness say, that when man falls into a sin, and offers no repentance on it, he would become a toy that one demon playfully throws over to another demon. By this, man loses his hope for salvation, and the enjoyment of the righteousness of Christ; as he finds himself falling into a serious diversity of sins.

Some believe that falling into one sin would give birth to a new sin; and sins would accordingly multiply; unless man concentrates his eyes on the Savior, who can set him aright, and grant him the possibility of a fellowship with Him.

According to **St. Augustine**, crucifying the Lord Christ, on the assumption that He is just a regular man, the Jews committed an iniquity.

But, the fact that He proclaimed Himself and His Person, and yet, they persisted on opposing Him, they added iniquity to their iniquity. And as the Lord Christ Himself says in the parable of the vineyard and the vinedressers: *“When the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance”* (Matthew 21: 38). And He also said to them: *“If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘we see’, Therefore your sin remains”* (John 9: 41).; And, *“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin”* (John 15: 22).

“Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous” (28)

“The book of the living”, is a symbol referred to by the prophet Moses; as though, in it, God writes down the names of the righteous who enjoy the eternal life. When the people committed a great sin in the wilderness, made for themselves a golden calf, and

¹ Fragment (on Matt.)292.

worshipped it as a god, Moses rebuked them, then went up the mountain to atone for their sin before the Lord. Interceding on their behalf he said to the Lord:

“Yet now, if You forgive their sin – but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written” (Exodus 32: 32).

Some believe¹ that the source of idea behind this book is:

a- The leaders of armies usually have records in which the names of their men are written; and from which the names of those who quit or die are blotted out.

b- Cities usually have elaborate records in which is written a census of the names of the citizens; and from which are blotted out the names of those who die.

c- Certain kingdoms and empires make a register from time to time of the countries under their authority (Luke 2: 1).

God, with His prior knowledge, knows the righteous, chooses, and glorifies them. Blotting out the name of the wicked from the book of life, is a symbolic portrait of the role of that specific man in his deprivation of the eternal glory.

When the Jews opposed the two apostles Paul and Barnabas, the apostles said to them: *“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first, but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles”* (Acts 13: 46).

The apostle Paul says: *“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called, these He also justified, and whom He justified, these He also glorified”* (Romans 8: 29-30)

❖ who are not stuck with Christ is not raised to the heavenly realms. Thus, those who die for the evil they do not very with it as it is written: "Death of very evil sinners." The man who dies with Christ and buried with him, not only find comfortable, and even resurrection².

❖ while praying, an angel of the Lord appeared to him. very terrifying, holding in his hand a fiery sword, and said to him: *“As God has blotted the name of this man out of the book of life (Exodus 32: 32-33; Psalm 69: 28), you should, as well, take him out from among the brethren, who although not ignorant, yet, even for the ignorant, such kind of defilements are abominations before the Lord”*³.

(Life of St. Pachum)

Someone may wonder, if Pontus Pilate could say: *“What I have written, I have written”* (John 19: 22); How would God blot out someone’s name from the book of life? Doesn’t God know beforehand whether he will enjoy the eternal life or not? To answer that, the psalm talks to wicked people who, counting themselves as righteous, assume that their names are written in the book of life, together with the hosts of the righteous. To those people the psalmist confirms that, even if they so assume, God will blot their names out of that book.

On another aspect, God, in His love for mankind, often talks to them in their human language, and according to their concepts. Saying that He will blot their names

¹ Plumer, Ps. 69.

² The Prayer of Job and Davidm 3: 3: 6.

³ Life of Pachomius (Bohairic). 108.

out of the book of life, is not to be literally implied; as there is actually no such book in the material concept.

4- A PRAISE OF CONQUEST:

“But I am lowly and in distress. May Your salvation, O God, set me on high”
(29)

While complaining from those cruel enemies, his haughty opponents; the psalmist confesses that he is lowly, miserable, and helpless on his own to confront them; feels the weight of bitterness and great sorrow; and knows for sure that no one can comfort him, and set his bowed down soul on high, except God.

The Lord Christ has borne all the sins of the world, became a sin offering on their behalf, by His own free will, He chose to go down to Hades; that when He is risen and ascend to heaven, He would bear in Him those with contrite hearts.

The Rich – Creator of heaven and earth – became lowly and in distress; to bear the lowly and those in distress to His joyful heavenly kingdom.

“I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving” (30)

The Lord Christ came down to our earth to partake of our sufferings; Yet, while suffering, He rejoiced in the Spirit for the sake of the simple and the babes, who enjoy divine proclamations, that the wise and prudent are unable to perceive (Luke 10: 21). After resurrecting from the dead, hearing no more that He ever wept or grieved; He therefore, wishes for us to share with Him the resurrected life, that our sorrows would turn into unceasing praise, and perpetual glorious joy. By His cross, He bears us up to the joy of His resurrection, and to the life of conquest over the last enemy, namely death (1 Corinthians 15: 55-57).

Here, he reveals to the lowly and the sorrowful, the true riches, and the joy that will never be taken away from them, namely, the praise of God’s name, and the thanksgiving to His greatness.

“This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bull, which has horns and hooves” (31)

By having our life turn into perpetual praise, God will receive it as a sacrifice by which He is pleased better than animal sacrifices. *“Whoever offers praise glorifies Me”* (Psalm 50: 23).

❖ A praise coming out of my mouth, will please God more than a precious sacrifice offered on an altar.

(St. Augustine)

“The humble shall see this and be glad; and you who seek God, your heart shall live” (32)

Nothing will please the believer’s heart more than when God receives well the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving; as by that he would enjoy the deposit of the eternal life, and the fellowship with the heavenly creatures. *“Those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever”* (Psalm 22: 26).

According to **St. Augustine**, the believer, concentrating his insight on God, he seeks Him to find Him, so that his soul would live. And finding Him, she would further long for Him, to reach new depths where she would seek Him. She would keep on seeking Him with a perpetual consistence.

- ❖ Let us therefore, concentrate our minds on seeking the Lord, putting before our eyes the words of the divine song: *“You who seek God, your hearts shall live”* (32). Let us seek the One who is there, yet hides, so that we would seek to find Him. He is beyond any measure, even if He is there; And when He is there, we would further search for Him. You will perpetually learn, yet you will never reach the knowledge of truth. Once man reaches the end; it will be the beginning¹!
- ❖ Seek the Lord, O you lowly, hungry, and thirsty; as He Himself is the bread coming down from heaven (John 6: 33, 51). *“Seek the Lord to live”*. You seek bread to sustain your body; and you seek the Lord for your soul to live.

(St. Augustine)

“For the Lord hears the poor, and does not despise His prisoners” (33)

God longs to respond to the supplications and prayers of his people, if they bear the spirit of humility; as they hear Him say: *“It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear”* (Isaiah 65: 24). He does not despise those who became captives for the sake of His name. He refers them to Him; the psalmist calls them *“His prisoners”*. *“Because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound”* (Isaiah 61: 1); *“He brings those who are bound into prosperity”* (Psalm 68: 6).

God never ceases to incline his ears to hear the sighs of the prisoners; *“Let the groaning of the prisoner come before you”* (Psalm 79: 11).

- ❖ The true riches of the poor man is the meditation in the creation, and the praise of the Creator.

(St. Augustine)

“Let heaven and earth praise Him; The seas and everything that moves in them”(34)

All the world praise God: the heaven, the earth, and the sea. All believers, wherever they are, in unity with the heavenlies, form a magnificent chorus to praise the Savior of the world.

“For God will save Zion, and build the cities of Judah, that they may dwell there and possess it” (35)

The psalmist starts some psalms in the plural tense, and ends them in the singular tense, as it is in psalm 66, in which he starts with a joyful shout to God by the whole earth (1-12), and ends it with his personal worship in the house of the Lord, and his enjoyment of the divine mercies (13-20). He starts another psalm (Psalm 69: 1- 31) with his personal relationship with God (Psalm 69: 1-31), and ends it with the inhabitants of heaven, earth, and sea, all partaking of the praise of God; And with God’s care for the salvation of Zion, and for building the cities of Judah (69: 32-36). Sometimes he talks in the singular tense in the whole psalm, and other times in the plural tense. What does this mean but that there is no separation between the personal relationship that binds the believer with God, and his relationship as a member of the congregation sanctified by God. Building the inner Jerusalem in the heart, God works in the whole congregation. And caring for the congregation, He works in every believer; as though His love for him is equal to His love for the whole congregation.

¹ *Tractates ob John, 63: 1.*

“That they may dwell there and possess it” (35). Who are they who dwell in the cities of Judah, but those who seek the Lord, the humble, the poor, the captives, and the singers of praise; whether they are in heaven, on earth, or journeying across the sea (32-34). He gathers all together when they enjoy His salvation work, to set out of them the new Zion – the holy church of God.

❖ *“For God will save Zion”* (35). He renews His church by the believers from all the nations joining His only begotten Son. He does not deceive those who believe in Him, concerning His promise: *“For God will save Zion, and build the cities of Judah”*. These are the churches themselves. No one could say when He will build the cities of Judah?!... You, who intend to recognize that great establishment; be a living stone to become included in it. Now, the cities of Judah are being built; As the word “Judah” means (confession), through confession in humility, the cities of Judah will be built, without the haughty who are reluctant to confess.

(St. Augustine)

Also, the descendants of His servants shall inherit it; and those who love His name shall dwell in it” (36)

The general feature of the true people of God, who enjoy dwelling with God, or the dwelling of God among them, is **love**: *“Those who love His name shall dwell in it”* (36); They enjoy that together with their descendants who follow their lead, and who partake of their faith.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 69

FROM THE DEPTHS OF MY HEART I CRY OUT TO YOU

- ❖ The floods of the wicked overflowed me;
Water came into my soul;
She plunged as though in depths without limit;
What do the wicked seek from me?
They are nothing but dust and mire;
They will not stop before turning me into mire and corruption;
I plead to You, Turn their opposition into the edification of my soul;
By the fire of afflictions, I pray, turn my dust into precious gold;
And turn the earthen vessel into one of honor.
- ❖ You alone can hear the cries of my heart;
My throat is dry with my cries;
And my eyes fail while I wait for Your coming;
Dwell in me;
To turn my bitterness into sweetness;
That my mouth would open up for praise and thanksgiving;
And my eyes would open up to behold Your beauty and splendor.
- ❖ If my enemies became more than the hair of my head;
I unite with You, O Head of the church;
To scatter the plots of the wicked.
- ❖ The kings and rulers were stirred up against You without a cause;
They unjustly condemned You;
By Your love You received the cross to pay back a debt that You have not borrowed;
Let me unite with You, O Crucified;
To turn all the persecutions into a fellowship of glory with You;
In the reproach of the cross, I find Your strength of salvation;
Instead of shame, I am proud of being referred to You.
- ❖ Let the world count me a stranger and a foreigner;
By You I became a member of the household of God;
I fast of the world and all what is in it;
For You are my satisfaction and joy.
- ❖ Let sackcloth be my garment, and let the world count me as a byword;
Let me become the song of the drunkards of the world;
For You are the Garment of my soul, my Glory, and my Crown.
You are my Praise and my Joy.
- ❖ Behold, the enemy – the devil – with his whole energy, intends to drown me;
Can the pit swallow what is Yours?!
Can the devil destroy him, who experienced the sweetness of Your mercy?!
Let the afflictions increase, for without them, I cannot enjoy the taste of Your mercy;

Without them, my soul would not thirst for the enjoyment of the splendor of Your face;

Without them, my depths would not cry out to You to approach me.

- ❖ Amid Your passion, You cried out, and delivered Your Spirit, O Creator of the Spirits and the bodies

All have forsaken You, there were no one to offer compassion;

Nor utter a word of comfort;

Indeed, having been tempted Yourself, You can help the tempted;

And when the world drive us out of the camp;

We may bear the reproach of the cross together with You.

- ❖ Let the world offer me gall and vinegar!

For You are my Food and drink

Who turns the bitterness into sweetness;

You are the food of the angels, satisfying to the souls.

- ❖ My soul is so sorrowful;

For the sake of those who set a table for themselves;

And their table became a snare before them;

The eyes of their hearts were darkened, and they lost the vision of the heavenlies;

Their loins were shaken, and their souls bowed as though in a bitter servitude;

Their habitation became desolate;

For their hearts became empty of Your Holy Spirit.

- ❖ In Your love for me, You allow for my chastisement;

In it, the wicked find a chance to spit their venoms;

To my wounds they add new wounds;

Yet, what a difference between the wounds You allow for my edification;

And the wounds of the wicked that reveal their envy and hatred!

- ❖ Practicing their evil, intentionally, and knowingly;

They add iniquity to their iniquity;

And they close the doors of Your righteousness before their own faces;

In their haughtiness, they assume that they are righteous;

They count their names written in Your book of life, together with those of Your righteous;

But, persisting on not repenting;

Their names are blotted out of Your book!

- ❖ Finally, I confess to You that I am poor and sorrowful;

Open before me the doors of Your mercy, to make me rich with praising You;

And fill my heart up with the comforts of Your Holy Spirit;

You listen to my prayers, O You, who hears the poor;

And who smells the sacrifice of praise as a fragrance of pleasure;

Glory be to You, who became poor to embrace the poor to Yourself.

PSALM 70

MAKE HASTE, O GOD, TO DELIVER ME

This poem is, to a great extent, analogous to psalm (40).

Some believe it to be an annex of the last psalm (69), and an introduction of the next one (71).

It seems that the prophet David, confronting a serious situation that dwelt upon him, and feeling that every moment of his life had its price, begins this psalm by asking God to make haste to deliver him; and ends it by asking Him not to delay.

In a sermon by **St. Augustine** on a feast of the martyrs, he interpreted this psalm, counting it as a poem presented to God the Father, by His Son the Lord Christ, in the name of the suffering members of His body -- the martyrs in particular. He considered it as a church song concerning the martyrs, who followed the lead of their Head, the Lord Christ, who, through His own free will, chose to be buried as a grain of wheat, to produce much grain (John 12: 24).

❖ Thanks to the Grain of wheat; He who intended to die and to be buried, to produce a double harvest of grains! ... Thanks to the Only -- begotten Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who did not despise submitting to our death, to make us worthy of our life! ... Look at Him, who was alone until He went there; He was a single grain of wheat in some way, so that a multitude of grains of wheat would liken Him in His passion, to be lifted up, when celebrating the new birthdays of the martyrs¹! ... Many then, are His members under one Head, our Savior Himself; bound together with the bond of love and peace; as though they are one man; you hear one voice of one man; You hear one man crying out, as though all cry together in One.

(St. Augustine)

The title:

A prayer for relief from adversaries.

To the Chief Musician. A psalm of David. To bring to remembrance.

“Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste, to help me, O Lord” (1)

The pure prayer is the quickest message that can travel from the heart to heaven; and in a glimpse, it will enjoy a divine response, more than what you ask, and beyond what you seek.

It so happen sometimes that God postpones His response, so that we may be justified before Him, trusting in His wisdom and good ordinance; and so that our longing for His sweet mercies would increase more and more.

❖ Concerning this ordinance of the “perpetual prayer”; we may compare it to the way of teaching the little babes, who still, have not the ability to understand the preliminary lessons concerning the alphabetical letters; although they may recognize their forms and shapes, when we provide them with cube models of them....

In a similar way, let me present to you a model of the spiritual contemplation, to put it perpetually before your eyes, and meditate in it for your own benefit, until you rise

¹ يتطلع القديس أغسطينوس إلى يوم استشهاد الشهداء أنه يوم ميلادهم الجديد.

up to a higher vision. ... Let me put before you a particular way to reach this ordinance you look for... Let me provide you with that particular prayer, that everyone of us should recite for the sake of his spiritual progress in an unceasing remembrance of God, driving away every other thought; For the heart would never be able to hold fast to Him, unless it is set free of every interest concerning the body.

This way, is delivered to us through a few, who have got it in turn from clever elder fathers ... To keep remembering God on a perpetual basis, put this marvelous prayer before your eyes: ***“Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste, to help me, O Lord!”*** (Psalm 70: 1).

This verse was chosen from the holy Scripture, not haphazardly, but because it bears all the feelings that could be in the human nature, and that conforms to all situations which could dwell upon us. ... It bears a supplication to God for the sake of all dangers, and bears as well a pious confession, full of contrition, of alert interest, and of perpetual fear.... It bears the feeling of man of his own weakness, together with a trust in God's response. ... It confirms that His help is swift and prompt; because man is calling for help from God who is perpetually present among us. ... It bears a kindled love, and an understanding of the plots of the enemies (the demons), whom, seeing them surrounding him day and night, he confesses his helplessness to confront them without the divine help.

This verse is a mighty stronghold and a strong weapon for those who are tired of the consistent attacks of the devil; as it does not allow those who fall into a mental depression, and are overwhelmed by grief, to despair of finding an effective healing; And as it proclaims that God, to whom we supplicate, is perpetually aware of our struggle, and is never far from those who seek His help.

It warns us, whose portion is the spiritual success and the gladness of heart; lest we become puffed up, because of our happiness; confirming to us that we would never live without God, our keeper.

This verse is a help and a benefit for everyone of us whatever his or her condition is, For man, in all the aspects of his life, needs God's help, not only in sorrows and grief, but even in joy and success; to be saved from the former, and to keep on in the later; for man, by his human weakness cannot endure both without the help of God¹.

❖ Now, I shall suggest to you a way to reach this spiritual ordinance, sought by every soul for the perpetual remembrance of God, beside the control of the mind. ... First of all, forget yourself, and forsake your own thoughts; Let us together approach God, bare ourselves of every worries of the body. ... And be sure that this way along which you will walk, has been treated by our elder fathers, who have known the secrets of the Spirit. ... Now, keep on reciting this prayer: *“Make haste, O God to deliver me, Make haste to help me, O Lord”*.

Father Isaac, disciple of Abba Anthony

“Let them be ashamed and confounded who seek my life. Let them be turned back and confused who desire my hurt” (2)

It is the nature of sin to bring about disgrace to its doer; And in case he does not repent, disgrace will be his portion on an eternal level.

¹ Cassian, Conferences 10: 10.

This request against those who seek his life is a prophecy of what will dwell upon them, rather than a curse from him against them.

“Let them be turned back because of their shame, who say: ‘Aha, Aha!’” (3)

The first weapon that the wicked use against the children of God is to ridicule and despise them. If that was what the world used against its Savior, how much more would it be against those who preach Him?!

Ridicule is not something new, for it is the language of the wicked whenever they address the righteous; for the later to be justified through his balance and steadfastness like a rock before the storms of no avail.

The word “Aha” came in psalms 35, 21, and 25, to express some kind of scoffing; or, according to St. Augustine, a way of with false sweet words of commendation.

“Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love your salvation say continually, ‘Let God be magnified;’” (4)

While the righteous is ridiculed by those who seek his life, he praises the Lord, magnifies Him on His salvation work, and rejoice in Him.

It was not possible for the prison in Philippi to draw the hearts of Paul and Silas away from the rejoices of heaven.

“But I am poor and needy; Make haste to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay” (5)

Poverty for the sake of the Lord will make Him haste to save, and not to delay. Poverty in spirit, and the optional poverty in the body for the sake of the Lord, are the two wings of prayer, by which it may reach up to the bosom of God, and take His great mercies by force.

The riches and honors of the world would never be able to take away from the righteous his feeling of poverty; for he would never find what to enrich him and give him comfort, except God’s exalted mercies.

❖ What does “do not delay” mean? ... Many would say that there was still a very long time until the first coming (in the flesh) of the Lord Christ. What then?! ... Will He come before the time He designated, when we say to Him, “do not delay”!... It actually means: I wish Your coming does not seem to me to delay much. For me, it may seem as though there is still a long time to wait; whereas for God, to whom a thousand years are like one day, or a three hours night watch, it is not a long time.

St. Augustine

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 70

WHO CAN TAKE YOUR JOY AWAY FROM ME?!

- ❖ With every morning, the enemy sets snares to catch me;
But with every morning, I taste the sweetness of Your exalted mercies.
Let the afflictions by the enemy increase!
For, together with every affliction, I experience a new taste of Your divine mercies.
The enemy does his best to catch me;
But You hasten to lift me up to You;
What could the snares of the enemy do?
As long as I am lifted up by You to Your heavens?
- ❖ The enemy will never cease to reproach me;
He scoffs me and makes me a laughingstock and a byword!
He will never cease to say: “Aha, Aha!”
Behold, he gathers up for himself a great deposit of ridicule;
He can ridicule me for some moments; And he will be ridiculed eternally in hell.
- ❖ Every time the enemy seeks my life to enslave;
I would enjoy Your cross, the grantor of freedom;
My soul would become glad in Your salvation;
And Your works would become magnified in me;
Can the enemy draw me away from Your hands?
Can all his hosts deprive me of Your joy?
- ❖ Even if the world put all its possibilities in my hands;
I would still be poor and needy;
Until I get rich by You;
O You, who became poor, so that by Your poverty, You make me rich;
- ❖ Make haste, O my Savior, and do not delay!
Make haste, not just to rescue me from my enemy;
But so that I would acquire You, and You get to possess me;
I am Yours, And You are mine; O my soul’s beloved!

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**A COMMENTARY ON
THE BOOK OF PSALMS
(PSALMS 71 to 80)**

by

FATHER TADROS Y. MALATY

CHAPTER 71

A PRAYER BY A TEMPTED ELDER

There is no mention of the name of the author of this psalm; but he is obviously an elder, going through a lot of afflictions, who puts his trust in God, and seeks from Him to remember him in his old age. Although old age did not spare him adversaries to afflict him, yet it did not weaken his worship and his trust in God, his Savior.

From its style, it is rather obvious that its author is the prophet David, who uses expressions like: “*Incline Your ear*”; “*My Rock*”; “*My Fortress*”; “*My Refuge*”; “*Make haste*”, etc.

Its divisions:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. A proclamation of his trust in God | 1 – 5. |
| 2. His sustenance is praising God; from his birth to his old age | 6 – 9. |
| 3. The opposition of the adversaries will never cease | 10–11. |
| 4. A cry-out of the heart | 12– 14. |
| 5. A praise of conquest | 15– 24. |

The title:

In the Septuagint version the title came as: By David – A psalm sung by the Rechabites, sons of Jonadab; and by those who were led into captivity.

Commenting on the title, **St. Augustine**¹ says that the sons of Jonadab, in obedience of their father’s command, refrained from drinking wine, building houses, sowing seed, or planting a vineyard; and dwelt all their days in tents (Jeremiah 35: 5-10). For obeying their father’s command, as though it is the command of the Lord their God; because it bears the spirit of a divine commandment, God blessed them, and quoted their position when He rebuked His own people for their disobedience of His divine commandments.

1- HIS PROCLAMATION OF HIS TRUST IN GOD:

“In You, O Lord, I put my trust; Let me never be put to shame” (1)

This preface (1- 3) came conforming to that of psalm 31: 1- 3.

Feeling that afflictions are chasing him in his old age, the psalmist appears before God, to proclaim his faith in Him, his trust in His divine promises; and to confirm that those who trust in Him will never be put to shame.

When troubles and afflictions dwell upon man, he finds protection in God alone, to cry out: “*Be merciful, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings, I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by*” (Psalm 57: 1). “*Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust*”. (psalm16: 1). “*Keep my soul, and deliver me; Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in you*”. (psalm25: 20).

❖ Great is the power of hope in God; an un-conquerable fortress; an un-vulnerable protective wall; an-unceasing military provision; a calm haven; a strong tower; an un-opposable weapon; and a mighty power that could find a refuge somewhere unexpected by anyone. By such a mighty power, the unarmed would become armed; the women would be stronger than men; and even the children could be stronger than

¹ On Ps. 70 (71).

experienced warriors. No wonder they conquer adversaries, while, actually, they could conquer the world itself Hope in God can change everything¹!

(St. John Chrysostom)

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist here feels the rich grace of God perpetually supporting him. This is the story of the Holy Book, and the story of every man dedicated to God.

- ❖ In all the Holy Books, the grace of God, saving us, deposits itself in us; to deposit our souls in it. That is what this psalm is all about It is the grace meant by the apostle, saying: *“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy of being called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God”* (1 Corinthians 15: 9). He says: *“but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief”* (1 Timothy 1: 13); to which he adds: *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life”* (1 Timothy 1: 15, 16). He means to say, that every despairing sinner and oppressor, has the attitude of a gladiator (a captive or slave who was made to fight even to death in the arena to provide fun to spectators in ancient Rome) This grace of God is deposited in us in this psalm as well.
- ❖ Paul has been actually put to shame, yet not forever; For how could he not be put to shame, he to whom is said: *“What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed?”* (Romans 6: 21). What then, can we do, so as not to be forever put to shame? *“Look to Him and be radiant, and your faces would not be ashamed”* (see Psalm 34: 5). Having been put to shame in Adam; You therefore, should draw yourselves away from Adam, and approach Christ; for then, you would not be put to shame; *“In You, O Lord I put my trust; let me never be put to shame”* (1 LXX). In myself I am now put to shame; but in You I shall never be².

(St. Augustine)

“In Your righteousness, deliver me and rescue me; Incline Your ear to me and save me” (2)

In this psalm, the psalmist often repeats the word *“Your righteousness”* although it is sometimes translated as *“Your justice”*. The believer’s hope depends upon the righteousness of God; as by His righteousness, He fulfills His divine promises to His believers.

- ❖ *“In Your righteousness, deliver me and rescue me”* (2 LXX). In Your righteousness, and not in my own. As in my own, I would be like those, about whom is said: *“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God”* (Romans 10: 3). What is my own? I am preceded by my iniquity; and when I become righteous, it is actually Your own righteousness, which, given to me I become righteous.

“Incline your ear to me”. That is, as well, a confession of humility; for he who says *“Incline your ear to me”*, confesses that he is lying down like a sick man at the feet of his physician standing over him³.

¹ On Ps. 11.

² On Ps. 70 (71).

³ On Ps. 70 (71).

(St. Augustine)

“Be to me a rock of refuge to which I may resort continually; You have given me commandment to save me. For You are my rock and my fortress” (3)

Searching his whole life, the psalmist proclaims his experience with God; for He is truly his Rock, Fortress, and Refuge.

“Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations” (Psalm 90: 1); “Bow down Your ear to me; deliver me speedily; be my rock of refuge, a fortress of defense to save me” (Psalm 31: 2)

- ❖ ***“Be to me a rock of refuge” (3)***. I wish the arrows of the enemy will not reach me. For I am not capable of protecting myself. See, God, Himself will become your place of refuge; He, from whom you used to flee away in fear! Lift me up from the ground, O Lord; I will lean on You to find refuge in a stronghold¹.
- ❖ In me, there is still a great human weakness; there is still the early captivity! there is still *“a law in the body members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin” (Romans 7: 23); “A perishable body still weighs down the soul” (Wisdom 9: 15)*. However strong is your steadfastness by the grace of God, as long as you still carry this earthen vessel, in which God’s treasure is, you should have fear to a certain extent (2 Corinthians 4: 7) You are, O Lord, my Rock of steadfastness in this world against all temptations².

(St. Augustine)

“Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked; out of the hand of the unjust and cruel men” (4)

In a message of condolence sent by **St. Jerome** to ‘Eustachium’ after the departure of St. Paula, her mother, he told her that some wicked people wrongly claimed that the pious behavior of her mother was a kind of mental deficiency; In their sight St. Paula was out of her mind, and in need of medical help.

- ❖ I know that when they wrote to her about the serious illness of her children, particularly of ‘Toxotius’, her favorite daughter; she first got very upset, and cried out: *“I am so troubled that I cannot speak” (Psalm 77: 4)*. Then, when she remembered the words of the Savior: *“He who loves a son or a daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10: 37)*, she prayed to God, saying: *“Lord, preserve those who are appointed to die” (Psalm 79: 11)*; namely, those who are physically put to death every day. I know that when someone cruel told her that some people claim that she is out of her mind and need mental treatment, because of her flaring zeal in virtue, she only quoted the words of the apostle: *“We have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men” (1 Corinthians 4: 9); “We are fools for Christ’s sake” (1 Corinthians 4: 10)*³.

(St. Jerome)

The adversary warring against the psalmist is wicked, evil, and unjust. There is no chance of reasoning with him, as he, by nature, finds pleasure in practicing evil, cruelty and violence; There is no way to be saved from his evil other than to take refuge in God; according to the words of David to the prophet Gad: *“I am in great distress. Please let us*

¹ On Ps. 70 (71).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

³ Letter 108: 19.

fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man” (2 Samuel 24: 14).

Unfortunately, man sometimes resorts to the devil, or to one of his hosts, to save him from the devil himself!

St. Augustine distinguishes between two kinds of wicked men: one he calls ‘disobedient’, and the other he calls ‘unjust’. The first has got the law, then disobeyed it; and the other did not get the law, and sinned.

❖ Beside the enemy within; namely, the law working in the body members, there are as well enemies outside.

The wicked are of two kinds: some have got the law, and others have not. All Jews and Christians have got the law. Therefore, generally speaking, the wicked include the two kinds: those who have got the law, then disobeyed it; and those who sin without it. The apostle, talking about both kinds, says: *“For as many as have sinned without the law, will also perish without the law; and as many as have sinned in the law, will be judged by the law”* (Romans 2: 12). You, who also suffer from both kinds would say to God: *“Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked”* (4); out of the hand of those who disobey the law, and of the unjust¹.

(St. Augustine)

“For you are my hope, O Lord God, You are my trust from my youth” (5)

The prophet David’s experience with God, and his hope in Him, is a long experience that goes back to his youth. In his talk as a young man to king Saul, he says: *“The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine”* (1 Samuel 17: 37).

❖ Truly, my hope is in You, O Lord; I will never be put to shame, for *“You are my trust from my youth”* (5)².

(St. Augustine)

2- HIS SUSTENANCE HAS BEEN IN PRAISING GOD FROM HIS BIRTH TO HIS OLD AGE:

“By You I have been upheld from my birth; You are He who took me out of my mother’s womb. My praise shall be continually of you” (6)

God’s care for David does not only go back to his youth, but goes even back to the beginning of his life, from the time he was conceived by his mother in her womb, and when he was delivered. *“You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust when I was on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s womb You have been my God. Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help”* (Psalm 22: 9-11). David got in touch with God’s love and mercy even while in his mother’s womb; for some, the womb became their grave; and some died on their exit from their mothers’ womb.

We heard of no one who offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving, on account that God has taken care of him while in his mother’s womb, and brought him out safe to the world. But David does not disregard God’s works with him since he was conceived, and

¹ On Ps. 70 (71).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

probably even before that, having been in God's mind, preparing him for a certain mission.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist started trusting in God since his youth, having armed him against the devil, with faith, love, hope, and all the rest of the divine gifts. God protected him even from the time he was in his mother's womb.

- ❖ Hasn't God been your hope since your youth? Hasn't He so been since your childhood? He has certainly been! "*I was cast upon You from my birth*".
- ❖ Now you are moaning! While being weak, you need the help of a physician. How about when you reach the perfect health, and become like the angels of God (Matthew 22: 30)? Will you forget the grace that saved you? ¹

(St. Augustine)

"My praise shall be continually of You" (6). I praise You because You created me; Because You cared for me while being in my mother's womb, at my birth, in my childhood, youth, and old age, and even after my departure from this world. That is why my praise shall be continually, and forever in You. You have created me a perpetual praiser.

- ❖ O Son of God; Move my melodies to praise you; that all my senses would exult.

Since the beginning, my tongue was prepared to praise You; It would be worthy of punishment if it slothfully cease to praise you!

O my Lord. I shall not cease to sing your praise, lest I will be condemned on the Day of Judgment.

Man's tongue is made to praise the Deity; and who does not will be blamed and despised.

When the Creator made the mouth, He put in it the voice and the word of praise.

Everyone, therefore, who feels the presence of the Creator, should praise the Lord who created him.

Man's mouth has not got the right to utter vain and unbecoming words.

When God created the mouth, He made it perfect to praise Him, and not to utter vain words.

To the one who ceases to praise Him, the Lord would say: 'Cry out with your larynx; Raise your voice like a horn'.

O my Lord, I am your creation, help me to admire about your works; and allow me to praise You as is befitting of Your creation.

Allow my heart to serve you by the thoughts of holiness; for you are fearsome to Your creatures.

Sanctify my tongue from all the worldly issues; and make it move to praise You.

O my Lord, Here I open my mouth; Fill it by Your praise as You promised; that no vain talk would be uttered by it.

Moving towards your talent-filled tunes that screamed, and I thank your praise to the Son of God².

- ❖ O my Lord, the mouth, the word, and the tongue, are all Your possessions; Move the mouth to praise You; even though it is unworthy.

¹ On Ps. 70 (71).

² الميمر 1 على الإرشاد (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

The mind, the understanding, and the thoughts, are all Your possessions; Help the mind to tell Your story, while looking at You.

Both the movements and the thoughts of the soul are Your possessions; Help the soul to recognize and to describe Your beauty.

O Word of God who came in a body; give me Your word to talk about Your amazing coming.

You came to us, yet You remained in Your Father; You are both up and down; the heaven and the earth are filled by You, O Son of God!

Fill my mouth with praise: Open it and fill it; It is not open, because it is slothful.

You are He who opens the closed mouths to talk; who could open his mouth without You?

You made the donkey talk (Numbers 22: 22-30). Everyone knows that You can easily give utterance even to a beast¹.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

“I have become as a wonder to many, but You are my strong refuge” (7)

Looking at the psalmist with so many violent afflictions dwelling upon him, one after another, people considered him as strange and weird, different from any other humans; as though God has poured upon him all His wrath. But the psalmist had in his depths God’s comforts strongly working amid the sufferings and tribulations.

Some scholars, however, take the Hebrew word translated here as “wonder”, in its good meaning; namely, they look at him in awe and admiration; how could he endure such severe tribulations and go through them in peace! Yet in sermons by St. Augustine, this word came as a kind of “monster”, an animal or plant, distorted, and horribly shaped!

❖ Why would they insult me, and look at me as a monster, on account that I believe in what I do not see; while they are content with the things they could see; exult in drinking, licentiousness, greed, riches, blunder, worldly honors, and hypocrisy?! Such things they enjoy; while I walk along a different path, despise and fear the luxuries of this world, and not trust in anything but the promises of God. When they say: “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*” (1 Corinthians 15: 32); I, on the other hand would say: “Yes, let us pray and fast, for tomorrow we die”. Walking steadily along such a narrow and difficult way, “*I have become as a wonder to many; but You are my strong refuge*”.

Be with me, O lord Jesus, and say to me: Do not be afraid to walk this narrow way; for I have already walked it. I am the Way itself (John 14: 6). I shall guide you, and I shall lead you to Me².

(St. Augustine)

This is a cry out that came from several men of God. Habakkuk says: “*O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to*

You, “violence!”, and You will not save?” (Habakkuk1: 1); and Jeremiah says: “*As a fountain wells up with water, so she wells up with her wickedness. Violence and plundering are heard in her. Before me continually are grief and wounds*” (Jeremiah 6: 7).

“Let my mouth be filled with your praise, and with glory all day” (8)

¹ الميمر 1- على الصلاة التي علمها ربنا لتلاميذه: أبانا الذي في السماء ليتقدس اسمك (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

The denier does not thank God, nor rejoice in His work even in the time of comfort; and if he did thank Him, it does not come from his depths; Whereas in the time of tribulation, he is stirred up inside, and sometimes utters unbecoming words against God. The children of God, on the other hand, will always find joy and gladness of hearts in their praise and thanksgiving to God, even in the time of pitch darkness. They never forget God's mercies in the past; trust in God's wisdom in the midst of present anguish, and are always sure that God will save, and glorify them in due time. Their mouths are "filled with His praise, and with glory all day".

St. Jacob El-Serougi believes that God in His love of man has created him an exultant musical being, who shares with the heavenly creatures their joy in Him and their praise to Him; and who practices while on earth the heavenly life that knows nothing but perpetual joy. The psalmist sings: "Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise the Lord with the harp; Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy" (Psalm 33: 1-3).

God created man to praise Him; to play the songs of praise by his body as well as by his soul; by his tongue as well as by his heart; publicly as well as in secret. The righteous praise God by their bodies that they offer a live sacrifice acceptable to God. (Romans 12: 1). **St. Augustine** says: [I wish no one would think about the musical instruments entertainment; as it refers here to inner things, as it is said:

"Within me, O Lord, I give You praise]. And **St. Jerome** says: [Our bodies and souls are our harps, playing together with all their strings in harmony¹].

❖ O Lord, I shall not cease praising You, even after my departure.

He who lives for and by You will not die; and the silence of death will not be able to mute him.

❖ What is "all day"? but 'without ceasing'?

In the time of joy; for You are my comfort!

An the time of anguish, for You will put everything in order!

Before I was there; for You are the Creator!

And as I became here; for You grant health!

When I sin, for You are the forgiver!

When I return to You; for You are the Helper!

And when I persevere; for You grant the crown²!

(**St. Augustine**)

"Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do You forsake me when my strength fails?" (9)

Expecting that in his old age to become frail, David seeks from God not to cast him off. Whereas the denier will cast off the one who served

him, once he becomes ill with old age, and not able any more to serve him; as did the Amalekite master to his Egyptian servant who said to

David: "My master left me behind, because three days ago I fell sick" (1 Samuel 30: 13).

❖ In the time of old age, you may say together with the apostle Paul: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12: 10).

¹ Homilies on the Psalms, 21.

² On Ps. 70 (71).

Do not be afraid that you will be cast off when you become weak in the time of Your old age. Why? Was Your Lord not weak on the cross? Did He not appear helpless before the mighty men? Was He not scoffed by those who shook their heads, saying: “*If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross*” (Matthew 27: 40). Was He forsaken because He became weak; He who chose not to come down from the cross, lest He would seem as showing off His power? To endure their slander? Was it not to teach you to endure the slanders of men; and to be strong by your God? Probably in His person, it was said: “*I have become a wonder to many; but You are My strong refuge*”¹.

(St. Augustine)

3- THE OPPOSITION OF THE ADVERSARIES WILL NEVER CEASE:

“For my enemies speak against me; and those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together” (10)

Our adversaries are the devil and his hosts who are not preoccupied with the death of our bodies as much as with the perdition of our souls. They dedicate their energies and time to lie in wait, and to counsel together against the children of God.

The psalmist cries out, saying: “*Many are they who say of me: There is no help for him in God*” (Psalm 3: 2). “*My enemies speak evil of me: When will he die, and his name perish?*” (Psalm 41: 5).

- ❖ Satan did not endure to see the privileges given to man who was created of dust, and yet was chosen to dwell in paradise. Although man, in the sight of Satan, was a lower creation, yet he had hope in the eternal life; while he, who was of a more exalted nature, fell, and became a part of the lower existence².

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ We were envied by the evil spirits once they knew that we are trying to recognize our shame and disgrace; to find a way to escape from their evil works; and that we have not only rejected their evil counsel that they plant in us, but many of us scoff their tricks. The devils know for sure that their Creator has condemned them to death, and has prepared for them to inherit hell because of their wickedness³.

(St. Anthony the Great)

- ❖ There is actually a conflict between virtue and the envy of the devil: the former endures everything, for man to live un-submitted to evil. And holds fast to goodness, even when man suffers troubles; whereas the later works hard to facilitate the way of iniquity⁴.

(St. Gregory the Neizianzen)

“Saying: God has forsaken him; Pursue and take him, for is none to deliver him” (11)

The wicked rejoice when they assume that God has forsaken someone; as they find the chance to attack and captivate him with ease.

¹ On Ps. 70 (71).

² Paradise, 12.

⁴ On The Great Athanasius, 18.

³ الرسالة السادسة.

- ❖ This could be said about Christ, for He who, by the great power of the Deity, being equal to the Father, has brought the dead up to life; In an instant, became, as though weak and helpless in the hands of the enemies.

On the cross He said what they were thinking of Him: “*Why have You forsaken Me?*” (Matthew 27: 46). How could those people, in their evil, assume that I am forsaken?! “*For had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*” (1 Corinthians 2: 8); they would have not persecuted and arrested Him!

I wish, O brethren, we take this more as concerning the members of Christ; and recognize our voice in these words; As He (Christ) uttered them in our persons, and not concerning His power and His majesty, He uttered them in what He became because of us, and not according to what He is, as the Mighty Creator¹!

(St. Augustine)

4- A CRY-OUT OF THE HEART:

“*O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!*” (12)

Man often feeling in his affliction, that God has forsaken him, cries out to Him to hasten to help him. This cry out came in Psalms 22: 11, 19; 35: 22; 38; 21, 22; 70: 1).

- ❖ God is not at all far from us; but “*He is near to those who have a broken heart*” (Psalm 34: 18).².

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Grace has an eternal home, for which she cares as a loving mother, and would never forsake, for a mother could never forsake her child. As a child thinks that there is no other woman in the world but she who suckles him, So the soul that loves God thinks of Him. Wherever there is a true Christian, he dwells in God; and God dwells in him³.
- ❖ Grace, becoming a mother for the earth, supplicates to the Lord, saying: Enough of this folly of the earth; go down and rescue it from vanity that supplication came before the divine majesty, which sent the merciful Physician to the sick⁴.
- ❖ Grace the mother of mercies -- established the world, and continues to carry it; for if she forsakes it, it would fall. A hen that stretches its wings over its chicks to protect them; portrays a likeness of how the Deity stretches His mercies over His creatures to protect them⁵.
- ❖ As an infant is in need of his mother to sustain him; a creature is in need of the Creator to sustain him.

If the mother forsakes her infant to whom she gave birth; It would be better for him not to be born by her.

And if the Lord forsakes the world He created; it would be better for it not to exist altogether.

¹ On Ps. 70 (71).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

³ رسالته إلى نشريات المتوحد.

⁴ راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سوني: الإنسان في تعليم ما يعقوب السروجي الملفانن 1995، ص 119-120.

⁵ راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سوني: الإنسان في تعليم ما يعقوب السروجي الملفانن 1995، ص 120.

Even if a mother would forget her infant; “*God is not unjust to forget His work*” (Hebrew 6: 10) ¹.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

“*Let them be confounded and consumed who are adversaries of my life; Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor who seek my hurt*” (13):

❖ What does it mean: who are adversaries of my life? Litigants as if they were in a battle. It is said they are adversaries those who are challenging to engage in battle. So if it's to warn of who adversaries our souls

What does it mean: “*who are adversaries of our life*”? Means to make us to resist God. We even evil that we have; God is not an eagle...

All the people who deal with them To make worried in your grief and your experiences That is the goal of all those who disturb you by sorrows and temptations; they intend to provoke you to be so discontent with God because of what you suffer, to utter from your mouth such words as: “What is this? What have I done to deserve it?” Now, do you mean to say that you are righteous, have done no evil; and God is unjust²?!
(St. Augustine)

“*But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more*” (14)

Whenever a creature – whether a human or an angel – praise God and thank Him for His goodness, he would see God’s mercies as though new, and was not seen before. He, who praises God, would always remain filled with hope, joy, and exultation, and would never get bored of praising God. He would perpetually enjoy new experiences in his relationship with God, the, merciful, loving, and compassionate.

God’s love, being indescribable, and His mercies uncountable, He will forever remain an inexhaustible spring of praise and exultation,

According to **St. Augustine**, God is glorified and praised for all His works; Yet it is befitting of the believer to add to this, his anticipation of our resurrection from the dead by the Lord Christ, as the greatest of works that gives glory to God; and as a great subject of praise.

❖ If everything is praising Him, Is there anything you may add? God is praised in all His good works: in all His creation; in His ordination of times, systems of seasons, raising up heavens, giving fruition to earth, nature of the seas, exaltation of the creation everywhere, and things concerning human beings themselves: in delivering the law; in the salvation of His people from the bondage of the Egyptians; and in all the rest of His amazing works. Yet, He is still not praised in the resurrection of the bodies for the eternal life. We should, therefore add this praise for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ; to become above any past praise. That is what is befitting of us to perceive here³!

(St. Augustine)

❖ He will come, and all creation will tremble before His coming; His sign will shine, and all tribes will tremble before it.

¹ الميمر 27 (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

³ On Ps. 70 (71).

He will begin His walk; and those awake will fly forth to him; Tens of thousands will run up toward Him.

The ends of earth will tremble before His hosts that hasten to throw live coals, and great lightening.

He will come to do justice; and the entire world will clearly see His great zeal.

The righteous will fly up to encounter the King who moved from His place of dwelling, to be together with Him as He promised.

There, the multitudes of Simon will encounter those of Gabriel, who will be accompanied by his chosen, and by his angels.

The thousands with Paul will sing together with the tens of thousands with Michael, the songs of praise by their trumpets.

The messengers of light will come together with the honorable chairs, to give glory to the divine Judge in great celebration.

The creation will thunder with praise before the Son of the King, who comes to uprightly judge the living and the dead¹.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

5- THE PRAISE OF CONQUEST:

“My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day, for I do not know their measure” (15)

Here he brings righteousness together with salvation; as the salvation which we enjoy is the fruit of God’s righteousness and faithfulness in fulfilling His divine promises to us. As far as we are concerned, our salvation is the practical interpretation of God’s unperceivable righteousness; according to the words of God in Isaiah: *“Am I not the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, a Just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me”* (Isaiah 45: 21).

The believer, having no knowledge of the numbers of God’s works, filled with love, mercy, and salvation, will remain unceasingly and perpetually praising God.

❖ I should add to my praise for You, that even if I am righteous, my righteousness is nothing but Your righteousness in me, and not my own; as *“You justify the ungodly”* (Romans 4: 5).

“Your salvation all the day”; What is *“Your salvation?”* I wish no one would assume that he could save himself, as *“Salvation belongs to the Lord”* (Psalm 3: 8). No one could save himself by himself; *“For vain is the help of man”* (Psalm 60: 11). *“Your salvation all day”*; all the time: in case of a tribulation, preach the salvation of the Lord; and in case of comfort, preach the salvation of the Lord. Do not preach in the time of comfort, and loose your peace in the time of affliction; lest the saying *“all the day”* would not be true; All day long, day and night, praise God; namely in comfort (as in the day), as well as in affliction (as in the night)².

(St. Augustine)

❖ O Lord, both the righteous and the wicked give you thank for Your love; which the world know as great and limitless.

O Lord, the righteous give you thanks by their behavior and their virtuous works.

¹ الميمر 8، على رجوع آدم، قبطي، الميمر 72 على خلقة آدم وحياة الموتى (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

By the blood flowing from their necks, the martyrs give You thanks; and all those persecuted by their diverse sufferings.

Let the prophets praise your name by the beauty of their inspirations; and the apostles and the martyrs by their slain bodies.

Let the scholars give you thanks by the sacrifices of their thoughts filled with peace; and all the priests by their holy attires.

O Lord, let all the peoples in the four corners of the world, praise You with their palms.

The sea with its waves; the land with its valleys; the depths with their creatures; the firmament with its light; and the earth with its inhabitants; Let them all praise you.

The earth with those awake; the wind with its blowing; the clouds with their lightening; the thunder with its roar; the mouths with their words; and the mind with its marveling; Let them all praise You.

The thoughts with love; the cherubim with awe; the seraphim with holiness; the fire with its power; the wind with its strength; Let them all praise you.

The scattered, whom You gathered together; the fallen, whom You set up; the broken, whom You mended; the slaves, whom You liberated; the cast-away, whom You brought back; and the lowly, whom You exalted, Let them all praise You.

The ill, whom You visited; the sick, whom You healed; the robbed, whom You rescued; the labored and heavy-laden, to whom You gave rest; the offended, whom You reconciled; and the defiled, whom You purified; Let them all praise You.

The captives, whom You brought back; the imprisoned, whom You set free; and the dead, to whom You gave life; they all give You thanks, but cannot fulfill Your due; They all praise You¹.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

“I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only” (16)

Where will David go to encounter the Lord God, the mighty in His works of mercy? The tabernacle of meeting had indeed a special place in David’s heart and mind, that he desired to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life (Psalm 27: 4); where he felt like being in his own father’s house! And when he was expelled from his place of residence, and it became impossible for him to go to the house of the Lord; that could not deny him being in the bosom of his Mighty Father. He was perpetually preoccupied with the Lord’s righteousness, wisdom, mercy, and fulfillment of His promises; his whole being was absorbed in God.

❖ *“I will go in the strength of the Lord God” (16)*. Not in my own strength, but in that of the Lord God. They are glorified in their strength of the letter; but as *“the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”* (2 Corinthians 3: 6), I do not know the letter, but *“will go in the strength of the Lord God”*.

“I will make mention of your righteousness, of Yours only” (16). I wonder why did he add the word *“only”*; Was it not enough to say *“I will make mention of Your righteousness”*? He means to say: I shall not make mention of my own righteousness; *“What do (I) have that (I) did not receive?”* (1 Corinthians 4: 7). Only your righteousness

¹الميمر 63، على محبة الله للبشر وعلى محبة الأبرار (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

gives me salvation. As my own alone, are nothing but sins. I wish I do not feel glorified in my strength; I wish I do not remain in the letter; I wish I despise the letter¹.

(St. Augustine)

“O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works” (17)

The men of God always feel that the Lord is their true Teacher, who open up their eyes to see the wondrous works of His love; in particular toward mankind; *“All your children shall be taught by the Lord”* (Isaiah 54: 13).

What did the Lord teach David from his youth? Joy in His works, wisdom, and the ordinance of salvation.

❖ What will You teach me? *“To make mention of Your righteousness; Yours only”*. When I think about my past life, I realize how much I am indebted; and what I received instead of paying back.

I am indebted for the punishment, that was paid by the Grace.

I am indebted for the Hades, while I have been granted the eternal life.

“O God, You have taught me from my youth”. Since the beginning of my faith by which You renewed me, You taught me that nothing surpass it; Hence, I should proclaim that all my debts, You have paid back yourself. From what would man return to God, but from iniquity? And from what is man saved, but from captivity? But, who can claim that he was unjustly captivated; if he forsook God, his Leader, and followed the destructor? It is God who should be our Leader; *“The Leader gave a commandment; while the destructor gave deception”* (Genesis 2: 17; 3: 5). Where were your ears, between the commandment and the deception? Was Satan better than God? Was the deceiver better than Your Creator?

From the time I returned to You, O my Creator, and You renewed him whom You created, I have been taught that it was not because of my worthiness, but Your grace has dwelt upon me for free, to *“make mention of Your righteousness; Yours only”*².

(St. Augustine)

As God reveals His wondrous love for His servant, the depths of the later flow with praise and thanksgiving; and his tongue testifies to His wonders; *“I will praise You, O my Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works”* (Psalms 9: 1); *“That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all Your wondrous works”* (Psalm 26: 7); *“Many, O lord my God, are Your wondrous works which You have done; and Your thoughts which are toward us”* (Psalm 40: 5).

“Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your might to all generations to come” (18)

The prophet David in his old age and gray-head, does not lean upon his long experience, nor upon his wisdom, popularity, material possibilities, or temporal authority; but he remains leaning upon the chest of God, and asks Him not to forsake him.

❖ You have taught me about Your grace from my youth; and up till now, I declare Your wondrous works; for You are with me lest I die; O You who came that I rise up; *“Now also when I am old and gray-headed”*; namely until my last breath. If You are not

¹ On Ps. 70 (71).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

with me, I would have no worthiness in me, I wish Your grace would stay with me forever.

“Do not forsake me, until I declare Your might to all generations to come” (18).

God’s Might is Christ; Do not let them rejoice; those who say: [Christianity will only be for some time]. Let there be someone *“to declare Your might to all generations to come” (18)*’ namely, to the end of the world; as once it is the end of the world, there would be no generation to come¹.

(St. Augustine)

Also Your righteousness, O lord, is very high; You who have done great things; O God, who is like You?” (19)

The righteousness of God here, includes His faithfulness in fulfilling His divine promises; and in particular the coming down of Emanuel to us; to carry what is ours, and for us to carry what is His. He came to present Himself to us to acquire, to enjoy the Grantor of the spiritual gifts, of the true riches, of the peace and reconciliation with heaven; and of the love for our brethren. We became clothed in Him to cover up our inner nakedness; Acquiring Him turned our dryness into fruition, and our bitterness into sweetness. He descended to us as a heavenly Teacher, to kindle our hearts with the heavenlies, and to set us free of the love of the temporal. For our sake He dove like a swimmer into the depths of Hades, to liberate us from the dark prison, and to bring us forth to His lighted kingdom. He received death on the cross, so that by His death, he put death to death.

❖ I wish I can say to every generation to come: You come from captivity, and belong to the new Adam, the Grantor of freedom; to tell every generation to come, that my strength is not my own, nor is my righteousness; but it is *“Your righteousness, O God, is very high, You who have done great things” (19)*

“Your strength and righteousness”; To what extent? Is it to the flesh and blood? No, but even to up high, O God, who have done great things; to heaven, where there are angels, thrones, authorities, principalities, and hosts.

They are indebted to You for the way they are.

They are indebted to You for the life they have.

They are indebted to You for the righteousness they live in.

They are indebted to You for the blessings they enjoy.

Do not think that man alone belongs to God’s grace. What was the angel before he was created? And how would he be if forsaken by Him who has created him²?

(St. Augustine)

❖ You are sent by Your Father to lift men up from the trash of the garbage.

The divine mercies mixed You with men who were in perdition; and through mixing with them, you brought them back.

You became one of us; and here You are with us, in our midst.

You are Emanuel who came to liberate His Father’s slaves, O You the beloved Son!

Here You are with us, O our God; Emanuel, according to the holy Scripture!

❖ For our sake He became poor; and by His mercies He made us rich.

¹ On Ps. 70 (71).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

He became the Son of Man; and made us the children of God. He brought us up from the lowliness of slavery to the level of beloved children of God (2 Corinthians 8: 9; John 15: 15).

He died by His own free will, and delivered us to life that will never die, so that death would no more have authority over us. He lighted the world that was dark. He paved the way of life for men, to head to His glorified Father¹.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

“O God, who is like You?” The deception of Satan for Adam and Eve, on the tongue of the serpent, was that they would become like God;

Whereas the psalmist, looking at the grace of God, whether concerning man or the heavenly hosts, says: *“O God, who is like You?”*

Through their disobedience, our early parents lost their likeness to God; And through grace, man will resume his enjoyment of God’s image and His likeness; the way Adam has been before his fall.

❖ *“O God, who is like You?”* No one in the pit; no one in Hades; no one in heaven; For all of them You have created... Why would the creature rebel against his Creator?!

“O God, who is like You?” As for me, says the miserable Adam in everyone of us, through my will gone astray, I intended to be like You. But look at how I ended up! From captivity I cry out to You I, who has been like a good king, became a captive under the deceiver! I cry out to You, for from You I have fallen.

I have fallen when I sought to be like You.

Through my evil vanity and wicked haughtiness, I was condemned to death, and withdrawn from the way of righteousness.

I broke the commandment; I took away from myself the yoke of self-control; I was puffed up by a spirit of arrogance!

I intended to be like You, and ended up to be like a lowly beast!

Where am I now? As a captive, I cry out: *“O God, who is like You?”*

I was indeed like You when I was under Your authority, and under Your commandment. But *“Man, not abiding in honor, became like beasts that perish”* (Psalm 49: 12). Now I cry out: *“O God, who is like You?”*²

(St. Augustine)

❖ He is the way along which man walks to behold the Father; He is the Gate of life; Whoever goes through it, will overcome death (John 14: 6; John 10: 9).

He is the Physician, from whom will come all help to the sick.

He is the Fountain, from whom life will flow upon those around Him.

By Him all devils are driven away from men;

By Him the soul is purified and enlightened;

By Him the multitude of the world’s sins are slain.

By the strength of His preaching the tax collectors were justified; and By His forgiveness the sinners have become perfect.

By His might He bears the burden of the world; On Him all creatures lean, and by Him they exist.

He is the Sun of Righteousness; and the great light.(malachi4: 2).

¹ الرسالة السابعة (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

He is the rich, Son of the Rich; who makes everyone rich; He is the strength for all the weak (2 Corinthians 8: 9; Ephesians 2: 4).

Blessed is He who came down to visit the world¹.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

“You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up from the depths of the earth” (20)

The divine hand that with wisdom allowed for the affliction, with the same wisdom and love, will bring us up, rescue us, and revive us.

❖ *“You, who have shown me great and severe troubles” (20)* with worthiness, O you arrogant servant! For you foolishly intended to be like God who created you in His image (Genesis 1: 27).

Did you think that it would be good for you to withdraw from that goodness? If He is God, on the highest level of goodness; good in, and by Himself, and not through outer source; by withdrawing from Him, how would you be, but evil?! If He is our blessedness, what would be left for the one who withdraws from Him, but misery?!

Now, come back after your misery, and cry out: *“O God, Who is like You? You, who have shown me great and severe troubles”*.

But you should know that those troubles are intended to chasten and reform, and not to forsake.

Finally, with his thanksgiving, he says: *“You have revived me again, and brought me up again from the depths of the earth” (20)* You brought me up again from the depths of sin².

(St. Augustine)

❖ When the Most High (God) sees iniquity, and keep silent, do not assume that He is not zealous or an avenger!

And when He severely chastens, do not assume that He is overwhelmed by anger, and is moved to punish the iniquity He saw.

He is the same in His chastisement, as well as in His longsuffering; He never changes³.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

“You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side” (21)

David anticipates, not only sure salvation, but blessings, glories, and comforts more than he asks for, and beyond what he seeks.

The Lord brought us back from the depths of the earth, and even from the graves, when He resurrected and presented to us the resurrected life, and granted us to seek what is high above. By that He granted us the true and heavenly comforts, and the fellowship of glories.

With some details, **St. Augustine**, commenting on the word “again” that came twice in verse 20, says that what the psalmist got is a reflection of what happened with the Lord Christ, who is risen to raise us up together with Him; and ascended to let us ascend together with Him⁴.

¹الميمر 17، على الكنعانية (مت 15: 21-28؛ مر 7: 24-30) (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

³الميمر 1 (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

⁴ On Ps. 70 (71).

- ❖ We back from the depths of the earth by our faith, The one who came before us stood up from the depths of the earth Here you hear the "back", then "return", because Christ goes before us, and others beg (to attain)¹

(St. Augustine)

“I will praise You with the harp for Your faithfulness, O my God! I will sing praise to You with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel” (22)

The psalmist praises God, not only for the works of His love toward him, but also for the sake of all His amazing divine features. He praises Him for His faithfulness, and for being the Holy One of Israel. The true believer will not fear the divine faithfulness, and will not get disturbed because God is Holy; But he will find in the divine faithfulness a fountain to help him recognize, experience, and enjoy the taste of faithfulness; And, in the divine holiness, he will find, not horror because of his sins, and the defilement of his heart, but will find a free source, and an exalted grace, to enjoy the fellowship with the Holy One, so that sin would dissolve and escape, for it finds no place for itself in his heart, mind, or feelings.

The psalmist, according to **St. Augustine**, sings with the harp, as well as with the lyre; namely with the spirit, as well as with the body².

- ❖ Humans are created to praise often, increasing it every day.

The shining sun does not shine for itself; but to give light to humans.

For their sake, the celestial bodies are set in heaven; and for their sake they cause day and night to follow one another.

For their sake there are the discernment, the knowledge, the word, and the voice; in order to give praise to the most High in due time.

The mouth of man is well formed as though to praise the Lord; and therefore who is slothful to praise is a denier of God’s favor.

For this purpose you have the mouth by which to praise, to give thanks, to exult, and to bless.

Therefore, praise, for you have the word; and exult, for you have the voice full of melodies.

Give thanks, for you have the mind and the discernment; Bless, for you have become an uttering, not a silent vessel.

Having been nothing before; the divine mercies made something great out of you; So now, give thanks in abundance; Why are you still silent?

Getting inside yourself and looking at your person within, you will find all the wonders of the mighty creation³.

(St. Jacob El-Serougi)

“My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, and my soul which You have redeemed” (23)

Praise causes joy to flow over the whole being of man, over his soul as well as over his body. According to **St. Augustine**, the lips sometimes express what is inside man, and sometimes what is outside. He may smile, yet his smile does not reveal an inner peace, nor a rejoicing soul. Here, the psalmist confirms that his joy springs from inside,

¹ On Ps. 70 (71).

² On Ps. 70 (71).

³ الميمر 96 على قطع رأس يوحنا المعمدان (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

as well as outside himself; his lips smile, so does his soul; and his tongue praises all the day long. It is befitting of the true believer to have his soul exult while praising God; and his body should also partake of his inner gladness.

“My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long; for they are confounded, for they are brought to shame, who seek my hurt” (24)

The psalmist, being sure that he will enjoy conquest, sings while still going through temptation; for he is sure that God will grant it to him.

❖ The tongue of the body “*shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long*” (24); namely, forever without ceasing. That will happen at the end of time, with the resurrection of the body, and its transformation to an angelic stature¹.

(St. Augustine)

¹ On Ps. 70 (71).

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 71

YOU ARE MY REFUGE SINCE I WAS STILL IN MY MOTHER'S WOMB

- ❖ Before I come to know You, while still in my mother's womb;
You were for me the refuge and support.
Before I come to this world,
I was in Your mind, the object of Your love.
As a son of Yours, You prepared a mission for me,
And presented to me Your care as my refuge.
- ❖ I passed through my childhood, and youth;
And here I am in my old age;
I cry out to You:
Do not forsake me; for no one will support me, but You.
- ❖ I have no righteousness to lean upon;
Your righteousness is my support.
Your love is the secret of my salvation.
You are my Rock, and the Stronghold of my life.
- ❖ You are aware of the multitude of my enemies;
You know their evils and oppression;
How they find pleasure in violence;
And how their law is oppression itself;
But You alone are my hope and salvation.
- ❖ You are my praise and strength;
You are my joy and gladness;
By You, my depths exult all the day long;
The day will never preoccupy me away from You;
And the night will never draw me away from rejoicing in You.
Both day and night motivate me to praise You;
In the daylight I exult in Your light;
And amid the darkness of the night, I resort to You; as You are the Light of
the world.
- ❖ When I become frail with age;
Even my closest relative will forsake me;
But You alone will be my refuge.
- ❖ The devil and his hosts will never cease to oppose me;
They will never find rest until they destroy my soul;
Hasten to come to my aid, O my God;
Fill my whole life by Yourself;
You are my conquest and praise.
- ❖ What does the enemy intend to do?
Except to take Your image away from me;
He will not stop provoking me;
Until I make a god of myself;
And until I think of myself as a righteous man;

Bring me back to You, to enjoy Your righteousness;
For I have nothing of my own;
Every goodness is a gift from You.
You sanctify my spirit and body.
To praise You with my body as though with a harp;
And with my spirit as though with a lyre;
My whole being rejoices in You;
Testifies to Your righteousness, O the amazing Holy One!

PSALM 72

THE GLORIOUS KINGDOM OF CHRIST, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

The last psalm concentrated upon the righteousness of God, and His faithfulness in His true promises toward His suffering believers. Here, the psalmist, by the spirit of prophecy, reveals the kingdom of Christ, who cares for the salvation of men; to restore to them their lost glory.

The portrait presented here about the king and His kingdom, very much conforms to the prophecies concerning the Lord Christ, that came in Isaiah 11: 1 – 5, and Isaiah 60 to 62.

This psalm is considered the end of the second division of the book of psalms, conforming to the book of Exodus (psalms 42 to 72); that speaks of salvation as a collective church life. The introduction to this division (psalms 42 to 48) came to proclaim the sufferings and the salvation of the church of God; which conform to the beginning of the book of Exodus (1 to 15). And the present psalm comes to conform to what came at the end of the book of Exodus (25 to 40); proclaiming the setting of the tabernacle of the meeting, and the public appearance of God's glory in it, as a palace for the heavenly King, the Savior of the world.

It is claimed that this psalm was used in the early church as a praise in the feast of the Nativity of the Lord Christ and His Epiphany; when the church celebrates the receiving of the kingdom of Christ by the Gentiles; and remembers the visit by the Magi from the Gentiles to submit to the King.

Its divisions:

1- The constitution of the kingdom: the righteousness	1 -4
2- A kingdom with no end	5 -7
3- A kingdom without limits	8 -11
4- A kingdom of love	12 -14
5- A blessed kingdom	15 -17
6- A kingdom of praise	18 –20

The title:

“A psalm of Solomon”: Some believe that the author of this psalm is Solomon; or at least it was he who put it in its poetic form. Yet many scholars believe that its author is the prophet David, concerning the celebration of the sitting of his son -- king Solomon, as a symbol of the Lord Christ. It is a genuine symbolic Messianic psalm.

We stand amazed before David the elderly king, celebrating the sitting of his son Solomon a king; while what truly preoccupied his heart and mind was not his son Solomon, but the true King, the Savior Messiah; who sets His kingdom in the hearts of men, to enjoy His righteousness, and experience the blessed heavenly life.

Many Jewish scholars looked at this psalm as messianic. The Jews assumed that it concerns king Solomon the son of David, presented by the psalmist David to God, praying to Him to pour His blessings on the young king Solomon, as well as on the people. Yet, we see some of its phrases, not applying to Solomon, except as a symbol of the Lord Christ:

a- He reigns forever.

b- He realizes peace; having unified the nations, and presented His peace to all. And as it came in the epistle to the Ephesians: *“He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and ha broken down the middle wall of division between us”* (Ephesians 2: 14).

c- He made those who were afar, the household of God.

d- In the Jewish ‘Tergum’, this psalm is interpreted as concerning the Messiah; saying: [*“Give Your judgments to the King Messiah, and Your righteousness to the King son of David”*]. And in it, an interpretation of verse 17 of this psalm, concerning the name of the king, it came:

[His name is mentioned forever; and before the sun was there, He was set; and all the nations are blessed by His worthiness].

e- In the ‘Telmud’ and the ‘Medras’, it came that the word translated as *“continue”* (in verse 17), is (yinnon) in Hebrew, which means (will endure); one of the names of the Messiah; that the Rabbis used to say in secret; and said that He was so called because He will make those sleeping under the dust rise from the dead.

Up to the time of the coming of the Lord Christ, the Jews used to think of this psalm and the like as referring to the Messiah the King, who reigns on earth. So no wonder that the multitudes intended to set Jesus Christ a King. And that even the apostles of Christ, themselves, up till the moments before His ascension, asked Him, saying: *“Lord: Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1: 6). And finally, after His ascension, and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit on them, tasting the deposit of His heavenly Kingdom, they perceived His divine saying: *“My Kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18: 36).

❖ *“Solomon”*, meaning (Peace Maker), this word is addressed to whom it truly applies; and by whom the intercession is made for the forgiveness of sins; *“When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son”* (Romans 5: 10). He Himself is a ‘Peace Maker’ Finding the true Solomon; namely, the true ‘Peace Maker’, we should know that this psalm concerns Him¹.

(St. Augustine)

1- THE CONSTITUTION OF THE KINGDOM: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS:

“Give the King Your judgment, O God, and Your righteousness to the King’s Son” (1)

This saying does not apply to Saul son Of Kish, nor to David son of Jesse; as neither of them are sons of a king; It only applies to Solomon, being a king, and, at the same time the son of a king.

❖ The Lord Himself says in the gospel: *“The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son”* (John 5: 22). Therefore, *“Give the King Your judgment, O God”*, applies to the King ‘God the Father’, and to the Lord Jesus the King’s Son; according to what is written: *“The king arranged a marriage for his son”* (Matthew 22: 2)².

(St. Augustine)

¹ On Ps. 72 (71).

² On Ps. 72 (71).

- ❖ It is befitting of us to “*go by the king’s highway, not turn aside into fields or vineyards*” (Numbers 21: 22). The believers’ minds should not lean toward Satanic works or thoughts¹.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ He let man live in Him; For this purpose, the Word united with man; that the curse no more reigns against man; That is why the prophets applied this supplication (1) to the account of *humanity* “***Give the king Your judgments***” ; seeking that the judgment of death, issued against us, to be delivered to the Son; so that when He dies on our behalf, He would void it in Himself. That is what he means by saying: “*Your wrath lies heavy upon Me*” (Psalm 88: 7); having carried the wrath that dwelt upon us, on Himself².

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- ❖ This saying applies both to Solomon son of David, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory. Solomon was a king on the Jewish kingdom; and a son of David the king, who sought from God to grant his son the wisdom to reign with justice over his people. Our Lord is, likewise, a King, being the eternal God with an enduring kingdom; And the Son of a King, being the Son of God. According to the flesh, He of the seed of David the king, whom Jacob, the chief of faith, called “a Lion and a young lion; and also called Him: “Judah”, being a King, and the Son of a King, of the tribe of Judah.

Saying: “*Give the King Your judgment*” (1); means: [O God the Father, as You have ordained to send Your Own Son for the salvation of the world, as proclaimed by Your Holy Spirit; Consummate Your ordinance, and send Him to the world. Christ, being Himself God, He is the Element of Justice; Yet being man as well, it is said that He has got justice from the Father; and calls those Jews who believed in Him ‘His people’, according to His words in Isaiah: “*These people draw near to Me with their mouths*”

(Father Enesimus of Jerusalem)

“He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice” (2)

The king who enjoys God’s judgments and righteousness, would care for the people, being the people of God, on whom he is entrusted; he would reign on them with the spirit of righteousness and love, and would care for the poor, namely, the oppressed.

God does not endure the oppression of the rulers, whether civil or religious. “*The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders of His people and His princes; For You have eaten up the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing My people, and grinding the faces of the poor? Says the Lord God of hosts*” (Isaiah 3: 14-15); “*Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, and make the poor of the land fail*” (Amos 8: 4).

According to **St. Augustine**, [The repetition here of the two words “Your people” and “Your poor”, means that the people of God are committed to be poor in spirit, namely, not haughty, but humble; for “*theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5: 3). ‘Job’ was that “poor”, even before losing his great earthly riches. I should refer to the fact that there are some who arrogantly count their good life to their account and not to the

¹ In Lev. 12.

² On Luke 10: 22.

grace of God; by which they would never be commended by God, whatever good works they think they do¹].

“The mountains will bring peace to the people, and the little hills by righteousness” (3)

The king who walks by the righteousness of God, his kingdom would be filled with peace. It was said about Solomon: *“Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around. His name shall be Solomon; for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days”* (1 Kings 22: 9).. And about the Lord Christ it is said: *“He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore”* (Isaiah 2: 4).; *“Of the increase of His government and peace, there is no end”* (Isaiah 9: 7); and, *“He shall speak to the nations. His dominion shall be ‘from sea to sea, and from the River to the end of the earth”* (Zechariah 9: 10).

According to **St. Augustine**, peace and justice (righteousness), go together; He who enjoys the true peace, will enjoy justice as well. He also believes that the mountains refer to the great men (who care for the salvation of the others); Whereas the hills refer to those less prominent than them; As it is said in another psalm: *“When Israel went out of Egypt the mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs”* (Psalm 114: 1-4).

❖ Those, prominent in the church, through being holy, are the mountains; caring for teaching the others (2 Timothy 2: 2), who follow their lead for their benefit. The hills, on the other hand, are those who follow the example of the former For both categories, justice and peace are required. Justice could also be called peace, being the true peace that differs from that which is set among the oppressors.

(St. Augustine)

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the mountains and the hills here, are diverse heavenly hosts; who, after the incarnation of the Lord Christ, they became familiar with the believers who became in peace. As the blood of the Lamb of God – Jesus Christ – lifted up the dividing wall of sin between the heavenly hosts and the people, the heavenlies united with the earthlies, and all became one church; and there came to be a great rejoicing among the angels for the repentance of the sinners. He also believes that the Gentiles who used to offer sacrifices to their idols on the mountains and hills, having believed in the Lord Christ, the worship of idols was no more, and the mountains became filled with peace and the hills with justice and righteousness.

❖ The Holy Spirit commands those prominent in virtue like Moses and the rest of the prophets to come into the company of the people, namely, of those who believed among the Gentiles; who used to worship idols, and to offer sacrifices to them on the mountains and hills; which aroused the wrath of God, on account of that they forsook Him, the true God, and worshipped the creatures. But once they believed in Christ the God, the temples of the idols were destroyed, and those of God were built; By which the mountains started to bring peace to the people, and the little hills righteousness.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“He will bring justice to the poor of the people; give deliverance to the needy, and will crush the oppressor” (4)

¹ On Ps. 72 (71).

The Hebrews and the Gentiles, having come to enjoy the salvation of Christ, the oppressor devil is crushed; he who used to reign upon them all; who would not cease to complain against the children of God, and to accuse them of vain lies.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the “*poor of the people*” are the Hebrews, who used to abide to the letter of the law without the spiritual understanding, which is the true riches; whereas the “*the needy*” are the Gentiles. By faith the two categories became children of the apostles; and having gained the spiritual birth, the oppressor, namely, the devil, was crushed.

❖ “*He will bring justice to the poor of the people; give deliverance to the needy, and will crush the oppressor*” (4). It is right to call the devil “*the oppressor*”, for he oppressed the people of God, and out of envy, he claimed to Adam and Eve that God has forbidden them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “*because He knows that when they eat of it their eyes will be open, and they will be like God*” (Genesis 3: 5); and about the righteous ‘Job’, he said to God: “*Does Job fear God for nothing? Stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face*” (Job 1: 9, 11). In the ninth psalm he was given two names: ‘the enemy’, and ‘the avenger’; while here in psalm 72: 4, he is called ‘the oppressor’¹.

(Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus)

According to **St. Augustine**, the poor of the people and the needy here, are one and the same; like saying ‘Zion’ and ‘the daughter of Zion’.

But if we intend to distinguish between them, we could say that the poor of the people refer to the mountains; and the needy to the hills.

2- A KINGDOM WITH NO END:

“*They shall fear You, as long as the sun and the moon endure, throughout all generations*” (5)

The true spiritual leader glorifies God among his subordinates; and bears the fear of God in himself all the days of his life; by day with the light of the sun, and by night with that of the moon; in the time of his joy (by day), as well as in that of his affliction (by night).

St. Augustine translates it as: “They shall endure with the sun”. It was claimed that Christianity will only endure for a certain time, then go away. But here, the psalmist confirms that, bearing the splendor of the Sun of Righteousness, it will endure until the end of the world; and that the church (the moon) will endure throughout all generations.

“*He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth*” (6)

Here, Solomon refers to the sign given to Gideon; when he sought from God to let dew come on a fleece of wool, and let it be dry on all the ground; then he sought from Him to let the fleece of wool be dry, and let dew come on all the ground (Judges 6: 37-40). God realized his request in both cases.

Many fathers, like **the scholar origin**², **St. John Chrysostom**, **St. Ambrose**³, **St. Augustine**⁴, and **father Caesarius bishop of Arle**⁵, believe that the ‘mown grass’ (the

¹ Commentary on Ps. 72.

² On Judges, homily 8: 4.

³ On Ps. Homily 24 (Ps. 96).

⁴ On Ps. 138: 7; 72: 9.

⁵ Sermon 117: 4.

fleece of wool of Gideon) refers to the Jews who received the word of God through the ministry of Moses, like rain (or dew); and “the earth” (or all the ground) refers to the Gentiles who received the word of God and believed in the Lord Christ in the New Covenant.

Here are short quotations of their comments on both cases:

- ❖ Having, by the spirit of prophecy, recognized His presence (the Lord Christ) through incarnation, David said: “*He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth*” (6); as He entered into the womb of the Virgin, gently and quietly¹.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ There is rain of the grace, grantor of well being, according to David’s words: “*He shall come like rain on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth*”. The divine books promised us this rain to come on all the earth, to water the world with the dew of the divine Spirit, with the coming of the Lord Savior. Now, the Lord came, and brought forth with Him the heavenly rain. Behold, we who were thirsty before with inner dryness, now quench our thirst from this divine Spirit².

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ “*He shall come like rain on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth*” (6). Here he reminds us that what happened with Judge Gideon, has reached its goal in Christ. Gideon sought from God a sign, that dew would come upon the fleece of wool alone, while the ground around remains dry; Again he sought from Him to let the fleece of wool remain dry, and let rain come upon the ground; and both requests were granted.

The dry fleece of wool refers to the ancient people of Israel; when the Lord Christ came like rain on the fleece of wool, while the earth around remained dry. About this the Lord said in the gospel: “*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (Matthew 15: 24). There, in Israel, He chose a mother through whom He took the form of a servant to appear to humanity. And there, He commanded His disciples, saying: “*Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter into a city of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (Matthew 10: 5, 6).

By saying: “*But go rather (first) to them*”, He showed that later on, they would go to other sheep, out of the house of Israel, about whom He said: “*And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring; they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock and one Shepherd*” (John 10: 16). After saying: “*Jesus Christ has become a servant of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises given to the fathers*” (Romans 15: 8), the apostle Paul goes on to say: “*and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: ‘For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name’; and again He says: ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people’; and again: ‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples’*” (Romans 15: 8-11). That happened when the time came to realize what God said through the prophet: “*A people I have not known shall serve Me; As soon as they hear of Me, they obey Me*” (Psalm 18: 43-44).

¹ *Against Marcionists and Manichaeans, 3.*

² *Of the Holy Spirit, 1: 16.*

Now we understand how the Jewish nation remained dry of the grace of Christ, while over all the nations of the world rain came out of clouds laden with the grace of Christ¹.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Hearing his father David utter those things, and seeing him build an amazing house, Solomon wonders in astonishment: “*Will God indeed dwell on the earth*” together with man?” (1 Kings 8: 27); to which David responds, saying: “*He shall come like rain on the mown grass*” (6).

"Like Rain" to the heavenly nature, and "fleece" to his humanity. Because the rain to come down to Shearer without noise. So the wise men and they do not understand the mystery of Christmas wonder: Where is the newborn king of the Jews? Having heard that Herod was troubled and wanted to know who this child is asked: Where is Christ born?!²

❖ We preach not only one coming of Christ but another one in which he will be more glorified. The first coming revealed His perseverance, while in the second, He will bring forth with Him the crown of His divine kingdom. With our Lord Jesus Christ, we almost always find him bear two sides:

A double genealogy: He is born from God before all time; And is born from the Virgin at the fullness of time.

In His first coming, He comes hidden “*like rain on the mown grass*” (6); and the second is His anticipated coming.

In His first coming, He was wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger; And in the second, “*He will be covered with light as with a garment*” (Psalm 104: 2).

In His first coming “*He endured the cross, despising the shame*” (Hebrew 12: 2); And in the second He will come surrounded by glorifying angels³.

We not only refer to His first coming, but we also anticipate His second one. And as we said in His first coming: “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*” (Matthew 21: 9; 23: 39); We shall say the same in His second coming; As we encounter our Lord and His angels, we shall worship Him, saying: “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*”.

He will ultimately come, not to be condemned, but to judge those who condemned Him. He who kept silent during His trial, will say to the wicked ones who dared to do that to Him: “*These things you have done, and I kept silent*” (Psalm 50: 21).

He first came through a divine ordinance to teach men with conviction; But, in His second coming, they will have to receive Him as a King; even those who do not intend to⁴.

❖ On whom the dew of the Spirit of life will come, “*He shall come like rain on the mown grass, and like shower that water the earth*”(6). Their hearts will be drawn by a divine love for Christ, captivated by that beauty and glory, to a perpetual desire toward Christ.

¹ On Ps. 72: 9.

² مقال 12 : 9.

³ ربما القسيس القديس كيرلس المقارنة بين المجيئين عن الشهيد يوستينوس (دفاعه 1 : 52؛ مع تريفو 110). أنظر أيضًا ترتليان (ضد اليهود 14) وهيبوليتس (ضد المسيح 44).

⁴ مقال 15 : 1.

(St. Abba Maccari the Great)

- ❖ The true Christ will come, no more from the earth. So if someone came performing false works in the wilderness, do not go after him; and if it is said: Behold, Christ is here or there, do not believe. Do not look anymore down to earth; for the Lord will come from heaven; not alone as He did before, but will come surrounded by tens of thousands of angels; not secretly like “rain coming on the mown grass”, (6), but shining like lightening; having said Himself: “As the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west; so also will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Mathew 24: 27); and also: “They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of the trumpet...” (Matthew 24: 30)¹.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- ❖ While the angel was preoccupied with such thoughts, the Lord said to him: [Why are you disturbed and anxious, O Gabriel?! Were you not already sent to Zechariah the priest with the good news of the birth of his son -- John the Baptist?! Haven't you put the punishment of silence on the cynical priest?! Haven't you brought similar good news to several barren women of the old?! Is there anything impossible for Me, the Creator of all?! Are you cynical as well?!].

What was the answer of the angel? He said: [Healing the corrupt nature; uprooting the evil pests; restoring the dead body members to life; taking away the barrenness from the body members that surpassed the natural limits of time; bringing life back to old men to regain their natural vigor; and producing wheat from dry land in an instant – These all necessitate the intervention of Your divine power And there are Sarah, Rebecca, and also Hannah, who were all barren, testify to Your might. Yet, to make a virgin give birth without ever knowing a man, is something that goes beyond all the laws of nature! Here You are proclaiming Your coming to a maidservant! If heaven and earth cannot accommodate You, how could the womb of a virgin do?!].

To this, the Lord responds, saying to the angel: [Yes indeed! If the fire in the wilderness happened to consume the burning bush, My coming would probably harm the virgin Mary; But if that fire of the heavenly Deity -- a symbol of my coming – has been to the bush a life-Giver, and not a consuming fire, What would we say about the Truth who comes down, not in a flame of fire, but would rather “come down like rain” (Psalm 72: 6)?!]

The angel then, presented himself to carry the divine message, went to the Virgin, and proclaimed to her: “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women” (Luke 1: 28)²; Satan will no longer bother you; For having inflicted you with a wound in the old; the divine Healer has come today to save you. As death has come before through a woman (Eve), behold, today life is proclaimed also through a woman! As abundance of evil has come through a woman; through a woman, blessings are flowing on us. Blessed are you, for you are chosen to become the mother of the divine

¹ مقال 15 : 10.

² يظهر من هذين النصين رأي الكنيسة الجامعة أن العذراء مريم كسائر البشر كانت ساقطة تحت حكم الموت، ومحتاجة إلى الخلاص، بسبب الخطيئة المورثة من آدم.

Judge and Savior! Blessed are you, O pure mother of the Groom for whom the world has long waited¹!].

(St. Gregory, the wonder-maker)

- ❖ The children of Israel got ready, and kept themselves pure for three days, according to the command of the prophet Moses (Exodus 19: 15), to be qualified to hear the voice of God, and to hear His proclamation. And when the time came, they were not able to receive His light, and to listen to His thunderous voice. But now, pouring His grace on the world by His coming, He comes down, not in earthquakes, nor in fire, or a horrific voice (1 Kings 19: 12), but “*like rain upon the mown grass, and like shower that water the earth*” (Psalm 72: 6); He talks to us “*by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is His flesh*” (Hebrew 10: 20). He talks to us in that body formed in the womb of the Virgin Mary, “the Theotokus”².

(St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)

- ❖ No wonder that the Jews have submitted to the dryness of disbelief; as the Lord has deprived them of the fruitful rains of the prophets, saying: I will command the clouds not to pour rain over this vineyard. Of great benefit is the rain of the prophetic clouds, according to the words of David: “*Like the rain on mown grass, like shower that water the earth*”. The holy books have promised us that kind of rain that would water the world by the coming of the Lord Savior, through the dew of the divine Holy Spirit³.

(Father Caesarius bishop of Arle)

“In His days may righteousness flourish, and peace abound, until the moon is no more” (7)

In the Septuagint version it came as: “In His days righteousness will shine”. The divine Teacher, through the shining of this righteousness in the people’s life, and his practical behavior, makes disciples of many, to bear the righteousness of God. Saying “*until the moon is no more*” does not mean that, once the moon is no more, the righteous will not shine in His days.

According to **St. Augustine**, the expression “*until the moon is no more*” could mean “exalted”; namely, with the shining of the righteousness and peace, the church (the moon) shall be “exalted” through the glory of the resurrection, to reign together with her Christ who preceded her to glory, the firstborn from the dead, to sit on the right hand of the Father (Mark 16: 19).

In his interpretation of the gospel according to St. Matthew, **St. John Chrysostom** advocated the virginity of St. Mary, as he interpreted the phrase “*He (Joseph) did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son*” (Matthew 1: 25); quoting some phrases from the Holy

Book that included this word “**till**” in a way that does not imply (limitation)⁴; of which are the following:

“*He (Noah) sent out the raven, and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth*” (Genesis 8: 7). The word “**until**” does not mean that the raven returned to the ark once *the* waters dried up from the earth.

¹ البشارة بالتجسد الإلهي، 2005، تعريب القمص تادرس يعقوب ملطي ونادية أمين مرقس، عظة 3.

² Homily 77.

³ Sermon 117: 4.

⁴ In Mat. 5: 5

“*The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand **till** I make Your enemies Your footstool’*” (Psalm 11:2); It does not mean that sitting on the father’s right hand would come to an end once the enemies are made His footstool.

“*In His days, may the righteousness flourish, and peace abound, **until** the moon is no more*” (Psalm 72: 7); It does not mean that righteousness would not flourish, and peace would not abound once the moon is no more.

To further prove her virginity and that she has not given birth to any other Children after Jesus, **St. John Chrysostom** quoted the fact that the Lord on His cross delivered her to John, His beloved disciple; for if she had other children, He would have not delivered her to John.

- ❖ To approach the true Light; namely, Christ, we praise Him in the psalms, saying: “*Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death*” (Psalm 13: 3). The real death is that of the soul, and not of the body, when we fall from the uprightness of the sound teachings, and choose vanity instead of truth. That is why our waists should be girded with truth, and our lamps should be lighted, as is said to us¹.

(St. Cyril the Great)

3- A KINGDOM WITHOUT LIMITS:

“*He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the end of the earth*” (8)

He refers here to the vastness of the kingdom, covering the whole earth with its seas and rivers, with neither limits nor names. As “*The earth is the Lord’s, and its fullness*” (Psalm 24: 1), It came in the book of Zechariah: “*He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be ‘from sea to sea, and from the River to the end of the earth’*” (Zechariah 9: 10).

- ❖ If it is true that, by the term (moon), he means the church, this would refer to her vastness, extending to every direction.

He says that all over the earth, from end to end, the name and dominion of the Lord will be preached in the whole world. And lest there would be any other meaning, he directly added: “*and from the River to the end of the earth*”.

Saying “*from the River*” he clearly expresses that the Lord Christ intended to stretch His dominion from the location where He started to choose His disciples; namely from the River Jordan, where the Holy Spirit came down on the Lord during His baptism, and a voice came from heaven, saying, “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am pleased*” (Matthew 3: 17). From that location He established His teachings and the dominion of His heavenly ministry, to extend and to reach the end of the world, “*where the gospel of the kingdom is preached in the whole world, as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come*” Matthew 24: 14).

(St. Augustine)

“*Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust*” (9)

“*Those who dwell in the wilderness*” refer to those who have no steady place of habitation nor country to live in; those who are free from the world will submit to Him;

¹ Comm.. on Kuke, hom 92.

Whereas those who oppose Him, will only have to lick the dust; like the serpent to which the Lord said: “*dust you shall eat all the days of your life*” (Genesis 3: 14).

It came in the writings of **St. Augustine**: [Before Him the Ethiopians will bow]; as Ethiopia, at that time, was counted as someplace very far from Israel.

- ❖ Loving the earth, you have surely to lick it, and so become an enemy to Him about whom the psalmist says: “*His enemies will lick the dust*” (9)¹.

(**St. Augustine**)

- ❖ By saying: “*lick the dust*”, the psalmist means that, like the ancient serpent that, on account of its deception to the ancient Adam, it was condemned to go on its belly and to lick the dust all the days of its life; it will also be with those who do not believe in the New Adam, namely the Lord Jesus Christ, and persist on their animosity toward Him; they will be knocked down to earth, and will lick the dust. So will also be the demons on whom we have the authority to trample, according to the proclamation of the Lord: “*I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy*” (Luke 10: 19).

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

“*The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts*” (10)

Tarshish was a rich land south of Asia.

The isles refer to the islands of the Mediterranean and the Aegean Seas.

Sheba, south-east of the Arabian Peninsula, has been rich with its commerce.

- ❖ **Tarshish** may be translated as (anticipation of joy); as the believers and virtue doers anticipate the perpetual joy; according to the saying of the Lord: “*Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful over a few things; I will make ruler over many things*” (Matthew 25: 21)
- ❖ **The isles** may refer to the souls that abide and hold fast to the upright word; and are never shaken by the violent waves of the world.
- ❖ And **Sheba** may be translated as (return), or (repentance); As those who anticipated the joy; returned by repentance to God; and became “good” kings over themselves; they submitted to the King of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ, and offered their souls, bodies, and good works to God.
- ❖ This saying befits Christ our Lord, who at His birth, kings from the East came to worship Him, and offered Him gifts. Those, who were before, His enemies, on account of their idol-worship, who used to lick the dust, namely, have been fond of the earthlies, have come to bow before Him.

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

According to **st. Augustine**, the kings, opponents to the truth, by killing the believers, they offer God a precious gift; the souls of the saintly martyrs.

“*Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him*” (11)

This applies to King Solomon who was sought by the kings of the earth, like the queen of Sheba, who came to listen to his wisdom, and brought him gifts. In this, Solomon was a symbol of the Person of the Lord Christ, the King of kings.

¹ *Sermon 231: 4.*

- ❖ If some of those kings have reversed their position through disbelief; the ultimate day of judgment will surely come, when before Him every knee shall bow, and He will be known by all as a God and a King; according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2: 10, 11).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

4- A KINGDOM OF LOVE:

“For He will deliver the needy when he cries; the poor also, and him who has no helper” (12)

The secret of the dominion of a living leader, to have all the earth submit to him, is not in his material or military possibilities, his talents, or his capabilities, but in his care for the poor and the needy, who have no one to help them; He who cares for the poor, God care for him and honor him.

- ❖ The poor and the needy refer to all the people who believe in God; including the kings who worship Him; who are not ashamed to be called *“poor and needy”*, namely, humble; *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3: 23); so that they may be worthy to be saved by the King, the son of the King, from the mighty devil, the haughty one who is called a killer, who bring people under his authority, and captivate them in sins.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The pure apostles, and all the people are counted as “poor”, on account of that they accepted poverty for the sake of the love of Him, who became poor for our sake, and saved us from hypocrisy and oppression, when He tore the handwriting of the requirements against us, and taught us to keep away from oppression and greed, and to make mercy and goodness to everyone.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“He will spare the poor and the needy, and will save the souls of the needy” (13)

Intending to open up His storehouses before us, God calls on us to open up our hearts to our poor and needy brethren; saying: *“Defend the poor and the fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and the needy. Deliver the poor and the needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked”* (Psalm 82: 3, 4).

- ❖ He who overcomes the Killer (the devil), who *“enters the strong man’s house and plunders his goods”* (Matthew 12: 29), will save the poor and the needy. As it is not by the virtue of anybody that this would be realized, nor through the effort of any righteous, or even of an angel; as when there is no helper, He Himself will save them by His coming.

(St. Augustine)

“He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; and precious shall be their blood in His sight” (14)

God counts Himself as the advocate of the oppressed, and those whose blood is shed by violence, as *“when He avenges blood, He remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the humble”* (Psalm 9: 12).

- ❖ "He will redeem their souls from the (illegally) high interest and oppression" (14); which is nothing but the sins, which are also called "*debts*" (Matthew 6: 12). It is so called; as there may be more evil in punishing than in committing sins. For example: While the killer kills only the body of his victim, and cannot harm his soul; he, himself, would have both his body and soul perish in hell. To those who disregard the present commandment, and scoff at the future one, it is said: "*At My coming I would have received back My own with interest*" (Matthew 25: 27). From such "interest" the souls of the needy are saved by the bloodshed for the forgiveness of sins.
- ❖ If the Christians seem despised in this world, Yet their name is honored in His presence; the name He has given them.

(St. Augustine)

5- A BLESSED KINGDOM:

***"And He shall live; and the gold of Sheba will be given to Him. Prayers also will be made for Him continually, and daily He shall be praised"* (15)**

The word "*live*" here, refers to the greeting given to kings: "Long lives the king" (1 Samuel 10: 24; 2 Samuel 16: 16).

"*Sheba*" in the writings of **St. Augustine** came as (Arabia), thought to refer to the Gentiles; and the "*gold*" to the wisdom, which exalts above all teachings, the way gold exalts among all metals; It is written: "Receive my instructions, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold" (Proverbs 8: 10).

"*Prayers also will be made for Him*"; This could be understood, in that a prayer made for the sake of the church is a prayer for Him; as the church is His body; as "*Concerning Christ and the church, this is a great mystery*" (Ephesians 5: 32), for the two of them are in one body. What follows "*daily, He shall be praised*" (15), makes this clear enough:

- ❖ The holy books look at the gold as referring to "authority"¹.
(The scholar Tertullian)
- ❖ The gold of "Arabia" refers to the mind, clear from worries.
(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)
- ❖ Before Your coming, Your father David sang to you the psalm saying: "*The gold of Sheba will be given to You*" (15). This prophecy has been fulfilled when You were given a gift of gold² (at Your birth).

(St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian)

***"There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, on the top of the mountains; Its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; And those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth"* (16)**

This refers to the grain from which the "broken bread" is made.

The 'Dedakia' (the teachings of the twelve apostles) quoted this phrase to refer to the sacrament of the 'Eucharist', the source of blessing to the church.

¹ *An Answer to the Jews 9.*

² القمص تادرس يعقوب ملطي : الحان الميلاد للقديس مار افرام السرياني 7 يناير 1997، ص 12.

According to **St. Augustine**, the tops of the mountains are the authors of the divine gospels; Whereas the fruit of those writings is ‘love’. These fruits are called “*the grass of the earth*”; namely, (fruitful plants).

“His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed” (17)

In the Septuagint version, the Syrian, and the Tergum, the word translated here as “*endure*”, came as (abide); as the name of the Lord Christ shall abide forever, and by it all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

❖ According to St. Athanasius, what came in this psalm do not apply to Solomon, born by the wife of ‘Uriah; as his name was not before the sun, and would not endure with the moon; nor was he worshipped by all nations; It would therefore become obvious that these sayings are a prophecy about our Lord Jesus Christ, God of Israel; whom they see by their minds, believe in Him, confess His Deity; and who is worshipped by all tribes in diverse tongues.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ “*His name shall endure forever; His name shall endure as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed*” (17). If all nations shall be blessed in Christ; and we are among the nations who believe in him; he is therefore truly Christ, and we are blessed in Him¹.

(St. Justine, the martyr)

6- A KINGDOM OF PRAISE:

“Blessed is the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things” (18)

This doxology (18-19) came as the conclusion of the second book of psalms (psalms 42 – 72). The true believer glorifies God in all situations, and counts God as, alone He does wondrous things.

“For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God” (Psalm 86: 10).

“To Him who alone does wonders; for His mercy endures forever” (Psalm 136: 4)

“He does great things past finding out; yes, wonders without numbers” (Job 9: 10).

❖ How could it be said that the Son, alone, does wondrous things? We say that the word “*alone*” here does not refer to His ‘Person’, but to the nature of Deity, in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are equal, without distinction.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Let us then give thanks to God, not only because He calmed down the tempest; but because He allowed the tempest to happen; Not only because He saved us from destruction, but because He allowed for us to fall into afflictions; and for such a serious calamity to dwell upon us. So Paul counsels us to give God thanks for everything (1 Thessalonians 5: 18) namely, we should give Him thanks, not only for saving us from evil, but even while we are suffering those evils².

(St. John Chrysostom)

¹ *Dialogue with Trypho, 121.*

² *Homilies on Statues, 17: 1.*

“And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen” (19)

“Amen, and Amen” was a response from the congregation assembled, that confirms a fellowship in glorifying God; together with a longing that the whole earth would partake of glorifying Him.

“The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended” (20)

This does not mean that all the psalms written by David are ended; but it is rather the end of the second of the five books of psalms.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 72

PROCLAIM YOUR KINGDOM IN MY DEPTHS

- ❖ You came down, O King of kings, to our earth which produce thorns and thistles;
Our souls moan for the sake of the oppression that prevails on the world;
You came down, O Holy One, and received the oppression and suffering;
To establish the kingdom of righteousness in our hearts;
To set Your as believers kings who carry Your righteousness;
Who do not fear the oppression, nor become disturbed before evil;
For You are their constitution, and the law of their life.
- ❖ Proclaim Your kingdom in my depths;
I would not go astray to the right or to the left;
My heart would go after wealth, honor, or authority
For You are my Riches, glory, strength, and praise.
- ❖ You care for Your people who are poor in spirit;
You make them rich, O the Truth who never changes;
You fill them with the heavenly righteousness.
- ❖ You set Your ministers as mountains flowing peace upon Your people;
And Your people as hills filled with Your righteousness.
You deliver the needy of all nations and peoples.
- ❖ The wicked assume that they could make Your name no more;
That the church would have no more place in the world;
But Your name will stay awesome to the end of time;
Its light would remain shining upon many who are in the darkness;
You will transfigure in Your church all the days.
- ❖ Your grace will unceasingly flow;
Will turn the wilderness into a holy spiritual paradise;
Instead of the thorns and the thistles, it will produce the fruits of the exalted Spirit.
- ❖ The more they humiliate Your people, the believers will glitter like stars;
And Your church will extend to the end of the earth;
You turned Saul, the persecutor and blasphemer, into Paul the preacher;
The believers will fly like doves toward heaven;
And the wicked will fall down to lick the dust;
The believers will get their hearts' desire – to behold Your glory;
Whereas the wicked will get back what they treasured – the dust of the world.
- ❖ Your dominion reveals Your love and compassion;
You attach Yourself to the suffering, to the oppressed, and to those who have no one to help them.
You brake the traps, and set them free in the glorious liberty of the children of God.
You honor their blood, unjustly shed before Your eyes;
You fill Your people with joy;
They will not cease praising You;

They will testify to the glorious works of Your love;
Glory be to You, O King of kings, who is alone the Holy One.

PSALM 73

THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED

We often stand perplexed, together with Asaph, when we see how the wicked are prosperous and rich, how they live in abundance and happiness (2-12); while the righteous suffer from troubles, temptations, and afflictions (13-14). We begin to wonder: Where is the divine justice?!

The same problem is shown in psalms 37 and 49; but is more prominent in the present psalm (73). The righteous Job and the prophet Jeremiah, as well, encountered the same problem.

The key of the psalm:

The word “*heart*” came six times in this psalm. The condition of the heart reveals whether a person lives in the truth, and has an experience of life with the righteousness and goodness of God; or he is far off from the divine Truth.

Its divisions:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1- Why God makes the way of the wicked prosperous?. 1 -3 | |
| 2- The prosperity of the wicked | 4 - 14 |
| 3- The solution of the problem | 15 - 20 |
| 4- The victory of faith | 21 – 26 |

The title:

Asaph: According to what came in 2 Chronicles 23: 2-5, David divided the 38,000 Levites into four divisions (24,000 6000 4000 4000); The last division of 4000 Levites, were assigned to the musical side of worship; out of whom a selected group of 288 singers were divided into 24 bands under leaders of praise, like Asaph and Gershon. Asaph was a cymbal player; and from 1 Chronicles 16: 5, we understand that he was a chief of the holy music. Beside being a music player, he was a writer of psalms, and a prophet; and according to some fathers and scholars, the psalms referred to Asaph and other musicians were actually written by the prophet David, then presented to them to turn them into melodies for singing.

According to **St. Augustine**, the word ‘ASaph’ means (a congregation), not necessarily the Jewish congregation that condemned the Lord Jesus to death; as out of them came “*the sons of rams*“, namely, apostles, like Paul, Peter, James, John, Andrew, and Bartholomew, and others, on whose minds, such bitter thoughts, which came in this psalm, concerning the prosperity of the wicked, sometimes passed; but soon discovered the divine truth.

- ❖ Some say that all the psalms were written by David; although the names of Asaph and the other chief singers came in the titles of some of them, because they turned them into melodies for singing.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

1- WHY DOES GOD MAKE THE WAY OF THE WICKED PROSPEROUS?

As we have already said, the psalmist stood perplexed; Although not doubting God’s goodness, righteousness, and justice, yet he could not interpret the problem of evil,

when he sees how the boastful and the proud are in great prosperity. He was probably fearful that his steps might slip away from the truth; drawn astray by the prosperity of the wicked; or led to doubt the justice of the Almighty God, or to assume that his worship of God and his obedience of His commandments were in vain!

❖ Now, let us approach the prayers we found in the psalms; In several texts, particularly in psalm 39, David consistently confirmed that the so called goods of this world are all vain; that every living man, although he walks in the image of God, yet he, in vain, is troubled, “*at his best is vapor; walks like a shadow; heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them*” (Psalm 39: 5, 6). And in another psalm he says: “*Lord, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph?*” (Psalm 94: 3). They may have here the shadow of glory; but once they depart from life, they will not enjoy the benefit of redemption. And he adds to this group psalm 73 in which, under the title of “A psalm of Asaph”, David proclaims that, at first he has almost fallen into this line of thought; was overcome by not a few doubts; when he saw how the wicked were prosperous and in abundance; while he, who “*cleansed his heart*” (13), or (justified his heart) was under sufferings. At first he was much dismayed, but was eventually enlightened by the strikes of the Lord, and got to learn the way of him who truly submits to the gift of the knowledge of God¹.

❖ Nowhere could we find that the righteous Asaph happened to be disturbed by any kind of anguish, whereas David has actually endured a multitude of intense troubles. Based on his own experience, therefore, he gave the psalm its title; not as though it is ‘about’ the righteous Asaph, but ‘for the sake’ of the righteous Asaph; which is more revealed in the Greek version of these psalms, in which David is obviously shown as their author; and then given to Asaph and others to sing.

Similarly, it is written in the same title: “*The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended*” (Psalm 72: 20)! How could they be, when, after reading the following ten psalms, the titles of almost all the rest are shown as “*A prayer of David*”²?!
(St. Ambrose)

“*Truly God is good to Israel; to such as are pure in heart*” (1)

Before proclaiming the bitterness of his soul through which he sometimes goes, when he sees how the wicked, who oppose God and His believers are prosperous, and enjoy authority; he confirms that he trusts in God’s goodness, righteousness, and justice.

The true believer would not cease to praise and glorify God, even though things around him may look somewhat confusing!

❖ “*How good is God of Israel*”, but to whom? “*to such as are pure in heart*” (1)... And in another psalm he says: “*With the merciful, You will show Yourself merciful; with a blameless man, You will show Yourself blameless; with the pure, You will show Yourself pure; and with the devious, You will show Yourself devious*” (Psalm 18: 25). God could never be, in any way, devious; far from it! As He is, who He is! But, while the sun may seem lovely and mild to him whose eyes are well and sound, they may seem like vicious and painful arrows to the one with weak and sick eyes! Although it is the same sun, It would revive the former, and harm the later; It is man who is

¹ Prayer of David 3: 1: 1.

² Prayer of David 3: 1: 2.

different in the two cases. What seems as punishment for one, may be the source of joy to another¹!

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“Truly God is good to Israel; to such as are pure in heart”* (1). From the beginning of this psalm, the growth of the virtuous (ethical) perfection) is obvious. Nobody can indeed say that God is good, except him who knows what ‘good’ is; not based upon his own success, nor upon the size of his wealth; but upon the depth of the heavenly secrets, and the exaltation of God’s works; which are estimated, not through the appearances of the present things, but through the benefits of the things which are to come (in the future). God is, therefore, always good to the righteous. Even if this righteous endures physical sufferings and bitter punishment, he will always say together with ‘Job’: *“Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept diversity?”* (Job 2: 10 LXX); he will rather exult because he is chastised here in this life, to find comfort in the one to come.

He perceives that he who gets the good in this life, has already got his reward (Matthew 6: 2); And that he who has not strived or been tempted by a multiple-sided adversity, would not be able to hope for a reward to come. But, on the other hand, he who strives and struggles, would exult in this world, for having the chance to pay the penalty of his sins here; or for knowing that there is an abundant grace waiting for him from the Lord. If he happens to suffer unjustly for the sake of Christ’s name, or of any good works, It is written: *“For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth, who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten”* (1 Peter 2: 20-22).

So it is with the righteous; even when he is in the depth of affliction, he would remain righteous; as he justifies God and repent, confess that his sufferings are less than his sins; and pledge to stay always wise; for the true and perfect wisdom is not robbed by the suffering of pain and anguish; nor loses its nature, for it casts fear away through its zealous and loving intention (compare Job 4: 18). The same way the wise knows that *“the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8: 18).

God therefore, for him who knows the time of harvest, is always good; and as a good farmer, he plows his field by the plow of strict and firm abstinence from lusts; purifies his field here by the sickle of virtues that cuts off iniquities; and manures it here by his humility and the contrition of his soul, even to the ground; for he knows that God *“raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the trash heap”* (Psalm 113: 7).

Indeed, if the apostle Paul did not count the world as *“rubbish, or dung”*, he would not be able to gain Christ (Philippians 3: 8). For such a man, who watches his crop here, to be able to store it there without any worry, God is always good; because he always anticipate what is good from God.

Let us meditate in another point: *“Truly God is good to Israel, to such as poor in heart”* (1). Is God not good to everyone? He is indeed; being the Savior of all men,

¹ On Ps. 73.

particularly of believers; “*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19: 10). He truly “*came to take away the sin of the world*” (John 1: 29), and to heal our wounds; Yet, because not everyone seeks treatment, and there are many who avoid it, that is why Christ heals those who wish to be healed, and do not reject it. Those who seek treatment will restore their good health; whereas those who resist the effort of the physician, and do not seek it, would not enjoy its benefit! The Physician is, therefore, good for those to whom He restored their health.

God is good to those whom He forgives their sins; But, if somebody has an incurable sin, in his spirit; how could he say that the divine Physician is good, when he avoids Him? That is why, the apostle truly explained that “*God desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2: 4); Namely, He is good to **all** men.

Yet, God’s personal grace, is more available to all the believers who get the benefit of His good will. But when the psalmist also says: “*Truly God is good to Israel; to such as pure in heart*” (1); he expresses the feelings of those who do not know how to enjoy what is God’s; except that He is good toward everything; and in everyone¹.

(St. Ambrose)

The psalmist probably means here that God is good to His church (the new Israel), whose members are supposed to be pure in heart. God Is good and loving to all men, and in particular to those who are pure in heart.

“*But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped*” (2)

If the psalmist justifies himself, showing that he believes in the goodness of God, and sees Him good, yet he remains cautious, lest his feet may stumble from the uprightness and the purity of heart, and may come to doubt the goodness of God; “*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls*” (1 Corinthians 10: 12).

❖ by the feet and steps is meant the thoughts; which is a nice analogy, as like when the feet and the steps slide over a slippery way, so it is with the thoughts, that, during the rough times, could slip to what is unbecoming.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ The feet, when the heart is not pure, may move to walk in vanity; and the steps may stumble to fall; not completely, but “*almost*”.

(St. Augustine)

❖ David presents his own experience when he says: “*But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped, for I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked*” (2, 3). He, however, does not mean the physical feet or steps, but the purity of heart, about which he says in another psalm: “*Let not the foot of pride come against me; and let not the hand of the wicked drive me away*” (Psalm 36: 11). That is why we should always pray to God to guide the steps of our spirit, lest we would stumble and slide in some kind of a sinful swamp, and would not be able to stand fast! As David’s fall was because he got envious of the peace of the wicked, we should be envious in good things, not in shameful ones; according to the words of the apostle: “*It is good to be zealous in a good thing always*” (Galatians 4: 18)².

(St. Ambrose)

¹ Prayer of David 3: 2: 3.

² Prayer of David 3: 3: 5-6.

According to **St. Jerome**, the talk here may concern the heretics who, although preaching Christ's name, yet God does not dwell in their midst; as they honor Him with their lips, while their hearts are far away from Him; they plot against the church¹.

- ❖ Let us hasten to pass-over through the virtue of perseverance and the endurance of persecutions. Yet, managing to achieve that goal, we still have to be very alert and cautious, lest through too much slothfulness in our walk, we would stumble. Saying: *"As for me my feet had almost stumbled"* (1); it is as though the prophet says: [We should not be less zealous in keeping the virtues, than when we were seeking them²].

(The scholar Origen)

***"For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked"* (3)**

Here, the psalmist says that the cause of his fear lest his feet would stumble and his steps would slip; is seeing the peace enjoyed by the boastful wicked, although it is the peace of the world, and not the inner peace of Christ!

- ❖ I notice how the wicked are in peace. But what kind of peace? Although it is just a temporary, mortal, failing, earthly kind of peace; yet, I seek it from God! I see those who do not serve God, get what I myself desire, to serve God³.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Do not get disturbed to see him count peace as evil. In the gospel you will find a kind of peace that the Lord Christ rejects; as He Himself says: *"Peace I leave with You; My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you"* (John 14: 27); For there is peace which would not become a stumbling block, and there is peace which would be! The peace which would not be a stumbling block is the peace of the soul; whereas the one which would be, is the peace of appearances (hypocrisy). That is why the prophet says: *"Peace, peace, when there is no peace"* (Ezekiel 13: 10). Let us then flee from the peace of the wicked, for they plot against the innocent, persecute the widow, and *"lie in wait for the righteous man"* (Wisdom 2: 12)⁴.

(St. Ambrose)

2- THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED:

Before such serious problem, the psalmist saw that the best thing to do is to present it to God in the holy temple; which was the way done by king Hezekiah when the king of Assyria sent a threatening messages to him; he put it there before the Lord (2 Kings 19: 14). A believer should likewise present his problems with faith to the Lord in His holy temple; because there, the Lord will certainly responds to him and provide him with the solutions.

But once the psalmist realized how the wicked will eventually end up, and discovered how the wicked will eventually disappear and fall in the nets of their deceit, he changed his mind (17-19), and became ashamed of himself (21-22).

"For there are no pangs in their death, but their bodies are healthy and strong"

(4)

***"They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men"* (5)**

¹ St. Jerome: Commentary on Jeremiah 3: 2: 2-3.

² In Josh 5: 1.

³ On Ps. 73.

⁴ Prayer of David 3: 3:5-6.

It is not just the enjoyment of the earthly peace by the boastful wicked, but they often have no pangs in their death, nor are plagued by maladies; as though they are a special kind of people, who do not partake of the troubles of men.

According to **St. Augustine**, we should not envy the wicked, as the devil himself is not plagued by calamities, although Hades will wait for him as an everlasting punishment.

- ❖ The devil himself is not subjected to any calamity together with men; nevertheless, an eternal punishment is set up for him¹.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ They do not plow, plant, crop, or labor by the hand work that God ordained as a chastisement for humans for the disobedience of Adam, according to His verdict: “*By the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread*” (Genesis 3: 19).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Those who defile themselves by all kinds of sins and evil, and yet, there are no apparent signs of the devil’s possession of them; namely, of the temptation of their bodies with what would fairly correspond to their evil works; are actually miserable, on account of that they have not got a light and quick punishment in this world, but are found worthy of a worse punishment in the life to come. “*in accordance of their impenitent hearts, they are treasuring up for themselves wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*” (Romans 2: 5); “*where their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched*” (Isaiah 66: 24).

The prophet, troubled to see how the saints submit to diverse temptations, while the wicked, may not only pass through their life in this world without any humiliating chastisement, but may probably enjoy great riches in every aspect; he was filled with indignation, and proclaimed: “*As for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped, for I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked; For there are no pangs in their death, but their bodies are healthy and strong; they are not in trouble like other men , nor are they plagued like other men*” (2-5). Yet, for they were not granted in the present life to be chastened together with humans, among the children of God, they will be punished later, together with the demons².

(Father Serinus)

- ❖ The rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously in his world every day (Luke 16: 19-24); we saw how, when he died and was buried, being in torment in Hades, he could barely lift up his eyes to see Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom; then he cried and said: “*Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame*”.

That is why, while in the life of his body, David was ready for strikes, so that the Lord would receive him as one who is submitted to chastisement.

I beg you to rethink of the righteous Job, of how his whole body was covered with soars, and his extremities with pains; and of how he thought of death as the only comfort

¹ On Ps. 73.

² Cassian, Conferences 7: 31.

for him. However, he did not stumble nor slip in his talk, but as the Holy Book testifies: *“In all this, Job did not sin with his lips”* (Job 2: 10).

That is why, because both Job and David, were struck with chastisement here, they got strength in their anguish; *“For whom the Father loves He corrects”* (Proverbs 3: 12 LXX; Hebrew 12: 6). Those who are not chastised here, and *“are not in trouble like other men, nor are they plagued like other men”* (Psalm 73: 5), are not received as children there; but will be struck together with the devil forever¹.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ Jeremiah wonders: *“Why does the way of the wicked prosper?”* (Jer12: 1) for as is written, God will reward the longsuffering.

It may so happen that God gives a long time to those He is going to judge eternally; so that the ways of the righteous are more purified. And Sometimes, He strike them instantly, so that by their perdition the hearts of the righteous are strengthened².

(Pope Gregory the Great)

“Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment”

(6)

Talking about the bitterness of his soul because of the oppressors, the psalmist most probably had in mind certain people of high positions, who used to use their authority with arrogance; and by the spirit of pride, they used to count that there is no God to rein them. Looking at the golden necklaces around their necks, and at their expensive attires, he could not see that behind those golden necklaces, there were chains that shackled their souls; and behind those expensive attires, a garment of oppression clothed their depths.

While covering their bodies with golden jewelries and expensive garments, their souls were bare because of their pride and oppression.

According to **St. Augustine**, when people see those wicked oppressors with such expensive jewelries and garments, they may count them as extremely happy; Yet this outer appearance usually hides their depths, unseen even by the wicked themselves, nor by those around them.

On the outside there may be an apparent happiness, health, riches, and authority; while in the inside there is anxiety, fears, a tortured conscience, and no comfort.

❖ *“Therefore pride serves as their necklaces”* (6). The Holy Book likens such arrogant people to an ox prepared for slaughter, which is allowed to have some kind of temporary freedom within limits, until its day comes (See Proverbs 7: 22).

Being clothed on all sides by their evils, the wicked are worthy of being miserable. Although seen clothed on the outside, but on the inside, they are with tortured consciences, and with souls shackled by chains of lusts and fears; they are actually miserable, even though pretending to be happy³.

(St. Augustine)

❖ They are overcome by their pride, and are clothed by their iniquities and evil (6). As iniquity provides man with a bad cover, if someone intends to clothe us with it, we

¹ Prayer of David 3: 3:8-9.

² Morals on the Book of Job 5: 35.

³ On Ps. 73.

should take it off instantly, lest we would come with it to judgment. And we should not let anyone bare us of our spiritual attire which we are given.

Take off the garment of iniquity, and put on the cover of faith and perseverance, with which David covered him in fasting, lest he would lose the garment of virtue. If the righteous Joseph has not covered himself with such a cover, he would be overcome by that lustful harlot (See Genesis 29: 12).

If Adam chose to cover himself with that fasting, he would not become bared; But because he let himself taste the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, disobeying the heavenly command, and breaking the law of fasting that was put upon him, he perceived that he was naked (See Genesis 3: 6-11). If he fasted he would have preserved the garment of faith, and would not have seen himself naked. Let us then keep away from covering ourselves with iniquity and evil, lest we would be described as *“clothed with cursing as with a garment”* (Psalm 109: 18) as Adam did when he made for himself a garment of fig leaves, and earned the verdict of curse (Genesis 4: 11). So did the Jews who clothed themselves with curse; on whom it is written: *“Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than their heart could wish”* (Psalm 73: 7) ¹.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ Whenever the Israelites were in tribulation, they happen to increase in number; but once they were forsaken by God to themselves, they all perished. Let us speak about our present time; to see that when people are doing well, and have more authority, they become puffed up, bear animosity toward everyone, and react in unwarranted anger. But once they lose authority, they become gentle, and return to their natural humility. About such people the Holy Book says: *“Pride took hold of them to the end; evil prevailed upon them with abundance”* (Psalm 73: 6, 7 LXX) ².

(St. John Chrysostom)

“Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than their hearts could wish” (7)

Having more than their hearts could wish, the wicked become as though fatness distorted their appearance; and their eyes bulged beyond their normal size. If this is what happens to their seen bodies, how much more would it be to their souls and depths that would lose their beauty and inner insight. Concerning the wishes of their hearts, it may refer to what they expected to get, to what they planned, or to their hidden goals.

St. Augustine believes that the parable of poor Lazarus and the rich man could clarify this. While dogs came and licked the sores of poor

Lazarus; yet when he died, angels came to carry his soul with great honor. The rich man, on the other hand, who used to be clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day; when he died and buried, many might have cared to attend his funerals; while poor

Lazarus might had no one to bury him.

❖ According to **St. Athanasius**, the abundance in which they lived was such that their eyes bulged beyond recognition; and iniquity took hold of their hearts; They got used to it that it became a second nature for them.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

¹ Prayer of David 3: 4: 10-11.

² In Acts, homily 6.

“They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression” (8)

When someone scoffs another, he most probably rebukes himself, even in secret; Whereas the arrogant wicked scoff their brethren within themselves, and are not ashamed to proclaim their evil feelings publicly and loftily.

- ❖ Men may speak wickedly, yet with hidden fear; but those, not only speak malice, but do it publicly and loftily, saying: [I shall do so and so! I shall show you what I can do to you; You will know with whom you are dealing; I shall not let you live!]. Such kind of thought could be in you, O proud man; yet it is not befitting of you to utter them¹!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Their thoughts and words were so evil that they even dared to speak against God the Most High with blasphemy; and referred oppression to Him, saying that He does not care for the wickedness that men do.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“They set their mouths against heaven; and their tongues range over the earth”

(9)

If the repentant say together with the younger son: *“I have sinned, O father, against heaven and before you”* (Luke 15: 18); the wicked, on the other hand, utter against heaven. Thinking themselves as exalted beings, which can challenge heaven, and range over the earth with their tongues; they assume that what they say should be executed under all circumstances, and that their commands should always be obeyed!

- ❖ *“They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues range over the earth”* (9).
- ❖ It never comes to his mind that he could suddenly die while so speaking; his mind goes beyond human weakness; he does not know the kind of vessel that clothes him; and is not aware of what is written that *“His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish”* (Psalm 146: 4)².

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ *“They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues range over the earth”* (9). We know the meaning of the words *“They set their mouths against heaven”* or let us say toward heaven, from what the younger son who came back to his father and said to him: *“I have sinned, O father, against heaven and before you”* (Luke 15: 18); But those who think that there is freedom in sin; something they think, came to them through birth in some way, would not care for heaven nor earth; for they most probably believe that man’s life is governed by celestial movements, and leave nothing to the divine ordinance³.

(St. Ambrose)

“Therefore their people turn to them and drink up water (of a full cup) by them” (10)

When the people of God or the true believers wonder about the prosperity of the boastful wicked; they come to be as though holding a cup full of poison, not just to taste, but to drink in full; Entering into some kind of confusion, they cannot interpret what goes on with the wicked.

¹ On Ps. 73.

² On Ps. 73.

³ Prayer of David 3: 5: 12.

He might probably means what God sometimes does, when He intends to use the wicked as a tool to chasten His people; like what He did when He allowed for the Babylonian captivity; As once the people returned to Him, He brought them back to the promised land, to enjoy the goodness of the earth.

“And they say: ‘how does God Know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?’” (11)

Such is the language of the boastful wicked; as the abundance they live in, without sanctification, usually leads to a kind of practical atheism.

Loftily, they assume that God, in His heavens, does not care for what happens on earth; and is not preoccupied with the affairs of men.

❖ Look no thought of expressing them. Look at the people's unjust are happy, and God does not care about human things. Do you know the truth of what we do¹.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The sinners, being overwhelmed by the world's luxuries, assume that there is no knowledge in the most High².

(St. Ambrose)

“Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches” (12)

Being preoccupied with the love of riches, they see gold as more valuable than justice; and in order to ease their consciences, they claim that God does not care for men, and has no knowledge of their affairs.

❖ The soul that is preoccupied with the seen earthly things, sells off her justice (her righteousness). What kind of justice could stand before the acquirement of Gold?! It is as though gold is more valuable than justice itself; or as though someone denies what another has deposited with him; in which case the loss that dwells upon the denier would be greater than that of the one who left it with him; as the later loses some material thing, while the first loses his faithfulness itself³.

(St. Augustine)

“Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence” (13)

Having had his heart moan as he sees how prosperous the boastful wicked are; how much authority and well being they enjoy; and how they set their mouths and tongues against heaven and earth and their inhabitants, the psalmist, realizing that being preoccupied with the vain peace of the wicked benefits him nothing, he returns to God to proclaim to Him that, even if he justifies himself and his inner motives concerning the worship of God; and even if he cleanses his hands or his behavior by purity, he would be doing it in vain without God's grace.

It is as though he says: Even though afflictions and troubles have dwelt upon me, I shall not grumble, nor justify myself; for You are my righteousness, my Savior, and my glory! I shall not preoccupy myself with what I count as unjust, but I shall concentrate my whole insight and energies on You, who justifies those who believe in You; I shall not seek a reward in this world!

¹ On Ps. 73.

² Prayer of David 3: 5: 14.

³ On Ps. 73.

❖ The psalmist says: “*Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands among the innocent (the pure)*” (13); by which he means to say: The sinners enjoy an abundance of goods, and see that everything goes well, for and with them; while I am crushed and pressed under a multitude of afflictions and troubles. It is therefore in vain that I delivered my soul to purity, and dedicated it a captive to a sound and upright way of life.

Saying well: “*I washed my hands among the innocent*”; he does not look as though he claims purity to himself, but is like someone seeking diligently toward it¹.

(S. Ambrose)

❖ We are aware how the saints are often inflicted by many ailments, tragedies, and need; and how they may be so much tempted to say: “*Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocence*” (13).

If you think that what you go through is caused by sin; and that the sickness you have, which physicians are unable to cure is a testimony of God’s wrath; you, by so thinking, count Isaac in fault; for being almost blind, that he was deceived in blessing someone he was not intending to bless (Genesis 27). And you will be accusing Jacob of sin, for having his eyes so dim with age, that he could not recognize Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48: 10); although, by his inner insight and the spirit of prophecy he could foresee the events to come; and that Christ will come from the royal seed (Genesis 49: 10).

Is there a more holy king than ‘Josiah who was slain by the sword of the Egyptians?’ (2 Kings 23: 29).

Are there saints more exalted than Peter and Paul, whose blood was shed by the sword of Neron?

Let us not speak about humans; Hasn’t the Son of God, Himself, endured the disgrace of the cross²?

(St. Jerome)

“*For all the daylong I have been plagued and chastened every morning*” (14)

The psalmist says: The sinners prosper in all aspects of life, and feel as though they are in perpetual and eternal security. While I, on my side, seek to fulfill Your will, to keep Your commandment, to avoid sin, and to seek Your love; Yet I am chased by chastisements every new morning, and am plagued by afflictions all the day long.

St. Ambrose believes that with every new morning, with the shining of the Sun of Righteousness, the psalmist should not be preoccupied with the temporal prosperity of the wicked; but his soul should instead exult that the Lord has brought her past the darkness of the night to the light of the day.

❖ Through danger he (the psalmist) passes over to health the chastisement is an act of correction... he who is chastened will be put on the right path The correction is postponed for the wicked, whereas for me it is not For the former, his correction will come tomorrow, or will never come, while for me, my correction will come every morning³.

(St. Augustine)

¹ Prayer of David 3: 6: 15.

² Letter 68, to Castrutius 1.

³ On Ps. 73.

- ❖ Testifying at the same time, that such talk by him would not go without punishment, the psalmist proclaims that he is repenting all the day long for saying that he has cleansed his heart in vain (14). Yet, after being completely corrected by those strokes, he hastened to say: *“I am chastened every morning”* (14); namely in public, as the light of truth shone on him, caught him, and did not let him hold fast to what he wrongly said.

The light of truth poured over my spirit, and proved the vanity of my proclamation: “I cleansed my heart in vain”. Whenever I remember having uttered such things, as though I am sitting in darkness, I fell into remorse; but from a regretful heart, the light of love shone in my soul like a burning fire (see Jeremiah 20: 9); and created in my heart a new beginning of the day with a spiritual concept. I used before to believe that God created everything for our own good, even those things that might have looked sorrowful at first, or gave us a little pleasure; then I got on distraught later on, and came to utter such foolish proclamations, and lost my former good belief¹.

(St. Ambrose)

3- SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM:

“If I had said: ‘I will talk on in this way’, I would have been untrue to the generation of your children” (15)

Proclaiming such vain thoughts concerning the injustice and oppression dwelling upon us, while the wicked are prospering, may cause the weak to stumble in faith, and would probably destroy the new generation of our children. In other words, it is befitting of the believers to wisely refrain from uttering what may come over their minds of such foolish temporary thoughts; as they may most probably come to perceive their fault, and regain their peace; but those whom they caused to stumble by their vain words, may not return to the Lord, and their souls may not regain their comfort.

According to **St. Ambrose**, such thoughts about the prosperity of the wicked may lead one to vainly justify his heart; while, if he gets back to the Holy Book he would certainly perceive that distributing the portions in the world is not based upon the worthiness of men, but according to a divine wisdom, for the sake of the enjoyment of the eternal goods.

- ❖ That is why I said to myself: *“If I had said, ‘I will talk on in this way’, I would have justified my heart in vain”* (15). to which the voice of God answered me, saying: *“Behold, the generation of your children to whom I allotted their portion”*; meaning: Behold, son of man, you will find in the Holy Book that I have distributed the portions on your children in such a way that wealth is given to the wicked by chance, and not for their worthiness; the reward of riches was not for the sake of virtue, nor the intense poverty a punishment on sin; but such things happen in life without discernment; like water flowing in a river².

(St. Ambrose)

“When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me” (16)

No creation could ever perceive the exaltation of God’s care, for His divine ordinances are beyond our own, the way heaven is beyond the earth. Trying to analyze or

¹ Prayer of David 3: 6: 16.

² Prayer of David 3: 6:17.

criticize what go on around us is therefore a waste of time, and a cause for bitterness for the soul.

Man often thinks that he is capable of perceiving things, and that he can judge by his knowledge which he cherishes; even though many things are hidden from him. Such a man, according to **St. Augustine**, will have his feet stumble, and his steps slip, to fall down from the truth.

- ❖ I considered it to be the truth, and wrongly assumed that it goes in complete harmony with the ordinance of God; to discover that I have confused myself for no good reason, and preoccupied myself with things I should not have got into, in the first place¹.

(**St. Ambrose**)

“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end” (17)

What does he mean by: *“I went into the sanctuaries of God”*?

In heaven, we see the chariot of the cherubim which carries God; And in the holy of holiness in the temple, we see two cherubs over the Ark of the Covenant, representing the throne of God. According to the **Jewish Philon**, followed by **St. Clement of Alexandria**, the word ‘cherub’ means (knowledge); And **St. Jerome** believes that the Cherub is a symbol of a storehouse of the knowledge that works in our nature to raise it and set forth with it among the heavenly hosts.

Going into the sanctuaries of God reveals the longing of God to sanctify our minds and hearts, to enjoy the true knowledge; then the secrets of God’s care, His ordinance for salvation, and His love for all humanity, would be revealed; As *“He desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2: 4).

Getting the right, by Jesus Christ, to have our depths rise up to the heavenly holy of holiness , and to become like the cherubs who carry the chariot of God, we shall come to perceive the ultimate destiny of those prosperous wicked who persist upon their evil, their opposition of the Heavenly, and their oppression of their human brethren.

- ❖ Having therefore perceived that I have got the right belief, I said to myself: *“It was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then I understood their end”* (16-17); Meaning that what I should do, is to go into the sanctuary of God, where the cherubim are (See Exodus 25: 17-22); namely, into the depth of knowledge; and not to preoccupy myself with the vain doubtful views; for *“A fool’s chatter is like a burden on a journey”* (Sirach 21: 16).

Let us then go into the holy knowledge, and into the secret chamber of the truth, and have no other work; for wisdom will draw us away from the troublesome thought. Let us go into the sanctuary of God, where the Cherubim are; in whom are the holy knowledge, and the eternal true light².

(**St. Ambrose**)

- ❖ If I do not pass over all these things, like passing over the River Jordan; and destroy the Gentiles in me, I will not be able to enter into the holy of holiness to find comfort (17), nor to have fellowship in the glory of the King³.

(**St. Maccari the Great**)

¹ Prayer of David 3: 6: 18.

² Prayer of David 3: 6: 17-19.

عظة 25 : 7³

- ❖ The saint does not die in a certain way, and the sinner in another. The violent death of the robber is not different from that of the martyr. Those sailing on the same sea, will enjoy the same calm, and will suffer the same storm. The babies conceived in harlotry and adultery are not born in a way different from those conceived in pure matrimony. And truly, our Lord and the two robbers suffered the same kind of punishment¹.

(St. Jerome)

**“Surely, You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction”
(18)**

Going into the divine sanctuaries, and getting to be like the Cherubs, the storehouses of true knowledge, the believer comes to discover that, if the success, riches, and security; the things that the wicked think they enjoy, do not motivate them to repentance, and to return to God with remorse, together with thanksgiving; they would be for them like slippery places; and would cast them down to destruction. They would hear what came in the farewell sermon of the prophet Moses: *“Their foot shall slip in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand; and the things to come hasten upon them”* (Deuteronomy 32: 35); and what is also written: *“Let them be like chaff before the wind; and let the angel of the Lord chase them”* (Psalm 35: 5).; And, *“In the morning they are like grass which grows up; In the morning it flourishes and grows up; In the evening it is cut down and withers”* (Psalm 90: 5, 6); And, *“For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he may gain much, if God takes away his life?”* (Job 27: 8).

- ❖ They are deceivers and swindlers; Being deceivers they themselves suffer deceit; and being swindlers, they, themselves suffer swindle.

Intending to play the role of deception on men, they themselves fall under deception, through choosing the earthly goods, and forgetting the eternal.

“You cast them down to destruction” meaning: “You cast them downwards”; for they raised themselves (haughtily) upwards; namely, by raising themselves upwards , they have fallen downwards².

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ When the human soul does not respond by thanksgiving to God’s infinite goodness, which are a reward for the good works, this soul becomes justly cursed, the same extent she enjoyed the mercy; hence the psalmist says: *“Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction”* (18). Because those cursed have not done good works analogous to the divine goods; they did not care for themselves while being on this earth, and plunged in so much pleasures, they brought destruction upon their souls. That is why it was said to the rich man who was tormented in the flames of hell: *“Remember that in your lifetime you received the good things”* (Luke 16: 25). Even though he was wicked, yet he received good things on earth, that he would receive a greater quantity of tribulations there³.

(St. Gregory the Great)

- ❖ That is then the first assumption of knowledge: that things of this world happen by chance. The second would indeed be *“You cast them down to destruction”* (18) Lest it

¹ *Against Jovinianus, book 2: 24.*

² *On Ps. 73.*

³ *Pastoral Care, 3: 26.*

would be thought that their lack of piety is a result of poverty or for going through bitter grief, that motivated them to steal and to rob, under the burden of need; they were flooded with great riches and honors; to give them no chance or cause to complain.

Hence, such kind of people would be cast down while rising upwards; and what comes upon them of good things, are actually a calamity; for what would have more weight than the divine complaint found in the book of the prophet Micah: *“O My people, What Have I done to you? and how have I wearied you? Testify against Me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage”* (Micah 6: 3-4 LXX)

Now you can see how the wicked are cast downwards while rising up; and how their complaints are silenced, and their punishment accumulate! Having been flooded by heavenly gifts, they should not have forsaken the Giver of prosperity and the security of life, but should have rather obeyed Him. But as great as God’s justice, so firm is His revenge; on account of that the wicked persists on his evil, about which is also written: *“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree; Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found”* (Psalm 37: 35, 36). The suddenness of his destruction is beyond imagination!! Now you see the wicked in great power in this life; then passing by him, you would see him no more! If there is unrest here, by looking forward toward the good things to come; you will discover that the wicked whom you thought to be found here, is not any more; Yet *“The Lord knows who are His”* (2 Timothy 2: 19); and does not know those who do not recognize *“I am who i am”* (See Exodus 3: 14) ¹.

(St. Ambrose)

“Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors” (19)

The psalmist stood in awe, looking at how desolation and horrible calamities dwelt so suddenly upon them, how they were utterly consumed, as though they did not ever exist; for having deprived themselves of the divine help, mercy, and salvation.

As it came in a prophecy concerning Israel: *“When its boughs are withered, they will be broken off; the women come and set them on fire.*

For it is a people of no understanding; Therefore He who made them will not have mercy upon them; and He who formed them will show them no favor” (Isaiah 27: 11); And, *“I will not pity nor spare nor have mercy, but will destroy them”* (Jeremiah 13: 14).

❖ They are indeed like vapor, that while going up, it vanishes; So they will²!

(St. Augustine)

“As a dream when one awakes. So Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image” (20)

With the dwelling of the great day of the Lord, humanity will awake and stand before the divine Judge, as though their life on earth was No more than a dream; The world have passed away like a dream that was not really there!

¹ Prayer of David 3: 7: 21-22.

² On Ps. 73.

- ❖ It is like when man sees a treasure in his dream, he would become rich; yet, once he is awake, he finds out that it is no more there; So will the wicked find the misery which they set for themselves¹!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The city of God is the heavenly Jerusalem. Those who are clothed in the image of the heavenly One, and likened the humility and poverty of Christ by their own choice, their image will be honored in the city of God. Whereas those who are clothed with the image of the earth, their image will be despised, and they will hear Him say: “*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness*” (Matthew 7: 23).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ If, in our city, namely in this life, we count God’s image as nothing, we should fear that our image would be despised, to become as nothing in His city, namely, in the eternal life².

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- ❖ That is why, concerning the wicked, David also says: “*They are utterly consumed, , as a dream when one awakes*” (19-20). Meaning, that they will be no more, like a dream that goes away once man awakes; for, as “*they walk about in darkness*” (Psalm 82: 5), nothing would remain of them or their works. “*The children of darkness are denied the Sun of Righteousness*” (Malachi 4: 2); and the benefit of virtue; for being asleep all the time and not watching the night; it is said about them: “*They are sunk in their sleep and found nothing*” (Psalm 76: 5); Once their souls separates from their bodies, they will find out that they possess nothing; they will lose what they thought they possess; because even if the foolish man is laden with riches, he will eventually leave everything to strangers, “*for when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him*” (Psalm 49: 17)³.

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ The actual events make this clear; The image of such a man will become no more, as long as his image is not there in the city of the Lord – the high Jerusalem (Psalm 73: 20). The Lord made us according to His image and likeness, as he teaches us saying to Zion: “*See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before Me*” (Isaiah 49: 16). If we walk as we should, this heavenly icon will endure in us; and if not, this image will be no more, or will be distorted; namely, the icon of Him who descended from heaven, and such a man will be left only with the image of the earthly man in him. Accordingly, the apostle says: “*As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man*” 1 Corinthians 15: 49). That is why the images of the good endure in the city of God (Revelation 3: 12); while, if he diverts to the deadly sins, and did not repent, the image of the heavenly man will be destroyed in him, or he will rather be cast away, as Adam was cast away from paradise. Those who clothed themselves with the works of darkness, cannot shine in the light.

¹ On Ps. 73.

² Sermon 26: 5.

³ Prayer of David 3: 8: 23.

To take an example from the world, we notice how the images of the good rulers endure in the cities; while those of the tyrants are destroyed¹.

(St. Ambrose)

4- THE CONQUEST OF FAITH:

“When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in my heart” (21)

Now, having perceived how the wicked, despite all what they have got of prosperity and success, have lost the image of God in them, and how they became no more in the city of God, as though they never existed; he did not take the position of gloating, but was motivated to re-evaluate his own condition, and entered into remorse and inner sorrow on his sins.

Came in the writings of **St. Augustine**: "because it rejoiced my heart, have changed in the kidneys."

- ❖ Can also be understood: "For my heart rejoiced" in God, "also changed the kidneys", which has changed Desires and I became all clean.²

(St. Augustine)

“I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You” (22)

The psalmist does not claim that he has perfectly perceived the plan of God, and has known His divine secrets, but admits that he is ignorant, and stands before Him like a dumb beast. He does not judge the wicked like one with knowledge, for he always hopes for their salvation.

- ❖ It is befitting of us not to lose hope even in those about whom we say such things³.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ I Became like a beast before You, although I have not forsaken You, but am always with You with my heart and intention.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Asking Abba Bemen about the secret of his humility, that he refrain to interfere into any conflict or dispute among the brethren in the monastery, he answered saying: [As a novice monk, I pledged to myself that, like a donkey that when beaten would never complain nor talk balk, I would abide to what the blessed prophet David said: *“I am like a beast before You”* (Psalm 73: 22).

(Garden of the fathers)

- ❖ In another way we can say that those who lead a life of poverty; by not concentrating their hearts on treasuring on the earth, and fulfilling the words of the psalmist, saying to God: *“I was like a beast before You”* (22), they would become clothed by the kingdom of heaven, Like the domestic beasts that are content with what would just sustain their life, so are they who lead a life of poverty; By considering silver and gold something unworthy to think of; and doing their handwork to earn their daily bread, they possess the basics of faith. About them, the Lord Himself says: Encouraged by the words uttered by the Lord Himself: *“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them”* (Matthew

¹ Prayer of David 3: 8: 24.

² On Ps. 73.

³ On Ps. 73.

6: 26). they say together with the psalmist: *“I believed, therefore I spoke”* (Psalm 116: 10).

(St. (Mother) Senklitiky)

- ❖ *“I was like a beast before You; Nevertheless I am continually with You”* (22). Meaning that I follow You like an obedient beast, will not get disturbed by the nature nor the length of the road, whether it is narrow or slippery, as long as You hold my rein and guide me. That is why I shall never separate myself from Your company, but will always stay with You, follow Your lead; lean on Your goodness, and encouraged by Your wisdom; for I know that whatever You do is good and noble¹.

(Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus)

“Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand” (23)

Delivering himself to God to lead him anywhere He chooses, he confesses that he used to be like a beast when he got preoccupied with the earthlies.

- ❖ Meditating in these things, he was joyful and exultant, yet a little distraught, he says: *“My soul was embittered, I was pricked in my heart. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You”* (21-23). He means to say: After so much labor caused by his old ignorance; once he came to know that God cares for the affairs of men, he finds comfort through the knowledge of the heavenly teaching and grace, and is strengthened through leaning upon the support brought forth by the heavenly commandments; then he says: I perceived that I have labored in vain because I did not know the truth.

“I was a beast before You”. Compared to the inhabitants of heaven, man is nothing more than a beast! Like the stars, although shining bright, they would disappear once the sun rises, Moses also says: *“O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that You have spoken to Your servant, but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue”* (Exodus 4: 10 LXX). So is man if compared, not to Christ, but even to angels. However, we should not despair for *“God preserves man and beast”* (Psalm 36: 6). As I have not learned on my own, but from You, I shall therefore always attach myself to You, in order not to be a beast any more; and then You may say to me: *“As for you, stand here by Me”* (Deuteronomy 5: 31). Man who through his ignorance has gone down to foolishness and lack of knowledge, to become like a beast; will start anew to become a man, covered by the grace of God; and will exult in being better than irrational beasts, and in entering into a fellowship with those men whom God visits and protects; for who is man but he whom God visits and cares for (See Psalm 8: 4)².

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ I have indeed become like a beast when I coveted the earthly things more than God; But I shall never forsake You, O my Lord³!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ All humans, including us, are not always with God, the way said by God Himself through the psalmist: *“Nevertheless I am continually with you”*, to which the psalmist responds, saying: *“You hold me by the right hand”* (23).

¹ *On Divine Providence, Discourse 5: 25.*

² *Prayer of David 3: 9: 25-26.*

³ *On Ps. 73.*

God is not with all men as it is with you and me, when we bless someone, saying: [God be with you].

I mean to say that man would not be more miserable than when he is without God, namely, when he has no inner relationship with Him, who is Himself the Life and Existence. We may add to this that: if he forgets that it was God's original plan toward man, that such a relationship is possible.

When man does not have such an internal relationship, he does not remember Him, and accordingly, does not perceive Him, nor recognize or find pleasure in His ways. He is not with God, although God is with him.

To make this point more clear, I shall use an example from our daily life: Just imagine meeting someone for the first time, who says to you: Yes, you know me! And he starts to remind you in detail, how, when, and where he came to know you! But you still say to him: Sorry I do not know you! That would only mean that something else has so preoccupied your mind to make you forget all about this man! Now, let us assume that, after spending sometime with him, you come to remember everything about him. You may apply this example on yourself, and on your relationship with God. There are men and women who, although they believe in God, yet they are not with Him, because of things preoccupying their minds; they do not perceive that even those things, supposed to be good and joyful on this earth, would be indeed harmful if they cause us to forget God. When we do not trust in him; when we disregard Him or forget Him, we would not be with him, which would perpetually cause our souls much harm¹.

(St. Augustine)

“You will guide me with your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (24)

What is God's view or counsel that guide us and receive us to glory, but the word of God?

❖ That is why David, having been visited by the Lord, says: “You hold me by my *right hand, and receive me to glory*”. Man receives a good counsel when God holds him by his right hand; by which he can say: “*I have set the Lord always before me, because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved*” (Psalm 16: 8).

If Adam has chosen to have the Lord on his right hand, he would not be deceived by the serpent; but because he has forgotten God's commandment, and listened to the counsel of the serpent, the devil held his right hand and caused it to stretch to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to pluck things against the command of God! Through him the verdict passed forth to all men, and the adversary got to stand on the right hand of every man. From this, as well, came the curse against Judas: “*Let an accuser stand on his right*” (Psalm 109: 6).

And if this is a harsh curse, the blessing by which its bonds are absolved, is indeed a very important blessing!

That is why the Lord Jesus who adopted the case and condition of man, allowed the devil to stand on His own right hand, as we read in the book of Zechariah (3: 1), then to cast him behind Him, saying to him: “*Away with you Satan*” (Matthew 4: 10); after which the adversary was cast away and departed from Him.

To keep Satan from standing on your right hand, the Lord Christ says to you: “*Come, follow Me*” (Matthew 19: 21). That is why David prophesied beforehand the

¹ *On the Trinity, 12-14.*

coming of the Lord, who came down from heaven to liberate us from the grasp of the adversary opponent, saying: “*The Lord is at my right hand, I shall not be moved*” (Psalm 16: 8); which is contrary to him at whose right hand is Satan.

How wise indeed was the apostle when he, according to the command of the Lord, fearlessly came down out of the boat, and walked on the water to go to Him (Matthew 14: 30-31); and when the Lord stretched out His right hand and did not let him sink, what would Peter say but quote David’s prophetic words: “*You held me by Your right hand, You guided me with Your counsel, and received me to glory*” (23-24).

What is the right hand but the strength of the working soul (which does not cease to strife), which if supported by the will of God, will need nothing, nor any help from this world¹.

(St. Ambrose)

“Whom I have in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside You” (25)

If God is the Help, the Support, the Stronghold, and the Grantor of knowledge, etc. He will be the soul’s desire and her eternal portion. He will be everything for her.

So was God, everything for them, not heaven, nor the kingdom of heaven, if compared to Him to whom they long.

❖ You are everything to me There is nothing high or low that I desire; I long only for You².

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ I desire nothing in heaven, nor on earth, except to be with You know how my heart was dissolved by such longing; O You who created my heart and knows my conscience!.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ First of all, return to yourself from what is outside; then present yourself again to Him who created you; for He is the source of your happiness and your perfect goodness.

❖ To worship God, is to love Him, to desire, to hope, and to believe that you will see Him.

This is the longing for happiness to reach Him; for His is Happiness itself.

Ask Yourself: to what extent will your love increase? The answer is that your heart is the measure of your progress.

Now, we see Him in a vague way; but the more we love Him, the clearer we can see Him.

Beloved brethren, this love does not come on our own, but by the Holy Spirit given to us.

There, there is no more sin, nor more vanity, but we get attached to Him with love; to whom we moan with longing.

In that city whose light is God, there we shall live, and in Him we shall find the happiness for the sake of which we strive now.

¹ *Prayer of David 3: 10: 27.*

² *The Epistle to Romans, homily 5.*

- ❖ You should perceive, O brethren, that the climax of joy will be realized through rejoicing in the Trinity in whose image we are created.
- ❖ Wherever the soul of man goes, if it does not head toward You, it would gather sorrows for itself, even it gets attached to what it loves, if it is outside God, because all those beautiful things are non-existent without You. Grant me, to praise You for the love of these things, O God, which You have created, yet Do not let attach to my soul; as in them I shall never find a place for comfort, on account of that they are all mortal; they come and will soon disappear from our senses¹.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The saint says: “*Who have in heaven but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside You*” (Psalm 73: 25). You are my portion; having made everything available for me, I seek nothing but to possess you as my portion!

I submit to no creature in heavens, the way the Gentiles do; And I need and desire nothing of the deceptive wealth or pleasures of this world.

“*Having nothing, yet I possess all things*” (2 Corinthians 6: 10), For I possess Christ, whom the Father “*did not spare, but delivered Him up for us all, How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*” (Romans 8: 32); as according to the apostle: “*All things are created through him and for Him*” (Colossians 1: 16). Possessing everything in Him, I will not seek any other reward, for He is the reward of all. To him who seeks to be perfect, the Lord Christ said: “*Take up your cross and follow Me*” (Mark 8: 34; Matthew 16: 24; Luke 9: 23; Matthew 10: 38); For he who follows Him will not become perfect by the reward; but through perfection, he becomes worthy of the reward. Those who follow the lead of Christ are not good because of hope, but because of their love of virtue; for Christ is Good by nature, and not for the sake of a reward; That is why He suffered because He is pleased to do good; and not out of a desire to have more glory through suffering.

Therefore, he who intends to follow the example of Christ, will do, not what is for his own benefit, but what is for that of others. And for this same reason, he becomes weak for himself, while becoming strong for others through his increase in virtue².

(St. Ambrose)

“*My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever*” (26)

Because of the believer’s exalted love for God, he becomes so weak that his body and heart both fail, to have God fill his whole inner being.

- ❖ The psalmist says: “*My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart*” (26). Because the eternal things will indeed not come except after the earth comes to an end; the body fails when the things of the body die; And those who always carry about in their body the dying of the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 4: 10), are also delivered to death; for, having Christ working in them, every lust or desire toward sin will also die.

Thus it is referred that man’s heart fails, once the wicked thoughts in it die, the thoughts whose source is the heart. That is why those who are blessed by a pure heart, are worthy of seeing God (Matthew 5: 8)

¹ Robert Llewellyn: *The Joy of the Saints*, p. 54, 241, 248.

² *Prayer of David 3: 11: 28.*

Let them approach You, and not separate from You; Because the close-by God will never cast out those who come close to Him (John 6: 37; James 4: 8); but wishes to be the cause of salvation of all, and not the cause of their death.

He indeed, does not cast out anyone, except him who chose to separate himself from Him¹.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ As Christ is all, he who forsakes all for Christ's sake, will find Him in the place of all; and will be able to proclaim freely: "*My portion is the Lord forever*"².

❖ The clergy are called by the Greek word 'Kleros', which means (portion), either because they belong to the portion of the Lord, or because the Lord Himself is their portion.

He who acquire the Lord, and says together with the psalmist: "*The Lord is my Portion*", would never have anything beside Him³.

Christ is holiness, without which no one would see God

Christ is our Salvation; being the "Savior" and the "Ransom" at the same time.

Because Christ is everything for us, he who forsakes anything for His sake, will find Him, corresponding to what he has forsaken; and can freely proclaim: "*The Lord is my Portion*"⁴.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Christ is the cause of all goods; From Him all the gifts for the needy will come.

He is the true riches (Ephesians 2: 4); No riches are outside Him.

He is the great security; "*By the blood of His cross, He reconciled all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven*" (Colossians 1: 20).

From Him is love; And from Him will learn how to love our neighbor; In him who loves his neighbor, Christ will dwell, "*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us*" (Ephesians 2: 14), which was established by the serpent between Adam and God.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

"For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish, You destroy all who are unfaithful to You" (27)

God receives the human soul as a heavenly bride; But in case she covets temporal things and loves the world, she becomes as though has committed adultery against Him.

❖ What does the human soul seek from her Groom she loves? The true believer loves God alone, not for the sake of some gain, because in Him he finds everything, "*All things were made through Him*" (John 1: 3).

(St. Augustine)

❖ To show that He would never forsake us, unless we, ourselves, so choose, we hear God say through His prophets: "*Your iniquities have separated you from your God*" (Isaiah 59: 2 LXX); and, "*Those who are far from You shall perish*" (27)⁵.

(St. John Chrysostom)

¹ *Prayer of David 3: 11: 29.*

² *Letter 66 to Pammachius, 8.*

³ *Ep. To Neoptian, 5.*

⁴ *Ep. 116: 8.*

⁵ *Homilies on St. John, homily 68: 2.*

- ❖ While singing: “*Those who are far from You shall perish*”, It is befitting of us to keep away from all evil lusts.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- ❖ My heart fails because of my longing to be always with You; for those who are far from you shall perish; and those who, by their iniquities, forsake You, O the true Groom of their souls, and attach themselves to the devil, You will destroy.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works*” (28)

Drawing near to God here is contrary to being far from Him, and committing adultery against Him (27). The believer finds pleasure in drawing near to God, finds refuge in Him, and a chance to speak to and about Him.

- ❖ O brethren, What would you seek more, and better than drawing near to God, when we see Him face to face (1 Corinthians 13: 12) ¹?!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ It is not only St. Paul who says that we should unite with God, and not to let anything separate us from Him saying: “*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good*” (Romans 12: 9) ²; The prophet David also expressed it equally and clearly by saying: “*It is good for me to draw near to God*” (28) ³.

- ❖ In heaven, as we shall no more have the experience of need, we shall be happy in being satisfied with our God. This will be realized concerning all things that we see here as greatly valuable: Here, we seek food as something necessary; There, God will be your food. Here, you seek physical closeness; There, “*It is good for me to draw near to God*” (28); Here you seek riches; There, you shall acquire Him, by whom all things are created; Finally, to let you feel more secure, the apostle, summing it up, says that there, “*God will be all in all*” (1 Corinthians 15: 28) ⁴.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Are you attached to God? You, then, have almost consummated your journey, and about to dwell in your real city⁵.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Now, if you love what He created; how much more you are committed to love their Creator?! If the world is beautiful, how would be its Creator?!... Therefore, rend your hearts and keep them away from loving the things created, to get yourself attached to the Creator. For then we can say together with the psalmist: “*It is good for me to draw near to God*” ⁶.

- ❖ The soul that forsakes her Creator to love the created is a harlot. There is nothing more pure and more rejoicing than His love; If you forsake Him and get to embrace another, you would become defiled.

¹ On Ps. 73.

² *The Way of life of the Catholic Church*, 16.

³ *Sermon 216*: 5.

⁴ *Sermon 255*: 8.

⁵ *Sermon 137*: 1.

⁶ *Sermon 21*: 6.

O soul, if you intend to be qualified for His bosom, forsake the other things and get attached to Him, not for the sake of any reward. That is why the psalmist after saying: *For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish*"; as though to show what is adultery, he adds: *"It is good for me to draw near to God"*; I seek no one but Him. Getting attached to Him is my goodness, from which there is no return¹.

❖ Once you reach this happy level of perfection, you will count all the pleasures of the world as rubbish; and you can say together with the psalmist: *"It is good for me to draw near to God"*².

❖ It is the devil indeed who accuses the saints; he who envies us for being in the kingdom of heaven from where he was expelled. Yet, in the presence of such a divine Judge, and before whom he speaks, he would not dare to accuse us of something false or vain; he says something that seems as though true, as he did with the righteous 'Job', when he said: *"Does Job fear God for nothing?"* (Job 1: 9). Yet here, our adversary accuses 'Job' without looking into his heart.

It is befitting of us to love God, not for the sake of a reward; As what kind of a reward do you expect to get from God who, whatever He gives you would be less than Himself.

Do not worship God for the sake of a reward; For then you will receive Him who keeps Himself for you to enjoy.

If you love what He has created; how much more would you love the Creator? Therefore, take away from your heart the love of the created to get yourself attached to the Creator; to be able to say together with the psalmist: *"It is good for me to draw near to God"*³.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

❖ It is said that Jerusalem is the daughter of Zion, for being underneath Mount Zion. The Christian churches in the whole world are, as well, the temples of God; and the gates through which the believers enter are the Old and the New Testaments, their preachers and teachers.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ We can divide those who have reached the stage following childhood into two kinds: Some grow through study and thought; while others grow through their union with the Word of God, and through their deep love for Him (like David and Paul); who may say: *"It is good for me to draw near to God"* (28); and, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ; neither death nor life; nor things present, nor things to come; nor any other created things, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8: 35, 38-39).

On the other side there are those who would keep away from the sin of adultery for fear of punishment; they would stay pure and undefiled, yet out of fear, and not out of intention.

Then there are those who are more perfect, who unite in purity with the purity of God. Those who may be called "queens", because of being attached to the "King"; are

¹ Sermon 21: 6.

² Sermon 173: 5.

³ Sermons, 21: 5.

worthy of standing on His right hand; and to them He says: “*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Matthew 25: 34).

Whereas to those who are of a lesser level, who are virtuous out of fear, who may be called “concupines”, and do not partake of the greatness and majesty of God, He says: “*Fear Him who, after He has killed, has the power to cast into hell*” (Luke 12: 5)¹.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

❖ The perceptive five senses of the soul, if they get the grace from high above, and the sanctification of the Spirit, are indeed like the five wise virgins. Whereas, in case they stay on their ignorant nature, they will discover that they belong to the world, to whose spirit they get attached; although, in their pride, nice utterance, and good appearance, they vainly claim that they are brides of the Groom! For, as the souls that are wholly attached to the Lord, think, pray, seek His love (28); are those souls, attached to the love of the world, to the earth, where they seek, think, and have their mind wholly dwell.

(St. Maccari the Great)

¹ عظة 15 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نزار.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 73

MY SOUL PRAISES YOU IN THE MIDST OF MY SUFFERINGS

- ❖ In my weakness I cry out: Why do You make the wicked prosperous?
Why are they living as though they are the most happy of humans?
Why are their strength firm?
Why are they not plagued like other men?
Why there are no pangs in their death?
Assuming that there is no God;
They set themselves as half gods!
And the righteous moan for their oppression.
- ❖ Looking at You, I come to perceive Your goodness;
Rising above the events;
The eyes of my heart see Your righteousness, love, and compassion.
When I see You impartial to any in heaven or on earth;
My heart is filled wit joy; and my soul set forth to praise You.
- ❖ Grant me the uprightness and purity of heart;
To behold Your majesty, and recognize the secrets of Your goodness;
Pour Your goodness on me;
To make me taste the sweetness of Your imperceptible goodness.
Preserve me in Your righteousness;
That my feet do not stumble, and my steps do not slip;
That no doubt would crawl into my depths concerning Your goodness.
- ❖ In my depths I used to long for temporal peace;
Deprive me of it, that my depths get filled with Your eternal peace;
You give it to the boastful wicked, to fill up the cup of their evil, unless they
return to You.
- ❖ The wicked boast the adornment of the bodies;
They adorn their necks with golden necklaces;
While their souls moan under the burden of the chains of sin;
They walk haughtily in their costly attires;
And do not perceive that, together with Adam and Eve, they hide naked
behind the fig tree;
How miserable they are!
They are like the Ox left to roam around; while being prepared for
slaughtering.
- ❖ Haughtily, the wicked speak loftily, setting their mouths against heaven;
And their tongues walk through the earth;
They assume that what their lips utter should be obeyed under any
circumstances.
- ❖ Let me draw near to You, O my God;
For you you draw near to me;
Let me be preoccupied with You, and let my soul find comfort in You;
Let me recognize Your ordinances;

Let me become amazed by Your exalted wisdom;
Glory be to You, O the Whole love and wisdom!

AN ANNEX TO PSALM 73

PATRISTIC COMMENTARIES ON THE PURITY OF HEART (Psalm 73: 1)

PURITY OF HEART AND SANCTITY:

❖ *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”* (Matthew 5: 8).

Be simple and innocent, for then you shall become like little children who know no evil that destroy human life.

For a start, do not talk bad about anyone; and do not give ear to those who do. As, if you listen to what you hear of what distort reputation, you will be counted as a partaker of the sin of talking evil. And if you believe what you hear, or add something more against your neighbor, you will be condemned of committing the same sin of the other party.

Keeping yourself from distorting the reputation of others, an evil, that creates controversies, you would live in peace with everyone.

Clothe yourself with sanctity that does not conform to evil, but grants steadfastness and joy.

Practice goodness. Simply give out of the fruit of your labor to the needy; as it is the will of God to distribute His gifts to all he who gives will be blameless; as, the way he received from the hand of God, he faithfully consummates his ministry, and does not falter between giving someone and refraining from giving another.

Consummating this ministry with simplicity is counted glorious in the sight of God.

He who ministers with humility will enter into an intimate relationship with God.

If you keep these commandments I am giving to you, your repentance, and that of your household will be well-received; and your heart will be pure and blameless¹.

(Father Hermas)

❖ To prepare the heart by forsaking the vain, evil, and controversial debates, is like turning your heart into a smooth board of wax, ready to be written on.

(St. Basil the Great)

❖ If you become pure, you will be able to perceive what is not seen by the impure; and to behold the blessed vision shining in the pure heaven of your heart.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

PURITY OF HEART AND BELIEF IN THE UNSEEN:

❖ Prepare, not your mouth, but your heart Because we are fed, not by what we see, but by what we believe. We seek, not just what touch our outer senses; For, if we were not there to behold the Lord by our own eyes, and to touch Him by our own hands, then how could we believe in His resurrection from the dead²?!

(St. Augustine)

PURITY OF HEART AND LOVE:

¹ *Shepherd, Commandments 2.*

² *Sermons on N.T. Lessons, 62: 5.*

- ❖ Change the heart, to get the works changed.... Uproot the evil desires, and plant love. For, as *“the evil desires (the love of money) is a root of all kinds of evil”* (1 Timothy 6: 10), So love is a root of goodness¹.

(St. Augustine)

PURITY OF HEART AND THE HEAVENLY LIFE:

- ❖ In case the heart is down on earth; namely, if man, in his behavior seeks earthly benefit, how could he then be purified? But if the heart is in heaven, it will be pure, as everything in heaven is pure. As pure silver is polluted through being mixed with dross, our mind is polluted through mixing with earthly thoughts; despite the natural purity and beauty of the earth in itself².

(St. Augustine)

PURITY OF HEART AND ITS SIGHS:

- ❖ What does this mean? The sound tendency of the soul toward the truth is more valuable in the sight of God than worship; as God hears the unuttered sighs of the heart³.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

PURITY OF HEART AND THE REAL AUTHORITY:

- ❖ If you reign like a king over your heart; yet in deep humility; you will command the vain laughs to go away, and it does go away; the sweet crying to come, and it will come; and the rebellious flesh to do something and it does⁴.

(St. John El-Dargy)

PURITY OF HEART AND ITS WIDENESS:

- ❖ Let us prepare the Lord’s way in our heart. Man’s heart is naturally great and wide, as though it is the whole world. Consider the greatness of the mind, yet not in the physical sense, but in its ability to embrace such a great knowledge of the truth. Let us therefore prepare the Lord’s way in our heart through adopting a befitting way of life, and good and perfect works; That way would then preserve your life with uprightness, and the words of the Lord would reach you without hindrance⁵.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ *“Create in me a clean heart, O Lord”* (Psalm 51: 10). He seeks such a creation, not as though he lacks a heart in his body, but, having corrupted it, he wishes to have it restored to its natural purity⁶.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

- ❖ Behold, heaven is within you if you are pure; and angels are seen shining.

(St. John Saba)

¹ Ser. On N.T. hom 22.

² Ser on Mount 2: 44.

³ Adv. Eunom 1: 37.

⁴ Ladder, step 7: 39.

⁵ In Luc. Hom 21.

⁶ Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon, Fragment 8: 22.

AN ANNEX TO PSALM 73

PATRISTIC COMMENTARIES ON THE PURITY OF HEART (Psalm 73: 1)

PURITY OF HEART AND SANCTITY:

❖ *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”* (Matthew 5: 8).

Be simple and innocent, for then you shall become like little children who know no evil that destroy human life.

For a start, do not talk bad about anyone; and do not give ear to those who do. As, if you listen to what you hear of what distort reputation, you will be counted as a partaker of the sin of talking evil. And if you believe what you hear, or add something more against your neighbor, you will be condemned of committing the same sin of the other party.

Keeping yourself from distorting the reputation of others, an evil, that creates controversies, you would live in peace with everyone.

Clothe yourself with sanctity that does not conform to evil, but grants steadfastness and joy.

Practice goodness. Simply give out of the fruit of your labor to the needy; as it is the will of God to distribute His gifts to all he who gives will be blameless; as, the way he received from the hand of God, he faithfully consummates his ministry, and does not falter between giving someone and refraining from giving another.

Consummating this ministry with simplicity is counted glorious in the sight of God.

He who ministers with humility will enter into an intimate relationship with God.

If you keep these commandments I am giving to you, your repentance, and that of your household will be well-received; and your heart will be pure and blameless.

(Father Hermas)

❖ To prepare the heart by forsaking the vain, evil, and controversial debates, is like turning your heart into a smooth board of wax, ready to be written on.

(St. Basil the Great)

❖ If you become pure, you will be able to perceive what is not seen by the impure; and to behold the blessed vision shining in the pure heaven of your heart.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

PURITY OF HEART AND BELIEF IN THE UNSEEN:

❖ Prepare, not your mouth, but your heart Because we are fed, not by what we see, but by what we believe. We seek, not just what touch our outer senses; For, if we were not there to behold the Lord by our own eyes, and to touch Him by our own hands, then how could we believe in His resurrection from the dead?!

(St. Augustine)

PURITY OF HEART AND LOVE:

- ❖ Change the heart, to get the works changed.... Uproot the evil desires, and plant love. For, as *“the evil desires (the love of money) is a root of all kinds of evil”* (1 Timothy 6: 10), So love is a root of goodness.

(St. Augustine)

PURITY OF HEART AND THE HEAVENLY LIFE:

- ❖ In case the heart is down on earth; namely, if man, in his behavior seeks earthly benefit, how could he then be purified? But if the heart is in heaven, it will be pure, as everything in heaven is pure. As pure silver is polluted through being mixed with dross, our mind is polluted through mixing with earthly thoughts; despite the natural purity and beauty of the earth in itself.

(St. Augustine)

PURITY OF HEART AND ITS SIGHS:

- ❖ What does this mean? The sound tendency of the soul toward the truth, is more valuable in the sight of God than worship; as God hears the unuttered sighs of the heart.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

PURITY OF HEART AND THE REAL AUTHORITY:

- ❖ If you reign like a king over your heart; yet in deep humility; you will command the vain laughs to go away, and it does go away; the sweet crying to come, and it will come; and the rebellious flesh to do something, and it does.

(St. John El-Dargy)

PURITY OF HEART AND ITS WIDENESS:

- ❖ Let us prepare the Lord’s way in our heart. Man’s heart is naturally great and wide, as though it is the whole world. Consider the greatness of the mind, yet not in the physical sense, but in its ability to embrace such a great knowledge of the truth. Let us therefore prepare the Lord’s way in our heart through adopting a befitting way of life, and good and perfect works; That way would then preserve your life with uprightness, and the words of the Lord would reach you without hindrance.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ *“Create in me a clean heart, O Lord”* (Psalm 51: 10). He seeks such a creation, not as though he lacks a heart in his body, but, having corrupted it, he wishes to have it restored to its natural purity.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

- ❖ Behold, heaven is within you if you are pure; and angels are seen shining.

(St. John Saba)

PSALM 74

O GOD, HAVE YOU CAST US OFF FOREVER?

Asaph, a contemporary of David, around 1000 years B.C. wrote a prophecy about what was going to happen when Nebuchadnezzar put Jerusalem under siege (2 Kings 25: 1-17). This psalm represents a collective lamentation, or a prayer by the Jews to remember the devastation and defilement of the temple on the ninth of the month of 'Ab' every year.

This lamentation is also be a church prayer that the believers should always raise from their hearts because of the anguish which keeps on dwelling upon the church all the time.

The author of the psalm¹:

1- Many believe that it is written by Asaph the seer, or by David the prophet, who delivered it to Asaph to put it into tunes to be sung by musical chorus. It is a prophetic psalm, written in the past tense to confirm that what it prophesies will be definitely fulfilled.

In its Syrian version it came that it was written by Asaph, concerning what happened when the angel of the Lord appeared to David for the destruction of the people; when David, greatly distressed said: *"Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly, but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house"* (2 Samuel 24: 17).

Yet some believe that it is a prophecy about what was going to happen to the Jews around the year 70 A.D. when the Roman commander Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and slained thousands of Jews.

2- Patrick believes that Asaph here, refers to the 'keeper of the king's forest' in the days of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2: 8).

3- Others believe that Asaph refers to a descendant of Asaph, a contemporary of David the prophet.

4- Few believe that the author of this psalm is Jeremiah the prophet, a view rejected by many.

1- A cry by the righteous:	1-3
2- A description of the horrifying events:	4-9
3- How long will it be, O Lord?	10-11
4- The divine work:	12-17
5- A PLEA FOR RELIEF FROM OPPRESSORS:	18-21
7- A CONCLUSION:	22-23

A contemplation of Asaph.

1- A cry by the righteous:

"O God, Why have You cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?" (1)

He begins the lamentation by asking "Why?" a word used in several of the lamentation psalms, like 10: 1; 22: 1; 44: 24; 79: 10, etc. This is not a sign of doubt, as it is rather a sign of faith. What dwelt upon the people by the Chaldeans, by Antichus

¹ W. S. Plumes: Ps. 74.

Epiphanius (in the days of the Maccabees), or by the Roman Titus, have come as a divine chastisement, like smoke coming out from the nostrils of huge beasts against weak sheep helpless to defend themselves

When anguish dwells upon the believers by the wicked, they, counting it as a chastisement from God, raise their eyes up to Him with repentance. They believe that the wicked would have no authority over them unless it is allowed by God; as according to Amos the prophet: “*Does disaster befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?*” (Amos 3: 6).

❖ He does not criticize (rebuke) what happened, but he rather wonders: “*Why?*”; For what reason did You allow it to happen?; “*Why have You cast us off forever?*” By “*forever*”, he probably means ‘until the end of the world’. ‘Have You cast us off until the coming of Christ, which is the end to everyone who believes? (Romans 10: 4) ¹.

(St. Augustine)

It is not a sin to enter into a debate with God to admonish Him, or to ask Him the reason for what He allowed to dwell upon us. That was what the righteous ‘Job’ did when temptations dwelt upon him.

“Remember Your congregation which You have purchased of old, the tribe of Your inheritance, which You have redeemed – this Mount Zion where You have dwelt”
(2)

The psalmist has nothing to present except the mercies of God; He who has purchased His congregation of old, the day He brought them out of the land of Egypt by a strong hand and a mighty arm; And, by His compassion, transfigured proclaiming Himself to them on Mount Zion.

According to **St. Augustine**, God’s care for His people goes back long before the exodus from the land of Egypt, to the days of the fathers, when He dealt with such personalities as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and others, to the account of the people to come from the twelve tribes.

“Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations. The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary” (2)

Saying “*raised His voice*” (Genesis 39: 18); or “*lifted up His hand*” (Isaiah 26: 11), means (stroke and chastened). Here, “*Lift up Your feet*” or Your steps, means (come, or hasten to come).

He calls on God to come and see by Himself what dwelt upon His sanctuary, which turned into an eternal desolation.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist prays to the Lord to lift up His hands on the cross in the locations which were defiled and devastated; for by the cross He draws “*all the kings of the earth to fall down before Him; all nations to serve Him*” (Psalm 72: 11). That is the way to mend the eternal desolations, and to turn the nations from idol worship to worshipping the true God.

2- A description of the horrifying events:

“Your foes roared within Your holy place; they set up their banners as signs”
(4)

The psalmist portrays the foes as lions roaring against their preys – the people of God; setting up their banners in the sanctuary as a sign of their complete authority over it.

¹ On Ps. 74.

- ❖ He prays to God to notice how the followers of the devil, the servants of the idols; namely the nations at that time, how they destroyed the temple and the city of God; how they boasted in the midst of His feast; how they assembled together, and set up their banners, carrying their Roman signs of eagles and dragons; and how they even set up the images of their idols within the temple. Yet they could not perceive what the Lord Himself said to Pilat “*You could have no power at all against Me unless it has been given you from above*” (John 19: 11).

How great goodness has God granted us through the betrayal of Judas! How the evil of the Jews eventually led to the Gentiles receiving faith! How the Lord Christ was slain on the cross, to let those struck by the serpent look up to Him and be healed¹!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Because the devil proclaimed his wrath, trampled upon the believers in the coming of the Lord, and brought upon them a multitude of afflictions and calamities; David attempts by a prophetic prayer, to hasten to render His help, and not to postpone His support.

In a previous like text the psalmist says: “*O God, why have you cast us off forever?*” (Psalm 74: 1); in which he mourns with tears, and proclaims that God has forgotten His people, and cast off from Himself the scepter of His inheritance; and proclaims that the enemies have come against the people of God (psalm74: 2- 3); have roared within His holy place. This short text probably refers to the Assyrians who have overcome the Jewish people, who have “*setup their banners as signs*” (psalm74: 4).

In wars, there are always banners that are set ahead of the advancing armies; every legion or group follows its own banner; and in case they scatter up over the battle field, they reassemble around their banner².

(St. Ambrose)

“They seem like men who lift up axes among the thick trees” (5)

According to **St. Augustine**, the invaders held axes to destroy the beautifully ornamented cedar gates and furniture of the temple (see I kings 6: 18) with violence and arrogance, as though they were nothing but thick trees in a forest.

“And now they break down its carved works, all at once, with axes and hammers” (6)

So came the description of the destruction of the temple, when Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came against Jerusalem, burned the house of the Lord, the king’s house, and all the houses of the great men of Jerusalem with fire... and the bronze pillars, the carts, and the bronze sea that were in the house of the Lord, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried their bronze to Babylon (See 2 Kings 25: 8-17; Jeremiah 52: 12-23).

- ❖ When the devil sees that truth is not on his side, he attacks and breaks down the gates of those who allow him to enter into their souls, by axes and hammers. Whereas our compassionate Savior does not commit whoever intends to follow Him and become His disciple, to come to Him, but He would come Himself to Him, and addresses him

¹ On Ps. 74.

² Prayer of David 4: 7: 26.

as “My sister and bride”; and in case he opens up to Him, He would enter; but if he is reluctant to open, He would forsake him¹.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

“They have set fire to Your sanctuary; They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name to the ground” (7)

This saying conforms to the defilement of the holy city by the Chaldeans, by Antiochus Epiphanius, and by the Romans. Although Antiochus did not set fire to the temple, but only to its gates, he defiled the altar by offering a pig on it; it was the Chaldeans who set fire and destroyed it to the ground; And it was the Roman Titus, who left no stone upon another, that he did not throw down.

“They said in their hearts: ‘Let us destroy them altogether’; They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land” (8)

It did not stop at the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, but the enemies put in their hearts to wipe out every single place of worship; by which he means the Jewish synagogues, where they used to read the law every Sabbath. The people were committed to appear in Jerusalem in the temple three times every year (Deuteronomy 12: 5-6); and it was not allowed for the tribes to offer any sacrifice outside Jerusalem, but only on the bronze altar in the temple; except in certain circumstances for individuals and families; as for example when Elijah the prophet built an altar and offered a sacrifice outside the temple (1 Kings 18: 30-38).

“We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet; nor there is any among us who knows how long” (9)

According to **St. Augustine**, the talk here represents the situation of the Jews after the captivity, when they lost everything; when they no longer saw signs which reveal the presence of God in their midst; and when there were no longer prophets, except for a very few. They became as though in darkness, and did not know how long it was going to last (see 1 Kings 4: 46; 9: 27; 14: 41). That also applies to the situation of the Jews from the days of the prophet Malachi until the coming of St. John the Baptist; and from the days of the Roman Titus until our present day².

As it came in Ezekiel: *“Disaster will come upon disaster; and rumor will be upon rumor. Then they will seek a vision from a prophet; But the law will perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders”* (Ezekiel 7: 26).

And in the lamentations of Jeremiah: *“The law is no more; and her prophets find no vision from the Lord”* (Lamentations 2: 9).

And Amos the prophet says: *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord”* (Amos 8: 11).

And Micah the prophet says: *“Therefore you shall have night without vision, and you shall have darkness without divination. The sun shall go down on the prophets, and the day shall be dark for them”* (Micah 3: 6).

3- How long will it be, O Lord?

“O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?” (10)

¹ *History of the Arians, 33.*

² *Plumer, Ps. 74.*

The psalmist stands astonished before God's longsuffering on the wicked who keep on reproaching Him and blaspheming His name; hoping for them to repent and return to Him; for then He would forgive them and embrace them.

“Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? Take it out of Your bosom and destroy them” (11)

Now he cries out to God to stretch His hand, rescue His people, and punish the wicked; he says to Him: Do not stand silent, as though You do not care about the anguish of Your people!

By the right hand of God he means His power, capable of saving; and refers as well to the eternal Word of God, the Creator, *“through whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made that was made”* (John 1: 3). Here, the psalmist asks Him to come soon to save the world from the devil, the enemy of humanity, and from sin.

According to **St. Augustine**, the author of the book recalls here what happened when God said to Moses the prophet: *“Put your hand in your bosom, and he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. And He said, ‘Put your hand in your bosom again’, so he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh”* (Exodus 4: 6-7).

Taking the hand out the first time, leprous like snow, refers to the first coming of the Lord Christ, when He carried our sins in His body on the cross to save us. So the call here is for the Lord Christ to come in His second coming, to find us sanctified, justified, and qualified for the heavenly wedding; To come to find His church prepared for the wedding; To find the wicked no more mix with the righteous; and to separate these from those.

In his essays against the Arius heresy, **Pope Athanasius**, referring to this phrase, seeks from the Father to stretch His right hand, and take it out of His bosom. What is this right hand but the eternal Son in the Father's bosom, by whose incarnation He says: *“I came forth from God”* (John 16: 27); this phrase refers therefore to the incarnation of the Word of God.

❖ The Son is the Word, and the Life who is with the Father; As, by saying: *“The only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father”*, St. John the evangelist shows that the Son was there from eternity. He, whom John calls “the Son”, is referred to by David in the psalm as “the Hand of God”, saying: *“Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? Take it out of Your bosom”* (11 LXX)¹.

(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)

4- The divine work:

“For God is my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth”
(12)

As the psalmist asks the Lord to hasten His ultimate coming, for the true believers to enjoy the kingdom of God, and for every believer to see that His Savior is his King, who, although He reigns on all, yet he has a special place in His divine bosom. Although He presented salvation to all mankind on earth, He presented it especially to every single believer, as though he is alone the subject of care of the Savior King.

¹ *Four Discourses against the Arians 4: 26.*

According to **St. Augustine**, although the Lord Christ is the Savior of the whole earth, yet the psalmist, in the midst of his anguish, feeling as though the Savior has forgotten him, cries out to Him.

❖ On one aspect we cry out: *“There is no longer any prophet, nor there is any among us who knows how long”* (9); but on another aspect we know that our God is our King from of old; as He is Himself *“the Word who was in the beginning”* (John 1: 1), by whom the world is created, *“working salvation in the midst of the earth”* (12) And yet I cry out as though I am forgotten.... While the nations have all waked up, we are fast asleep, as though forgotten by God; and hallucinating in our dreams¹!

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ On the cross He stretched His hands to embrace the whole world; Calvary being the center of the earth; as, according to the prophet: *“working salvation in the midst of the earth”* (12). He, by whose spiritual hands He created the heaven and earth, stretched His human hands, nailed on the cross, carried the iniquities of men, and died; that our iniquities would die with Him, and we rise in righteousness. *“As through one man (Adam) death entered the world; also through One Man – Jesus Christ, there will be life”* (Romans 5: 12, 17). That One Man died by His own free will; as according to Him: *“I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again”* (John 10: 18)².

(**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**)

“You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents (the dragons) in the waters” (13)

The “dragon” is mentioned 13 times in the book of Revelation, by which it means the devil: *“The great dragon was cast out, that serpent of the old, called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world”* (Revelation 12: 9); And, *“He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years”* (Revelation 20: 2). He is also called *“the red dragon”*, being a shedder of blood.

In his message to ‘Oceanus’, **St. Jerome** wrote about the blessings of baptism that destroys the power of the devil, saying:

[*“The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”* (Genesis 1: 2); from which He brought forth the empty earth (the infant world), a symbol of the Christian child coming out of the font of baptism.

“God made the ‘firmament’, and separated the waters that were under the firmament from the waters that were above the firmament. God called the firmament ‘sky’” (Genesis 1: 6), meaning in Hebrew ‘Shemaim’ or (that comes out of the water).

That is why in the vision by the prophet Ezekiel we see *“the likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures was like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads”* (Ezekiel 1: 22); namely, compressed dense waters.

The first beings came out of the water. And the believers come out of the font of baptism, as though flying with wings up to heaven.

Man was created from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2: 7); And God held the secret waters in the palm of His hand.

¹ Plumer, Ps. 74.

“In Eden in the east the lord God planted a garden; A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches” (Genesis 2: 8, 10).... That was the same river mentioned in the vision by Ezekiel: *“There was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east; goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed; and everything will live wherever the river goes”* (Ezekiel 47: 1, 8, 9).

When the world fell into sin; nothing but a great flood could cleanse it anew.

Pharaoh and his army who chased the people of God coming out of the land of Egypt, drowned in the Red Sea; While the children of Israel crossed over its dried up bottom; a symbol of our baptism¹].

- ❖ The Lord Christ was baptized, not that He was in need to be cleansed, but to make my cleansing His cleansing; to *“break the heads of the sea serpents (dragons) in the waters”* (Psalm 74: 13); to cleanse the sin, and to bury all what is for the old Adam; to proclaim the secret of Deity; and to become for us an example to receive baptism².

(Father John of Damascus)

- ❖ *“The great fiery red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his head; whose tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to earth; And stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it was born”* (Revelation 12). He is the devil who lies in wait to destroy the mind of the newly baptized who receive Christ, and the image of the Word, and His features are obviously transfigured on them. But he fails to catch his prey that is renewed and ascends to the throne of God³.

(Father Methodeus)

- ❖ I wish we are not ashamed to confess the Crucified.

Let us draw the sign of the cross, our seal, with courage, with our fingers on our foreheads and on everything: on the bread we eat; on the cup we drink; on entering in and on getting out; before we get to sleep, and when we awake; when we walk, and wherever we go.

Great is its activity; free for the poor; and easily applied for the sake of the sick; It is the sign of believers, and the terror of the devils; *“Having disarmed principalities and powers, and made public spectacle of them”* (Colossians 2: 15). For once they see the cross, they remember the Crucified, and get terrified from Him who broke the heads of the dragons (Psalm 74: 13)⁴.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- ❖ In the book of ‘Job’ it came that in the water there was a dragon *“in whose mouth the Jordan gushed”* (Job 40: 23); And because his heads had to be broken (Psalm 74: 13), the Lord descended and bound the mighty in the waters; *“To give us the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions”* (Luke 10: 19).

¹ Letter 69, to Oceanus, 6.

² Orthodox Faith, 4: 9.

³ Ibid 10.

Down to that dragon, that was so great and horrible that no fishing boat could endure one stroke of its tail¹, the “Life” descended to encounter, to shut down the mouth of death there; and we could then say: “*O death, where is your sting*” (1cor15: 55); The sting of death was taken out by baptism².

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ The wolves saw the clouds, the rain, and the storm.

Stirred up, they called one another, and charged like wild beasts against the blessed herd.

Yet their scepter was broken down, and ended up in regret.

“*A broken reed*”, was the support of their left hand (Isaiah 36: 6).

They retreated back to their dark and ancient caves.

After being depressed, the creation shines and exulted;

For the foes were trampled;

“*And the heads of the sea dragons were broken in the waters*” (Psalm 74: 13).

And the tail of Leviathan dragging along the dry earth was broken in peaces (Psalm 74: 14)³.

(St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian)

“*You broke the head of Leviathan in pieces, and gave him as food to the people inhabiting the wilderness*” (14)

Father Theodore clarifies how the newly baptized get liberated from the authority of the devil, to enter into a covenant with God as His children, enjoying freedom. And speaking of the gift of baptism as liberation from the authority of the devil, the dragon inhabiting the depths of waters, **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says: {It so came in the book of ‘Job’, that “*in the water there was a dragon in whose mouth the Jordan gushed*” (Job 40: 23). To break his heads, the Lord descended and bound the mighty in the waters, in order to gain strength in it; and “*to give us the authority to trample over the serpents and the scorpions*” (Luke 10: 19). To that monster which was so great and horrible that nobody could endure the stroke of one harpoon-like scale on his tail (Job 41: 7), the “Life” descended to encounter, there to shut off the mouth of death; and when we are saved we can cry out: “*O death, where is your sting*”? (1 Corinthians 15: 55). The sting of death was taken out by baptism! You enter into the water loaded with your sins; and by the seal of grace on your souls, that horrible monster would have no authority over you⁴.

According to **the scholar Origen**⁵, the Jewish people enjoyed three kinds of food: the first was when they got out of the land of Egypt, “*the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders*” (Exodus 12: 34); which they ate for a short time. The second kind of food was when God rained on them the daily manna in the wilderness (Psalm 74: 14); and the third kind was when the manna ceased to come, and they started to eat the produce of the land of Canaan (Joshua 5: 11-12). The first food was the simple teaching we receive once we enter into faith; which is a temporary kind of food. The second food is our entry into the

¹ الترجمة السبعينية أي 40: 26 عوض أي 41: 7ز

² مقال 3: 11.

³ ترانيم ضد جوليان الملك الذي ارتد عن الايمان وضد الهرطقة واليهود 1، تعريب عايدة بشاي.

⁴ Cat. Lect. 3: 11, 12.

⁵ On Joshua, homily 6: 1.

depth of the divine law; like the manna coming down from heaven. The third kind is our food when we see our Christ face to face in eternity, where we enjoy “*what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Corinthians 2: 9).

- ❖ Man having lowly tendency, used to feed on nothing but sin; That is how the Holy Spirit describe the sinners, and talk about their food; referring to the devil by saying: “*gave him as food ...*” (Psalm 74: 14).

Our Lord and Savior, being the heavenly bread, He is the food of the saints; hence He says: “*Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood*” (John 6: 53); The devil is the food of the unclean, who do, not the works of the light but the works of darkness. And to draw them away from their evil, the Lord counsels them to feed on virtue, particularly on the humility of the mind, poverty of the spirit, endurance of reproach, and on thanksgiving to God¹.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- ❖ As we are committed by the commandment to partake of the communion in the Lamb, only in one place – the church, the house of God – It is thus obvious that, in all the assemblies of the heretics where the deviated teachings are taught, as they do not eat the Lamb in the church, it is not the flesh of the Lamb they eat, but the flesh of the dragon².

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ We know, O God, that You control the world by a royal divine policy. Before time, of old, You made salvation for us in the midst of the earth; namely, publicly among all men; when You dried up the bottom of the Red Sea, let Your people pass; crushed the heads of the Egyptian aggressors like dragons in the waters of the sea; and broke the head of the great Pharaoh; namely his kingdom.

We confess that the Son of God is God and King before all time; equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit in eternity and in essence. Having incarnate in the fullness of time, He made salvation for the whole world in Jerusalem, said to be “*in the midst of the earth*”.

The life of men is, likewise, called ‘a sea’, on account of its frequent disturbance and tumult; whose violent waves were calmed down by the Lord Jesus Christ. The dragons are the evil spirits and the controversial hosts, and their heads are their rulers, through whom are sorcery, divination, idol worship, and the like. All these dragons used to disturb and move the sea of the world by their heads, which was broken by our Lord Jesus Christ in the waters, when He was baptized in the River Jordan, granting us the gift of baptism by water. As to the great dragon who crawled into paradise and deceived our early parents, He, as well, broke his head and brought him to death.... Those who, after believing, have been baptized, have got the authority and power to take off the flesh of the ancient dragon; namely his evil, and to break his head and destroy him.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*You broke open the fountain and the flood; You dried up mighty rivers*” (15)

If the Lord Christ, by His baptism, has broken the heads of the dragons in the waters (13); He has the power to dry up the mighty rivers; as

¹ *Paschal Letters, I.*

² *Homily 91, On the Exodus, The Vigil of Easter.*

He did when he made way for His people in the Red Sea, and in the River Jordan. He has the power, as well, to break open fountains of water from the rocks, as He did by the rod of Moses, also called the rod of God.

According to **St. Augustine**, God could bring forth from the unbelieving Gentiles, who were like the rocks, fountains of water of wisdom and spiritual riches.

❖ *“You broke open the fountains and the flood”* (15); You broke open rivers of wisdom, and riches of faith; and turned the saline water of the unbelieving Gentiles into the sweetness of faith. The word of God in some people *“have become a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4: 14); Whereas others who hear the word and do not preserve it by the good life; and, at the same time, do not keep their mouth shut, are worthy of being called “floods”, on account of that they are temporary and not permanent; run for sometime and come to an end; not like the fountains that steadily run¹.

(**St. Augustine**)

According to **St. Augustine**, As the devil made the waters his dwelling place, the Lord Christ dried up the rivers where the enemy dwells to destroy him in his abode; as according to the Lord Himself: *“How can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?”* (Matthew 12: 29). St. Augustine also says: The Lord dries up the rivers of the heathen nations; namely, their faulty teachings, until he lets their minds flow with the gospel of truth.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem presents to us the following views:

1- The fountains and valleys refer to the waters broken open from the rock in the wilderness to quench the thirst of the children of Israel. The rivers of ‘Etham’ (as it came in the Septuagint version) are rivers that flow in the River Jordan.

2- ‘Etham’ refers to forests dense with trees and rich in waters, where king Solomon used to go hunting and fishing. And according to Jusiphus the historian, Once God got angry with Israel, He dried up the waters there.

3- ‘Etham’ means (blood). God took the blood of the sacrifices to the idols away from His people.

4- The symbolic meaning of the phrase: [The sayings of the prophets were like fountains of running waters healing and satisfying the hearts of the Jews. But because of their hypocrisy, God dried them up, and denied them their benefit; as He did with the rivers of ‘Etham’. The Gentiles, on the other hand, who were before barren wilderness with no water, He broke open from them running waters of His divine gifts].

Resorting to God, He will turn our life into valleys where fountains of the gifts of the Holy Spirit flow; will make us bear His fruits, to become a holy garden for the Lord; And the deception of the devil will no more be able to crawl into our hearts.

“The day is Yours, the night also is Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun” (16)

According to **St. Augustine**, the Lord Christ longs for the salvation of all; He works in those enlightened by Him, and seeks to work, as well, even in the children of the night, to turn their darkness into light.

❖ *“The day is Yours”*... Who are these? They are the spirituals; *“The night also is Yours”* Who are these? They are the physicals. *“You have prepared the light and the*

¹ On Ps. 73.

sun” The ‘sun’ is the spirituals; and the ‘moon’ is the physicals. He does not forget the physical, but wishes to make him spiritual.

The ‘sun’ is the wise man whom You never forget; as it is written: “*The conversation of the godly is always wise, but the fool changes like the moon*” (Sirach 27: 11) And the apostle says: “*I am a debtor both to wise and unwise*” (Romans 1: 14)¹.

(St. Augustine)

❖ After that the number of types of charities Prophet of God to the Jews, gave charities to all creatures.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ A brother asked an elder: If it so happens that I overslept and missed the time of prayer, and I was so sad that could not pray, what should I do? The elder said: Even if you oversleep till the morning; get up, shut your door, and resume your rite, remembering what the prophet David said to the Lord: “*The day is Yours; the night also is Yours*” (Psalm 74: 16); meaning that our God is so compassionate and merciful that if He is called at any time, day or night, He will respond.

(Garden of the fathers)

“*You have set all the borders of the earth; You have made all summer and winter*” (17)

God, with His might and care, knows the size and form of the earth, the rivers, seas, and oceans, and the borders and inhabitants of every nation with accuracy; even the seasons are in His hands; He is the Creator of all nature, and the Father of all nations.

“*When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel*” (Deuteronomy 32: 8).

“*The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness; the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters*” (Psalm 24: 1-2).

“*And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the world, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation*” (Acts 17: 26).

❖ How wonderful it is, when the Creator of spring describes the beauty of this season in the Holy Book! He took away the gloom of the winter, and proclaimed that the rains that wearied us have come to an end; He covered the fields with flowers, ready for plucking to be enjoyed, and be made into perfumes; the birds are singing for joy ; the fig trees and the grapevines started to bud and produce their fragrant smells to fill our hearts with gladness. Let us then, put aside the gloom in our hearts, and enjoy the awesome description of the beauty of spring by the Holy Book².

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

5- A PLEA FOR RELIEF FROM OPPRESSORS:

“*Remember this, that the enemy has reproached, O Lord. And that a foolish people has blasphemed Your name*” (18)

¹ On Ps. 74.

² عظة 5 على نشيد الأناسيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نزار.

Despite all that exalted care by the Almighty God for the earth and everything on it, and the seasons for the peace of man; yet there are wicked people who reproach and blaspheme the name of the Lord. They have reproached the incarnate Word of God, claiming that he is a sinner, Samaritan, and even “Belzeebub”, the ruler of the demons.

- ❖ Sad over the old blindness in understanding, Asaph says: “*The enemy has reproached, O Lord, and a foolish people have blasphemed Your name*”. It was said of Christ: “*We know that this man is a sinner*” (John 9: 24); “*We know that God spoke to Moses; As for this fellow, we do not know where He is from*” (John 9: 29); “*He is a Samaritan and has a demon*” (John 8: 48)

“*The ignorant people have insulted the name*” [18], do all those? God forbid Even the Apostle Paul, who is broken because of a lack of faith has its roots in the reformed faith¹.

(St. Augustine)

“*Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast! Do not forget the life of Your poor forever*” (19)

Here he calls the church a turtledove, helpless to defend itself, hates controversy, and does not practice it; meek and calm, weaponless, and beloved by God who cares for her.

According to **St. Athanasius**, this prophetic saying concerns some of the Jews who repented and believed in Christ, whom God “*would not forget forever*”.

- ❖ If God had not spared His own chosen people, how much more would He not spare us?! If we do not keep God’s commandment and the words of the gospel, He would say to us anew: “*Come, assemble all the beasts of the field, Bring them to devour*” (Jeremiah 12: 9)... Yet we dare to say in our prayers: “*Do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beasts*” (19); or: Do not deliver to the wild beasts the soul that confesses her sins. Let us then confess our sins and repent them, so as not to be delivered to the beasts, but to the saintly angels who would embrace us to their chests, and help us to pass over through this world to the world to come in Jesus Christ, To whom be the power and the glory, forever, Amen².
- ❖ Those evil spiritual beasts, the apostle Paul calls “*the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (Ephesians 6: 12). About them it is written: “*The serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal*” (Genesis 3: 1); and, “*Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith*” (1 Peter 5: 8-9). If you wish to know other evil beasts, Isaiah will tell you: “*Through a land of anguish, from which came the lioness and lion, the viper and the flying fiery serpent. They will carry their riches on the back of young donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to a people who shall not benefit them*” (Isaiah 30: 6). Could this be done with the physical beasts of the wilderness?! How could the lioness, the lion, the viper, and the fiery serpents carry their riches on the back of a donkey or a camel?! It is therefore obvious that the prophet, filled with the Holy Spirit, means the wicked powers of the worst devils put their riches, which are their deception of the souls, through the foolishness (the donkey) and the

¹ On Ps. 74.

² عظات للعلامة أوريجينوس على سفر إرميا ترجمة جاكلين سمير كوستي، 10: 8.

defilement (the camel). And in order not to be delivered to those beasts, our souls that fear God, are committed to say: *Do not deliver Your turtledove to the wild beast*" (19)¹.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ *“He (Jesus) was there in the wilderness ..., with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to Him”* (Mark 1: 13). It is written: “Do not deliver to the wild beasts the soul of him who believes in You” (19). Those are the beasts on which the Lord has trampled under the foot of the gospel: the lion and the serpent (Psalm 91: 13)².
- ❖ We are committed to behave in a certain way, so as not to be expelled from this house, and become prey for the wild beasts; and cry out together with the prophet: “Do not deliver to the wild beasts those who lean upon You” (19)³.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ We read: *“I will rid (your) land of evil beasts”* (Leviticus 26: 6). The material beasts, being irrational by nature, are not altogether evil, nor altogether good, but rather somewhere in between; But there are other kind of beasts, the spiritual beasts, called by the apostle: *“the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* (Ephesians 6: 12); Those are the evil beast about which the Holy Book says: *“The serpent was more crafty than any other animal”* (Genesis 3: 1). Those are the evil beast of which God promises to rid our land if we keep His commandments.

Another evil beast is described by the apostle Peter: *“Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith”* (1 Peter 5: 8, 9)... So as not to let our soul (the turtledove) that fears God be delivered to the beast (the eagle) (19)⁴.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

***“Have regard for Your covenant, for the dark places of the land are full of the haunts of violence”* (20)**

That which He called a meek turtledove, whose only weapon is God Himself, He also calls the heavenly bride with whom the Lord has entered into a holy covenant. Living still on the earth that became dark because of the oppression prevailing on it, she is in need of His care

The world is so full of violence everywhere, that the church cries out to God to keep her safe against the wicked adversaries of the truth.

- ❖ I am not asking You to have regard for Your Covenant; not the Old Covenant. I am not asking for the sake of the land of Canaan, nor of the temporary submission of the adversaries, the physical fruition of my children, the worldly wealth, the earthly riches, the temporary happiness; but I am asking You *“to have regard for Your covenant”*, by which You promised to give the kingdom of heaven⁵.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Remember what You promised our fathers, and look at the earthly men who are fond of the earthlies, and at those in the darkness of idol worship; whose houses are filled

¹ In Lev. Hom 16: 63.

² Homily 76 on Mark 1: 13-31.

³ Homily 93 on Easter Sunday.

⁴ Sermon 105: 7.

⁵ Op Ps. 74.

with what they have unjustly confiscated from us.... Those in the darkness are also the devils who possessed the souls of men before the coming of Christ; who are meant by the prophet's saying: "Remember, O Lord, Your covenant and Your promise through Your prophets, to rid us from hell, the haunts of the wicked.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

"Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed! Let the poor and needy praise Your name" (21)

Here he talk about the "poverty in spirit" (Matthew 5: 3), by which the believer lean upon God; for God to become his treasure and riches; to have his soul perpetually exult, and never cease praising His name.

Christ loves poverty:

❖ He who, by His own free will, became humble for our sake; and came to be in extreme poverty, to say:

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8: 20).

He so loved poverty that He wishes for those who love Him not to acquire any earthy possession!

He who does not intend to acquire anything in the world, He recognized and loved from His whole heart.

The soul that hates the adornments and pleasures of the world is His home where He dwells.

The two mites of the widow, once He came to her place, she gave them away.

Simon cast the little net he used to have, and followed the Son of God.

The apostles, as well, cast away their nets which they had on earth; and behold; they are rich in the kingdom of heaven.

The tax collector, once Christ entered into his house, gave away all the riches he had; for he saw that the Lord loves poverty

The Lord will never dwell in a house full of gold; for gold took over His place.

Gold, would become the master wherever it is, and would despise any other master.

"No one can serve two masters: God and mammon" (Mathew 6: 24).

One of them you will honor, and the other you will despise, for you cannot honor both equally.

Having commanded you to love the Lord by your whole heart; if you acquire gold beside Him, you do not love Him.

Gold would prevail on your whole heart, and would possess it; pushing aside any love for God¹.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

❖ The mind is committed to get perpetually attached to this phrase, to give him strength. By continuously meditating in it, he would drive away and disregard all the other foolish thoughts.... He would be so satisfied with the poverty of this single phrase, that he would very soon reach the beatitude mentioned in the gospel, and taking the

¹ الميمر 66 على شجرة معرفة الخير والشر وعلى الصداقات وعلى الفقر (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

foremost place among them; namely: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5: 3).

And once man becomes so poor, in him would be realized the prophet’s saying: *“Let the poor and the needy praise Your name”* (21). Yes indeed, what would be poorer than he who confesses that he is helpless to defend himself, and seeks a daily help from another?! He would realize that every moment of his life depends upon the divine care; to cry out daily to the Lord: *“But I am poor and needy; but the Lord thinks upon me”* (Psalm 40: 17).

He thus ascends through the spiritual enlightenment to the knowledge of God on several aspects, and feeds upon exalted holy secrets; according to the saying of the prophet: *“The high hills are for the wild goats; the cliffs are a refuge for the rockbadgers”* (Psalm 104: 18).

This conforms completely to the meaning we present; for he who walk in innocence and simplicity, harming no one, just striving to protect himself against the harm by his adversaries, would be like a spiritual rockbadger, perpetually taking refuge in the rock of the gospel; namely in his remembrance of the passion of the Lord About such a spiritual rockbadger, it came in the book of proverbs: *“The rockbadgers are a feeble folk; yet they make their homes in the crags (the rocks)”* (Proverbs 30: 26)¹.

(Father Isaac)

❖ The Holy Book talked about the riches and the possessions in three ways: What is good; what is bad; and what is neither good or bad.

The **bad possessions** are those about which is said: *“The young lions (the rich) lack and suffer hunger, but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing”* (Psalm 34: 10).; and: *“Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation”* (Luke 6: 24). To disregard such riches implies an exalted perfection; the Lord says about the poor: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5: 3); And as it came in the psalm: *“This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him”* (Psalm 34: 6); and: *“The poor and needy praise Your name”* (21).

The **good possession** is what is sought by him who seeks to do the great virtue out of worthiness; the good doer commended by David, saying: *“His descendents will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever”* (Psalm 112: 2-3). And it is also said: *“The ransom of a man’s life is his riches”* (Proverbs 13: 8). And about him who lacks such riches it is written in the book of revelation: *“I will spew you out of my mouth, because you say: ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich, and white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed”* (Revelation 3: 16-18).

Then there is **the riches which is neither good nor bad**: It could be either one according to the wish of its user and his personality. About this the blessed apostle says: *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them be good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for*

¹ Cassian, *Conferences* 10: 11.

themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6: 17-19).

Such riches, the rich man mentioned in the gospel kept for himself, and did not share it with the poor; “*while poor Lazarus was laid at his gates desiring to be fed by the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table*”. That is why he was condemned to torment in Hades, by the flames of the eternal fire (Luke 16: 19) ¹.

(Father Pavnotius)

❖ Everyone offers the temple according to as much as he or she can afford; some offer expensive silk fabrics woven with gold; But I am content to offer goats’ skin the temple of the Lord. Let those who are risen up to perfection offer to God their virtues and exalted meditations; but as for me, I am content to offer Him my humiliation, lowliness, and confession that I am a sinner, burdened with iniquities and transgressions, and utterly lacking every good thing.

(St. Jerome)

7- A CONCLUSION:

“Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; remember how the foolish man reproached You daily” (22)

His believers’ cause is His own. Any reproach or persecution directed against them is counted as directed against the Lord personally. This, the Lord Christ Himself proclaimed when He said to Saul of Tarsus: “*Why are you persecuting Me?*” (Acts 9: 4).

❖ By saying “*Your cause*”, and “*reproached You*”, he means to say that what dwell upon them dwell upon God, their Father.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; the tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually” (23)

Seeking the intervention of God to rescue His people from their adversaries; the psalmist asks Him not to forget the way the wicked talk against Him, and the tumult and violence they use without cause, against the meek and calm turtledove which has no hope except in God’s support!

¹ St. Jon Cassian: Conference 3: 9. (See also Conf. 6: 3 Abbot Theodore).

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 74

UNTIL WHEN, O LORD, WILL YOU FORGET US?

- ❖ Behold, the vicious devil pours all his evil energy against us;
He will never despair or calm down, hoping to acquire us for himself;
You are the Savior of the whole world'
Before we even exist, You have planned for our salvation.
Your works from the old testify to Your compassion toward us.
- ❖ You are our portion; and we are the portion of Your inheritance;
We cherish You, for You died and saved us;
And You cherish us, for You are the whole love!
You made us a sanctuary for Yourself;
Yet the enemy persist on forcing himself upon Your sanctuary;
He wishes to bring desolation upon us, as it came upon him;
He roars to persecute You in our persons!
- ❖ The enemy strikes as though with axes and hammers;
To destroy everything Your hand has done in us;
He kindles the fire of his evil on us;
But You descended to us as the mighty hand of the Father;
On the cross, You stretched Your hands to acquire us;
You granted us sonhood to Your Father to enjoy the fellowship of the eternal glories.
- ❖ Behold, the dragon in the waters intends to devour us;
But You descended to him in the waters, You broke open the sea, and dried up the rivers.;
For our sake You broke the heads of the devil;
You made him a laughingstock even to little children;
The monster has no more authority upon the simple turtledove;
You set us forth like a turtledove flying in the sky;
The enemy can no more catch up with us;
He has no more authority over us;
Let the enemy be ashamed; let all his nets be broken; and let all his tricks come to no avail;
Glory be to You, O Helper of the poor, and the contrite of heart;
Praise be to You, O Savior of the weak and miserable;
You are our perpetual strength, praise, and exultation of our souls!

PSALM 75

THE TRUE JUDGE EXALTS AND HUMILIATES

The psalmist, in the previous psalm, cries out because of the great anguish dwelling upon the church of God by the boastful wicked; when God seemed as though He does not hear her cries. Now the psalmist raises a praise of thanksgiving to God who intervenes in due time.

This psalm came conforming to the praise of thanksgiving raised by Hannah, mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2); but the present psalm represents a liturgical praise of thanksgiving or of testimony, presented by the holy congregation for the sake of God's intervention.

God intervenes as a just Judge who endures no oppression [2, 6, 8, 10]; by which He exalts the spirit of the righteous whose souls are broken down because of the continuous scoffing of the wicked.

Is divisions:

1- Thanksgiving to God	1
2- God's response	2 – 3
3- Warnings to the wicked	4 – 8
4- Glorifying the righteous	9 – 10

The title:

To the chief musician. Set to "Do not destroy". A psalm of Asaph. A song.

According to the Septuagint version it came as: "To the end (to the conclusion), do not destroy"; A psalm of Asaph. A song.

"*Do not destroy*". Some believe that this psalm is a praise raised by the prophet David to God who kept his hand from killing Saul. According to them this psalm was written by David, and put in tunes by Asaph.

- ❖ The word "*destroy*" or (corrupt), has shadows of several meanings, used by David as "*Do not destroy*", meaning (do not kill) (1 Samuel 26: 9), namely (do not kill Saul); And in another location (see 1 Samuel 26: 11, 23-24; 25: 32-34; 24: 11-13), David blesses the Lord who did not let him stretch his hand to kill Saul, the Lord's anointed¹.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ "To the end, do not destroy (or corrupt)". This psalm refers to the incorruption that will be for the saints at the end of times; as is written by the blessed Paul: "*Then comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power*" (1 Corinthians 15: 24); Then, all those who strove well will come to incorruption.

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul also calls virtue (incorruption or sincerity), saying: "*Grace be with all those who love our Lord*

Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen" (Ephesians 6: 24).

Meaning, this psalm says that once you start by a good work, keep it up to the end; for then you will come in incorruption.

¹ On Psalms, homily 8.

It is so called 'A psalm of praise': 'a psalm' for it foretells what is going to be; and 'a praise', for it is a confession of the grace of God, and a thanksgiving to Him by the saints for the sake of His goodness.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

1- THANKSGIVING TO GOD:

"We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near" (1)

Here we are before a scene of liturgical worship (collective church worship) presented before God in the holy temple. The congregation looking to God, coming to judge the adversary wicked, as though saying: "*Behold, the name of the Lord comes from afar, burning with His anger, and dense cloud of smoke; His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue like a devouring fire*" (Isaiah 30: 27); And, "*Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; Let those also who hate Him flee before Him*" (Psalm 68: 1). The congregation became able to hear the voice of the divine Judge who is coming to defend them, and to see His amazing salvation works, all their feelings moved in thanksgiving to the might of God who helps the poor, weak, and oppressed.

❖ By the repetition of the expression "*we confess to You*" (or we give You thanks), the psalmist refers to his longing and wish to give thanks to God. ... Confession to God should also be by keeping away from sin, and doing the works that please Him.

There are two kinds of confession: Confession of sins we committed, and confession through keeping on giving Him thanks on the goodness He granted us.

"*We call Your name*", reproached by Your enemies; by which we are called 'Christians'; namely, called by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Do not call His name before you confess (give thanks); Confess, then call Him to come near.... To whom will He come near? He will not come near the boastful who haughtily exalts himself. ... To reach the high things, we should rise up; and in case we cannot, we have to look for tools or guides to help us rise up to reach them. On the contrary, God is High up; and it is the humble who approach Him; as it is written: "*The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart*" (Psalm 34: 18).

A broken heart is piety and humility. He who has it gets angry on himself.... Man should therefore get angry on himself, so that God would be merciful on him.... If he judges himself, God will defend him; ... That is therefore, the way to call God! And that is to whom He comes near!

As confession purifies the temple to which the Lord will come when you call Him; Confess then call Him!

I wish He turns His face away from your sins; and not away from you! ... I wish He turns His face away from what you do; and not from what He has created; namely, from you; You, being a man, He created; whereas your sins are your own doing¹!

(St. Augustine)

This way, whether we confess to God our sins or His mercies and care, we enjoy the spirit of humility, to draw Him near us, and we to Him; and we feel His presence

¹ On Ps. 75.

among us, and in us. And by His presence, we experience His wondrous works in us, and declare them in every way.

❖ *“We give thanks to Your name”* (1). God’s name is “the Father”, which was not known in the old; as the Lord says: *“Now, O Father ... I have manifested your name to the men”* (John 17: 5-6). ... Every son carries his father’s name¹.

(St. Jerome)

2- GOD’S RESPONSE:

“In the appointed time, I will judge uprightly” (2)

As the psalmist draws our hearts to practice confession and thanksgiving to God, to feel His presence in our midst, and to experience His wondrous works in our depths and in everything going around us; We, on our side, anxious and longing to have such divine gifts, may wonder: ‘When will that be realized? ... Here, the answer will be: *“In the dispensation of the fullness of time, the Lord will come into our depths.”* (Ephesians 1: 10; Galatians 4: 4); as *“To everything there is a season”* (Ecclesiastes 3: 1); and as the Lord says: *“In the appointed time”* (2).

This expression *“In the appointed time”*, had its importance in the Old Covenant, concerning God’s ordinances for the world, by setting certain seasons for the year with certain features.(Genesis 1: 14); setting the feasts (Leviticus 23: 2), and designating certain kinds of worship rites in each one. As there was a certain time for the first coming of the Lord Christ for the sake of our salvation, there will be a certain time, preceded by certain signs that came in the holy gospels, and in the book of Revelation for His ultimate coming².

According to **St. Jerome**, the talk here concerns the ultimate judgment; as the present time is not for judgment but for strife. Now is the time for preaching to enjoy salvation. Through His mercies and longsuffering, God let us enjoy salvation, that when the time for judgment comes, we become justified before Him³.

And according to **St. Gregory the Nezianden**, it is befitting for everything to have its appointed time; saying that even entering into a simple debate with others should have its befitting time.

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, the psalmist in the previous phrase uses the plural tense, while here he uses the singular tense. The holy congregation, and even all the creation, collectively partakes of the thanksgiving to God; And at the same time, each believer feels a personal relationship with God, and His dealing with him, to proclaim the wondrous works of God with him.

And according to **St. Athanasius**, he who declares the wondrous works of God in the singular tense are actually those who speak in the name of the Gentiles, or the church of the Gentiles, that saw wonders in God’s love with no partiality.

❖ When will be the proper time for this debate? It will be when we get rid of the mire and the noise outside, which distract our minds, and make us unable to distinguish between the beautiful and the bad writings, or between the sweet fragrance and the

¹ On Psalms, homily 8.

² Cf Kinder, p. 271.

³ St. Jerome: On Psalms, homily 8.

rotten smell. We need tranquility (Psalm 45: 10) in order to recognize God; for when we have that chance, we could “*judge uprightly*” (2) ¹.

(St. Gregory the Neizianzen)

“*The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved; I set up its pillars firmly*” (3)

It is as though God, rebuking us on our haste to judge the wicked; or to be rescued from them, says: “Why are you in such a hurry? The earth on which you and the wicked live is the work of my hand; and if I take My care or My power away from it, it would dissolve like wax.

Nothing, or any being on earth, can live or settle down without me. ... Do not get disturbed, even by those who oppose Me, My church and My people; For I set the pillars of the earth, grant it its balance, knows exactly how much it weighs, and when will be the appointed time for it to dissolve, for the divine justice to be fulfilled, and the oppressed to enjoy their reward.

St. Augustine, sees in “*the earth and all its inhabitants*”, the man who loves the earthly things with his whole energies; as through his love for the sins and the world, he will collapse, and all his energies will be dissolved.

And according to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, “*the earth which dissolves*”, is Jerusalem; and “*its inhabitants*” are the Jews who rejected faith in the Lord Christ, and persecuted His church. Whereas the “*pillars*” set by God to weigh the earth are the blessed apostles whom God supported, and gave them the strength to preach the holy gospel.

He also believes that “*the earth and all its inhabitants*” are those, being preoccupied with the earthly things, they got so fat, that God will dissolve the earth with fire, to dissolve their wretched fat.

❖ Nothing dissolve the earth like sins, which are called ‘breaking the law’, namely, sliding from abidance in virtue and righteousness, down to licentiousness; As when man sins; he would become as though dissolved by the love of lowliness.

“*I set up its pillars firmly*”. What are those pillars but the apostles, so also called by the apostle Paul (Galatians 2: 9). Yet, even those pillars had to be strengthened by Him. Before the passions of the Lord, the apostles were overcome by despair, and the so-called pillars were temporarily shaken, then were strengthened anew by His resurrection².

(St. Augustine)

3- WARNINGS TO THE WICKED:

“*I said to the boastful, ‘Do not deal boastfully’, and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up the horn’*” (4)

In a kind of madness, the wicked boast their wickedness, and lift up the horn like wild irrational beasts.

According to old customs in the east, and still going on in the country, kids express their joy on conquest, by putting over their heads some kind of conical horns, by which they lock-horns like conquerors.

¹ العظة اللاهوتية الأولى: عظة رقم 27 عظة تمهيدية ضد أتباع يونيموس، 3.

² On Ps. 75.

The psalmist, by the Spirit of God, counsels the wicked not to boast their wickedness; for if they appear as conquerors, it is only for some time; then they together with the earth on which they stand will dissolve.

St Augustine, probably, seeing the wicked holding the horn that was used to amplify the sound, counsels them to listen instead to the horn of the gospel, the grantor of repentance, salvation, and true glory.

❖ Your horn declares iniquity, whereas that of Christ declares majesty (true greatness) ¹.
(**St. Augustine**)

According to **St. Cyril of Alexandria**, the psalmist talks here about the heretics, and the false apostles and prophets, who, in their pride and haughtiness, presenting fragile views, and depending on temporal philosophies, they distort the word of God².

While the previous psalm ended with a cry-out: “*Arise, O God, plead Your own cause*” (Psalm 74: 22); Here, the prayer is fulfilled; and the psalmist looks to our Lord Christ, risen from the dead, declaring the power of the glorious cross, and appearing as the Savior King, who reigns upon the hearts of His believers.

❖ The ‘Horn’, implying power, glory, and exalted reputation, refers to what God provided to a wild beast for self-protection, which if lost, it would be like a soldier without a weapon. An ox without its horn could easily be manipulated³.
(**St. John Chrysostom**)

“Do not lift up your horn on high; Do not speak with a stiff neck” (5)

The psalmist warns the wicked who boast against God; and instead of speaking with a stiff neck, he counsels them to say together with

Hannah the mother of the prophet Samuel: “*My horn is exalted in the Lord; ... Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth*” (1 Samuel 2: 1)... He also says: “*Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speaks insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous*” (Psalm 31: 18); and, “*They utter speech and speak insolent things; all the workers of iniquity boast in themselves*” (Psalm 94: 4).

❖ Many who utter such iniquity, do not dare to do so publicly, lest they would be despised by the pious, as blasphemers ... In another psalm it is written: “*The fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God’*” (Psalm 14: 1); yet he may not dare to say it publicly for fear of being heard by men; when he is heard by Him, against whom he so utters (God) ⁴.

(**St. Augustine**)

“For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up” (6)

Seeking from the wicked not to speak with pride and haughtiness against God; they are committed to abide, not for fear of men, coming from the east or from the west, from the wilderness or from the mountains, but for fear of God Himself. He seeks from them not to quit evil for fear of men, lest they would practice it within their hearts.

¹ On Ps. 75.

² Cf. St. Cyril of Alexandria: Commentary on Luke, homily 77.

³ Homilies on Hammah, 4.

⁴ On Ps. 75.

He may also warn the boastful wicked, and those who oppose the divine truth; for if judged, they would find no refuge in the east nor in the west from the face of the divine Judge.

“But God is the Judge; He puts down one, and exalts another” (7)

God who is not limited by one place, is present wherever the wicked is, and hears what he utters in his heart and mind. He is aware of the hidden things, and at the same time, He is the mighty Judge; *“The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men”* (Daniel 4: 17, 32, 35).

- ❖ God, the Judge of your iniquities, is present everywhere; ... Where can you flee from His eyes, to utter them somewhere He cannot hear you?!... And in case you retreat deep into your heart, and utter iniquities; He is deeper than your heart ... Wherever you flee, you will find Him there Instead of fleeing from Him, flee to Him¹!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ God puts down the oppressor, and exalts the oppressed, by ordinances we, as men, cannot perceive; ... like when He put down the Assyrians for their oppression, and exalted the Israelites for the humility of their hearts; And like when He put down the circumcised for their haughtiness and lack of faith; and exalted the Gentiles when they humbly believed; and as He does when He *“He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the beggar from the ash heap”* (1 Samuel 2: 8); and, *“He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly”* (Luke 1: 52); being the Just Judge who, by His might, sets kings and puts them down.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; It is fully mixed and He pours it out; Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down” (8)

It was the custom in the old days to offer a cup of wine in all occasions, whether joyful or sorrowful; and drinking the cup used, as well, to refer to judgment, according to the following quotations:

“Upon the wicked He will rain coals, fire, and brimstone, and a burning wind; This shall be the portion of their cup” (Psalm 11: 6);

“Awake, awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem; You who have drunk at the hand of the Lord, the cup of His fury; You have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and drained it out” (Isaiah 51: 17).

“For thus says the Lord God of Israel to me: ‘Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations to whom I send you, to drink it; And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them’ (Jeremiah 25: 15-16).

The Lord said to Jerusalem: *“You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will put her cup in your hand. Thus says the Lord God: ‘You shall drink of your sister’s cup, the deep and wide one; You shall be laughed to scorn, and held in derision; it contains much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of sorrow and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria’”* (Ezekiel 23: 31-33).

¹ On Ps. 75.

According to **St. Augustine**, the righteous drink from the hand of God the pure wine that make them drunk with pure divine love. Whereas the wicked drink the dregs that accumulate at the bottom of the cup; not that the Lord intend to destroy them, but to bring them forth by repentance to His righteousness. That is why it is said that wine is pure to the righteous, but mixed to the wicked.

4- GLORIFYING THE RIGHTEOUS:

“But I will declare forever, I will sing praises to the God of Jacob” (9)

The psalm started with thanksgiving and ended with singing praise to God who, even if He shows longsuffering, he anticipates the salvation of all; He will never hasten to break the horns of the wicked, hoping for them to repent.

“All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted” (10)

❖ He will put down, and He will exalt ... The horns of the wicked refer to the honors of the boastful; while those of the righteous refer to the gifts of Christ, namely, His rejoicing; ... On earth you despise the earthly rejoices, to acquire instead the heavenly ones; If you love the earthly, He will not grant you the heavenly¹.

(St. Augustine)

¹ On Ps. 75.

AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 75

YOU ARE A COMPASSIONATE FATHER, AND A JUST JUDGE

- ❖ I Know You, O Holy Father!
You have sent your holy Son to reveal to me Your fatherhood!
Your name is near to me;
For you are my Father; My Creator, and the Wonder Maker to my account;
Who is there nearer to me?
Who is there wiser than You, O the whole in love, wisdom, and might?!
- ❖ I shall never trust a hand, but Yours;
For You are amazing in Your love, ordinance, and knowledge;
For everything You appoint a certain time;
You measure heavens by Your hand;
And weighs the earth by Your balance.
- ❖ I am astonished to see those who lift up the horns on You!
Those who boast and speak against You with a stiff neck;
When You, with Your might put down and exalt whomever You chooses;
When You let someone drink the wine of heavenly joy;
And You let another drink the bitter dregs.
- ❖ Let me flee, not from You, but to You;
For You are my refuge, and the stronghold of my life;
You are my joy, my riches, and my glory.